

“The Black Mecca.”

Gentrification in Black Central Harlem and its Complex Socio-Cultural Consequences.

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ENGELSE TAAL EN CULTUUR

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Title of document: "The Black Mecca." Gentrification in Black Central Harlem and its Complex Socio-Cultural Consequences.

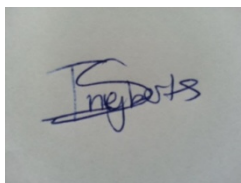
Name of course: Master Thesis North American Studies

Date of submission: 16-07-2018

Word count: 25.037

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Abstract

Much of the literature on gentrification is written from an economic perspective, with many different sub-discussions within the larger gentrification debate. Research done through a social and cultural lens is mostly absent within these discussions. This thesis therefore sets out to clarify the main socio-cultural consequences of gentrification in black neighborhoods, taking Central Harlem as its main case study. Through a multidisciplinary framework this thesis positions itself at the crossroad of the social, cultural and political history fields. First, this thesis will start off with an explanation on gentrification and its deep connection with displacement practices. Next, it will address the relationship between gentrification and crime with a particular focus on race. It will be explained how these two fields find their common ground in displacement. Finally, identity formation is seen as an important part of any analysis related to displacement but in this specific case study the peculiar characteristics of the neighborhood make it even more compelling.

Key Words: Gentrification; Displacement; War on Drugs; Mass Incarceration; Identity Forming; Ethnic/Racial Identity; Central Harlem; New York.

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Acknowledgements

I would like to devote a few words here to give thanks to those who have pushed and motivated me to finish the writing process of this thesis. It is common practice to not name specific people because one will inevitably forget one or two names, but I am going to try. First and foremost, I would like to thank my two supervisors Jorrit van den Berk and Dario Fazzi. I had the luck to be supervised by not one but two supervisors and even though the North American department hit a rough patch, it luckily did not affect my thesis writing process. Thank you both for your extreme patience, knowledge and crucial feedback this last year.

A massive thank you goes out to you, Melanie. The hours spend in the library, messages send via WhatsApp and the cries for help through skype have been of great value. I cannot thank you enough for all the ideas I could bounce off you, for your honest feedback, and your patience when I yet again asked you a question only for me to answer it myself immediately.

Thank you Sanne, for being you. My oldest friend, one who has no connection to the academic field but is always there to catch me, to bring me back those times I get stuck inside my own head, and for the shoulder to cry on whenever I needed to. Thank you for helping me relax and for making me not feel guilty whenever I did not spend time on my thesis.

Lastly, thank you mom and dad. Thank you for molding me into the person I have become today, for helping me persevere and believe in myself. Thank you for giving me the confidence that whenever and for whatever reason life knocks you down, I am able to get up and see that the glass is half full.

And thank you to all of you who I have not explicitly named but have been an integral part of my life, whether it is in the academic field or in my personal life. This leaves me to wish you, my reader, a good time in reading my thesis.

Introduction

Throughout my years at Radboud University I have been interested in African-American studies, whiteness studies and the systemic inequalities that connect these two fields to each other. I wrote my bachelor's thesis on Black Lives Matter and researched why a developed country such as the United States still needed a civil rights movement like BLM to acquire cultural and racial awareness. In the course of my masters program, my focus on these inequalities only deepened and more questions have risen to the surface. During the Obama era, there were many people who were of the opinion that the United States had entered a post-racial stage. However, with a new President, the United States are threading into new territories and hate crimes are on the rise, effectively doing away with the utopian idea of a post-racial era (Farivar). Concentrating on systemic inequalities built into the fabric of American society, my focus shifted to the process of gentrification and I wondered how this policy affects poor and colored minorities in the United States.

The United States is seeing light at the end of the tunnel after the financial crisis that started in the late 2000s and continued in the early 2010s, which laid bare the major inequalities that seem to persist in the country. With growing wealth, people are returning to the cities, which is a significant change from the pattern that was visible in the 1960s and 1970s, when “blacks were moving into and staying in cities, and whites were moving out” (Edsall). Since the year 2000, and earlier for big cities such as New York, San Francisco, Boston and Washington D.C, “young, white, professional, technical, and managerial workers with higher education and income levels” returned to live in the vicinity of their profession (Edsall, Marcuse 198). However, this relocation meant that other people – often less educated and less affluent people of color – living in the ‘desired’ area had to enter an unfair competition for living space (Edsall, Marcuse 198).

This process is commonly known as gentrification and it is happening in “numerous other urban centers,” neighborhoods that have been “predominantly black since the 1950s and 1960s are now changing,” as white residents find their way into these black neighborhoods (Chatman 37). Between 2000 and 2015 a significant amount of black people moved out – 23.1 percent, a decrease of 77.3 percent to 54.1 percent – and a significant amount of white people – 12.9 percent, an increase of 2.1 percent to 15 percent – moved into Central Harlem (NYC neighborhood data profiles, MN10).

Coined in 1964 by Ruth Glass, gentrification has been used by many to side-step claims of intentional racism towards poor and racial minorities and instead pushes an

economic narrative to help bolster the pro-gentrification debate. One would think that after the abolition of slavery and the Civil Rights Movement the United States, or at least, American people, would have learned that we are all equal, no matter our color or creed. Yet, practices such as gentrification seem guises used by government institutions to keep reminding United States citizens of their place in society. Precisely this lack of social and cultural attention in the gentrification debate led me to the following research question, which will guide my analysis: What are the main socio-cultural consequences of gentrification in black neighborhoods?

To be able to answer this question as efficiently as possible I have selected Central Harlem as my case study. While I could have easily picked gentrifying neighborhoods in Atlanta or chosen to research the effects of gentrification in the Bronzeville neighborhood in Chicago, it was Central Harlem that spoke to me. What is more, I chose Central Harlem – and not East or West Harlem – because of its seemingly unbreakable connection to African Americans. Known for being the ‘Black Mecca’ of the United States, Harlem has produced political giants, jazz greats and sports heroes, all the while keeping a firm foothold in Manhattan’s heart (Maurrasse 19, Huggins 112). Since its origins Harlem has not been a predominantly black neighborhood. Harlem was established by the Dutch and functioned as a permanent Dutch settlement, named after a Dutch town. Therefore, New Harlem was born (Maurrasse 17). New Harlem was annexed by New York City and became property of the city in the year 1873. Before African Americans slowly found their way into New Harlem it was home to German and Irish immigrants and ultimately saw an influx of Italian and Jewish immigrants (Maurrasse 17). Although immigrants resided in New Harlem around 1885, the elite called it their home first. Remnants of the neighborhood’s elite and past wealth is still visible in some works of architecture “dispersed” among the streets of Harlem (Maurrasse 17). Harlem functioned as New York City’s “first suburb,” and living here was considered as a symbol of high status back in the 1800s (Maurrasse 17).

African Americans from the south of Manhattan, from the South of the United States and immigrant African Americans slowly began coming to Harlem in the early 1900s, effectively turning Harlem into the capital of the African diaspora (Maurrasse 17). Due to the influx of colored people into Harlem, white residents of the neighborhood created “protective associations,” adequately trying to bar African Americans from renting out vacant apartments (Maurrasse 18). Afraid of plummeting apartment prices these white people used signs such as ‘whites only’ and proposed “evictions of existence” to keep their neighborhoods African American free (Maurrasse 18). Sooner or later this ‘alliance’ had to fail, leading white

residents to sell their apartments and houses. Money stricken, landlords eventually also rented their apartments out to black people which ultimately led to the “White flight” (Maurrasse 18-19). White people, en masse, moved out of the city into the neighboring suburbs. At this point in time, Harlem – especially Central Harlem – quickly turned from a predominantly white neighborhood into a predominantly black neighborhood, although proprietors remained largely white (Maurrasse 19).

Current academic discussion on gentrification mainly revolves around economic gains and is viewed through an economic lens. Many of the policies are thus created on academic discourse that completely sidesteps social context and social cohesion. One scholar who is trying to change this systemic pattern is Loretta Lees, professor in Human Geography at the University of Leicester. Her work field stretches itself out over research on communities, public space, regeneration and urban planning, with a special focus on the social consequences of gentrification. The pressures of gentrification are deeply enmeshed with “broader inequalities of class, race and ethnicity and gender” and thus “gentrification is the sum of many different parts,” according to Lees (“Pursuit of Difference,” 213 and Newman and Wyly 51). By following these lines of analysis, this thesis will highlight the links between gentrification and displacement, crime, identity, and racism.

First, this thesis will start off with a chapter elaborating on the short summary given in this introduction on the origins of Central Harlem and how it became known as the Black capital of the world. It will then flow into an explanation of gentrification and how this concept is deeply connected to displacement. Displacement, indeed has been largely forgotten by a vast literature that has kept growing in the last fifty years. Peter Marcuse, one of the few commenting on this form of displacement in his article on gentrification, noted in 1985 that instead of being a cure for abandonment, gentrification drove the process of displacement, especially in New York, where gentrification and abandonment have worsened the level of displaced inhabitants (Marcuse 196). According to Marcuse, public policies not only contributed to these results, but at the same time have the capability to counter the problem, whether they are willing to do this or not (Marcuse 196). The chapter will then turn its attention to the notion of race and place and how this terminology helps understanding the creation of specific neighborhoods and the shaping of their identities.

Secondly, this thesis will address the connection between gentrification and crime with a particular focus on race. Indeed, it is often claimed that gentrification has a ‘positive effect’ on crime statistics, such as Michel S. Barton claims in his work “*Gentrification and Violent Crime in New York City.*” And as such, this positive effect and research findings have often

been used as a tool to further suppress minorities. The second chapter will therefore discuss this relationship and will draw attention to the large potholes that are still present in the literature on this topic. Moreover, this chapter will reinforce statements made in the first chapter on the quest for thorough research into the displacement of residents by highlighting the role of social mixing. As pro-gentrification advocates proclaim, social mixing should have positive results on crime numbers within a gentrifying area. By using the term social mixing, the harmful side-effects of gentrification could be overstepped, thus feeding into the narrative that it is not government funded programs that are keeping hard working black people in the lower ranks of society, but that they themselves are to blame for the position they hold on the social ladder. What is more, through sidestepping the harmful effects of gentrification, scholars and policy makers can actively ignore that the problem in United States society is not class but race. In addition, the inability “to stare racism in the face” is what prohibits many scholars of adequately researching the social and cultural impact of gentrification in predominantly black neighborhoods such as Central Harlem (Badger et al). Consequently, policies such as the War on Drugs and gentrification seem to be falling under the same umbrella as both are guises used by government institutions and policy makers to keep certain groups of people ‘in their place.’

The last part of this thesis will focus on how identity is shaped by gentrification. Identity formation is an important part of any analysis related to displacement but in this specific case the peculiar characteristics of the neighborhood make it even more compelling. Described as the “Black Mecca,” – referring to the iconic status of African American culture present in Central Harlem – of the United States, I wondered what the effects of gentrification do to the people of color who call this place home. In other words, what does the changing face of their neighborhood do to their sense of belonging? There is a growing body of research that includes the voices of people still living in Harlem. However, they fail to incorporate the voices of the people being displaced, because these voices are simply not there and it is extremely difficult to find them. While I was not in the position to do any field work and thus try to find these missing voices, I was able to examine what the process of gentrification has done to the geography, or in other words, the physical appearance of the neighborhood. Scholars who are boasting a pro-gentrification narrative argue that uplifting a neighborhood always bodes well for a community; but doing so the process of gentrification may destroy clear identity markers that are crucial for any community.

Finally, this last chapter will delve deeper into several identity markers and will trace out how they have changed within Central Harlem. Some important markers of identity

formation within a community include local institutions, schools, churches, museums, storefronts, libraries, salons, community centers and so on. African Americans have worked very hard to get their neighborhood the recognition it has today. A lot of colored people brought in their culture, and thus were able to transform entire neighborhoods into safe havens for residents residing in the Central Harlem area. These markers have become important facets of the lived experience of many people living in this area, thus creating a sense of belonging which is extremely important to form an ethnic and racial identity.

The ultimate goal of this thesis, which comes to light in a period in which racial tensions in the United States have almost been institutionalized, is to raise awareness for the complex dynamics set in motion by gentrification. In addition to foregrounding the sociocultural side of the debate on gentrification, this thesis can be seen also as an invitation to policymakers to broaden up their perspectives when planning major changes in the lives of the local communities.

Chapter One

Gentrification, Displacement, and Race and Place

“In 1999 my landlord doubled the rent in the apartment but we didn’t understand why ... My rent went from \$750 to \$1200. So he almost doubled it. There were five other families in the building, one from Ecuador one from Columbia ... worked in factories all of their lives, lived there about 28 years; we were there for 8 years ... My apartment was taken over by a couple and their cat. So that’s what he wanted. He always said he wanted to put trees on the block. It faced a factory, which he owned. It was part of Park Slope but not very residential, more like a commercial block. He put trees on it, fixed the gates and then sends everybody a letter saying the rent doubled. It wasn’t that he wanted to make it nice for us. That’s where gentrification affects people. He was making it look better and fixing it up but he was doing it with a mission to put in luxury condos for other people”

(Quote by a displaced NYC tenant in Newman and Wyly 44)

The focus of this chapter is on the major issues and perspectives that come along with gentrification. This section of my thesis serves four purposes. First, it will give a brief historic analysis of Harlem starting from the Harlem Renaissance to give an idea on how the neighborhood evolved and changed over time. This historical analysis will flow into a discussion on gentrification in which several theoretical approaches to the idea of gentrification will be detailed. Third, this chapter will deal with the notion of displacement and how it can be interpreted in contrasting ways by several scholars and it will highlight the importance of not doing away with the notion of displacement. Lastly, this chapter will examine the terms of race and place and how this terminology is important for understanding how neighborhoods are formed and what shapes the people who live in this neighborhood.

Questions will be raised on whether or not gentrification has negative effects on native Harlemites. Although Harlem is seeing a shift in its racial up-make it can be questioned whether greater diversity bodes well for a neighborhood that is historically known for its African American inhabitants and rich history and culture. While Tyler et al. agree that “greater diversity presents a unique opportunity for greater integration in some cases,” different neighborhoods undergo different patterns of change and some might even face more economic and social problems than their counterparts (283).

Central Harlem

Harlem is a neighborhood tucked away at the north side of the borough of Manhattan in New York City. Harlem is most famous for being an international symbol of black culture, “a city within a city” also known as the “capital of the black world” (Huggins 13; Schaffer and Smith 350; Freeman “*Hood*” 17; Goldstein 286). 125th street is the most iconic street in Harlem as it crosses West, Central, and East Harlem and runs from the Hudson to the East river. The street was established after construction completed a subway stop at the corner with Broadway in 1904 and “125th street established itself as Harlem’s central commercial corridor” (Busà 52). The neighborhood also harbors a nostalgic image in which it brought forward the Harlem Renaissance which, according to Huggins, echoed “American progressivism in its faith in democratic reform, in its extraordinarily high evaluation of art and literature as agents of change” as well as echoing an almost “uncritical belief in itself and its future” (303). The Harlem Renaissance, a moment of phenomenal “artistic and literary accomplishments for black people,” saw its birth in the twenties of the twentieth century and left its imprint as an emblem and “point of reference” for everyone to reminisce about (Huggins 303; Busà 52). Moreover, the very name remained a flagship signifying the meaning of “a special spirit, new vitality, black urbanity, and black militancy,” in which Harlem became a racial centerpiece for “knowledgeable black men the world over” (Huggins 303).

Apart from the Harlem renaissance, Harlem has also been known for crime, drug use, and dilapidation. After WWII, the neighborhood of Harlem faced serious decline when middle-class income blacks decided to move out of Harlem and into neighboring boroughs, which in turn left low-income, poor, and unemployed blacks to their own defenses (Busà 52). Landlords deserted their properties that were no longer profitable leaving the city of New York to take over ownership of “about 65 percent of Harlem’s buildings” (Maurrasse 23). Over one hundred thousand residents left Harlem after the 1960s and subsequent years (Maurrasse 23). This exodus of people leaving Harlem was one of the reasons Harlem tumbled into further decline while pockets of poverty gradually deepened within Harlem (Maurrasse 28; Busà 52). Moreover, discriminatory policies of a vast number of banks resulted in the elimination of mortgages for new construction in the Harlem community, weakening the neighborhood even further (Busà 52). By the end of the 1960s, “only 9 percent of Harlem’s housing stock had been built since 1940,” and the majority of this construction was likely to be “public housing that served to further concentrate poor and disadvantaged households” (Freeman, “*Hood*” 26). Due to the lack of livable housing, exploding crime rates, racial tensions, and a falling population, Harlem became less and less attractive for

investment, which led to the decline of 125th street's fortune as a premier commercial street (Busà 52; Freeman "*Hood*" 26). All this ultimately led to the culmination of the "shut-down" of the famous Apollo Theatre in 1976.

Many of the African Americans leaving Harlem during the 1960s, '70s, and '80s took "vital resources" with them (Maurrasse 27). Harlem remained predominantly black, with central Harlem harboring a 96.1 percent of blacks. However, while Harlem remained the undisputed capital of the "African diaspora," the exodus of well-off blacks left Harlem with diminished resources and "weakened community organizations that provided an important social structure" (Maurrasse 28; Schaffer and Smith 353; Hyra 72). 65.5 percent of people living in Central Harlem in the 1980s were of low-income, meaning they earned less than \$10,000 dollars a year (Schaffer and Smith 353). This left many inhabitants of Central Harlem unable to hold down a business or own real estate, meaning they did not only have a low income but also attained "little wealth" (Maurrasse 28).

Having little wealth strips many of the power to make a fist against the establishment and the ruling class as more often than not money equals power and without money a neighborhood often has no viable resources to obtain power and the control that comes with it.

Central Harlem was stripped of its power thus tumbling down into a decade of crime, drug use, and drug dealing. The crack epidemic during the 1980s and 1990s introduced the most daunting stages of drug use in Central Harlem. This epidemic turned buildings into crack houses and intensified an already commonplace "local drug industry" in which crack cocaine became the "major employer for young black men" (Maurrasse 28; Freeman, "*Hood*" 188). All these developments did not bode well for Harlem and its name. Harlem was stereotyped as a 'dangerous' neighborhood, a ghetto, to walk through and there is ample evidence to be found to this day that many people still hold on to the image of Harlem that was created in the 1970s and '80s. Terms such as the ghetto and the inner city have been used as denominations for black neighborhoods and rake up images of places that are "off-limits to outsiders," areas to avoid after the sun has gone down (Freeman, "*Hood*" 1). A friend of mine recently visited Harlem, as she told her father about her trip he warned her 'not to get out of her cab' because Harlem was extremely dangerous for white people to enter and it looked as like 'people were literally dying in the streets.' He himself once visited New York City, went on a tour through the city and subsequently saw a glimpse of Harlem back in 1978. Unknowingly, my friend's father shows how hard it is for anyone or anything to do away with stereotypes. If he were to visit Harlem today, he would see that the neighborhood underwent significant changes in the last thirty years. Moreover, once confronted with pictures of the 21st

century Harlem he was very surprised and said that Harlem looked ‘unrecognizable.’ I will also briefly mention the ghetto later on in this chapter when I try to shed light on the term race and place in connection to Harlem.

Gentrification

“Within five to ten years Harlem will be white,” says William Allen (Gørrild et. al.). William Allen made this comment in an article by Gørrild et. al. entitled *Gentrification and Displacement in Harlem: How the Harlem Community Lost Its Voice en Route to Progress*. This article dates back to 2008 and while the percentage of white people living in Harlem back then was 7% this number has doubled in 2015 to 15% (NYC neighborhood data profiles, MN10). Fifteen percent of the total population of people living in Harlem is white and even though this seems like a small number, for a neighborhood which is known for its black culture and black inhabitants, these numbers are staggering. These figures become even more stunning when one keeps in mind that at the time of the 1990 census the percentage of white people living in Harlem was only 1.5%, according to census data. Therefore, the sentiment that is spoken out by Allen seems to hold some truth to it.

It is an undeniable fact that Harlem is gentrifying at a fast rate. This was not a given back in the eighties of the previous century, according to the work of Richard Schaffer and Neil Smith. The authors state in their article, which dates back to 1986, that “Harlem seems at first sight a highly unlikely target for gentrification” (347). Thirty years later this seems like an odd thing to say. However, when one thinks back to the 1960s, Harlem was recognized not only for the Harlem Renaissance, but the neighborhood also got fame from being transformed into a “slum” and promptly became known as the “most notorious symbol of black deprivation in America” (Schaffer and Smith 351). Lance Freeman uses the term ghetto to more accurately depict a black neighborhood. Where the term ghetto originally was used to describe an area of a city wherein Jews were confined within walled-off sections (during the World War II period), it nowadays is often applied to “the black experience in urban America” (Freeman, “Hood” 15; Sanneh). The word ghetto signifies something as trashy and cheap and more often than not a “modern” American ghetto is not only poor “but disproportionately African American” (Sanneh). Although African American people are not physically confined by walls within a neighborhood, political, economic and social forces have much of the same effects as real walls.

At this point it becomes almost impossible to talk about Harlem without mentioning gentrification and what it does to a neighborhood. Therefore, a shift will be made from a

historical analysis to the gentrification perspective. At this point in time literature and scholarly research on gentrification sees a rapid incline and everyone wants to share their two cents on what gentrification does and how it affects certain areas. I will show the significance of the process of gentrification for Harlem in the time period 1980 to roughly 2006 where the debate finds itself now. Much of the literature on gentrification is written from an economic perspective and there are many different sub-discussions within the larger gentrification discussion, which is also what makes it extremely difficult to wade through the vast body of information and one has to be aware of the fact that there are scholars who are adamantly pro-gentrification and scholars who are anti-gentrification.

I discuss the research on gentrification that is done by Neil Smith, Richard Schaffer, Lance Freeman, Sharon Zukin, and Loretta Lees because these scholars give the breadth of the gentrification debate and all highlight a different angle on gentrification. These scholars look at gentrification in light of displacement theory, macro flows of capital and micro-sociological processes of the individual, and how Central Harlem has been a focal point of interest for the academics I chose to highlight. Moreover, I also specifically selected the works by these intellectuals to show that a gradual shift is occurring in the debate and that Loretta Lees is trying to steer the gentrification discussion into the social realm, a realm that has unfortunately largely been absent from the main discussion but certainly requires more academic/scholarly attention. Especially now that census data taken up until 2015 shows that the percentage of black people living in Central Harlem is declining at a much faster rate than it had in the past forty years, I firmly believe that gentrification cannot be dealt with without naming the social and cultural impact it has on a community and neighborhood.

According to Freeman, gentrification changes the meaning of the ghetto ("*Hood*" 16). The term gentrification is defined as "the transformation of a working-class or vacant area of the central city into middle-class residential or commercial use" (Lees; Slater and Wyly, xv; Schaffer and Smith 347; Hwang 226; Hyra 176; Lees 208; Freeman, "*Hood*" 1; Wacquant 198; Glass; Zuk et. al. 11). Or in other words, a city or neighborhood is gentrifying when old and deteriorated urban buildings are renovated and there is a steady influx of affluent people coming into the city/neighborhood thus changing the character of a neighborhood. But according to Schaffer and Smith, Harlem was atypical in comparison to other neighborhoods undergoing gentrification back in the 1980s. Census data from 1980 show that 96.1 percent of people who live in Harlem are of African American decent. And Schaffer and Smith state that "heavily black neighborhoods have been perceived as harder to gentrify" and that the process of gentrification in Harlem should be seen as a "trenchant and long term" process (351-352).

Twenty years later, Freeman concludes that even though Central Harlem remains an overwhelmingly black neighborhood, white people are more and more seeing Central Harlem as a viable option to live (“*Hood*” 190). To Freeman, gentrification does in fact change “the relationship between black inner-city neighborhoods and the larger society” (Freeman, “*Hood*” 16). However, this does not necessarily mean that fundamental changes made to the neighborhood – through the influx of white residents and upper-class black people – also do away with persisting inequalities. These inequalities remain ever present for the ghetto residents.

Neil Smith argues in his Article Title, *Toward a Theory of Gentrification a Back to the City Movement by Capital, not People*, that the return of capital is what drives gentrification, specifically the return of capital from the suburbs to the city (Smith 538). Many of the residents leaving Central Harlem between 1960 and 1980 started to slowly find their way back to Central Harlem during the 1990s, inciting “tensions and conflicts” between the in-movers and the residents of Central Harlem (Hyra 72). Intra-racial class conflicts emerged within Harlem where differences of opinions on what path the neighborhood should take flared up between homeowners and renters. The black middle-class vehemently wanted to reconstruct Harlem to a “safe, prosperous, and tranquil place” not realizing that this desire to “restore” Harlem might lead to the displacement of the low-income, black residents (Hyra 72). The hypocrisy in the willingness of the middle-income blacks to “restore” Harlem after their mass exodus in the forty years leading up to this is palpable. However, according to Hyra, the historic nature of Harlem leads sections of the middle-class blacks to believe that in relocating to Harlem, an impoverished black neighborhood, they take part in the upward mobility of low-income people and advance “the interests and goals of the entire race” (72). This makes one wonder though if upward mobility can exist in places where displacement occurs. What is more, the created income equality gap inevitably leads to income segregation and gives middle to high-income residents a greater ability “to influence local political processes” than their lower-income households’ counterparts (Reardon and Bischoff 1103).

A vast body of literature already exists on gentrification. However, this vast body of literature only provided me with information on the gentrification of Central Harlem roughly up until 2006/2008. Many scholars until that point were of the opinion that Harlem was not gentrifying and that white people were not moving into Harlem. Granted, these scholars used census data from 2000 and earlier to substantiate their findings. Around the year 2000, the percentage of black people living in Central Harlem was 77.3 percent and in 2006 this number slightly decreased to 69.5 percent. The number of white people in 2000 was only 2.1 percent

and tripled to 6.8 percent in 2006 (NYC neighborhood data profiles, MN10). Lance Freeman, a professor in the Urban Planning program at Columbia GSAPP, and author of the 2006 book *There Goes the Hood: Views on Gentrification from the Ground Up*, attempted to uncover the amount of displacement due to gentrification in New York City (Freeman, “Hood” 4). However, Freeman’s research did “not show a causal relationship between gentrification and displacement” (Freeman, “Hood” 4). According to Freeman, “poor residents and those without a college education were actually less likely to move if they resided in gentrifying neighborhoods” (Freeman, “Hood” 4). Freeman was of the opinion that gentrification was tied to historical patterns “of residential segregation” and that gentrification was purely the “latest imprint of these efforts by the state” (Freeman, “Hood”; Zuk et al. 12). Neil Smith, on the other hand, saw the government as a “larger political economy that aims to accumulate capital through land use management and city development” mirroring the notion of a city as a “growth machine” (Smith 1979, Zuk et al. 12).

Sharon Zukin states that what makes gentrification possible is the notion that there is a “convergence toward geographically targeted investment on the part of private capital and public policy makers” (“Paradoxes” 203). Gentrifiers who want to move into a gentrifying neighborhood – Central Harlem – have a steady higher income than the people who already have been living – most of them their whole lives – in Central Harlem. The reason, according to Zukin, for people to move to Harlem is often connected to the cultural esthetic of a neighborhood – the neighborhood being “interesting” in an architectural sense, historical sense, or even “the racial and ethnic diversity of longtime residents” (“Paradoxes”, 203). Central Harlem with its Harlem Renaissance and its old brownstone houses is a magnet for gentrifiers then. Zukin also concluded that Harlem can be both a “test case of, and challenge to, gentrification” (Zukin, “New Retail” 50). According to Zukin, Harlem has seen a “startling rise” in equity values and an equally startling boost in “big chain stores as well as elegant restaurants, shops, and cafés” (“New Retail” 50). Moreover, Zukin is a scholar who explains gentrification in terms of capital investment and economic forces that point to the relation between “the theories on macro-flows of capital” and the more “micro-sociological processes of individuals” (Zuk et al. 12; Zukin, “Culture and Capital”). Another explanation for gentrification according to Zukin lies in the flows of people in which “aesthetic and lifestyle preferences of gentrifiers, who desire a gritty, authentically ‘urban’ experience” drive their willingness to move into gentrifying neighborhoods (Zuk et al. 12; Zukin, “Loft living”).

Richard Schaffer and Neil Smith question on whether or not Harlem is gentrifying was an honest question and according to research, neighborhood transformation takes decades to

complete (Zuk et al. 4). Schaffer and Smith used several indicators taken out of census data to substantiate their claims about the gentrification process of Harlem in the 1980s. Two indicators came up during their research that they believed were the most sensitive markers to indicate whether or not gentrification was happening. These indicators were the dramatic increase of income, and rent levels. According to the 1980 census, the population of Harlem was predominantly poor, working class and 96 percent of its inhabitants were black. Moreover, according to census figures, Central Harlem had a low percentage of college graduates and just a small number of high-income households. If we were to look up these indicators in recent census data, we find that in 2015 the median household income is \$46,540 (in 2000 this was \$31,500) and poverty rates have dropped to 24.1 percent and the percentage of black people living in Harlem has decreased to 54.1 percent. What is more, the number of people with a bachelor's degree or higher has increased to 38 percentage points and the number of people without a high school diploma has decreased to 19.1 percentage points between 2000 and 2015 (NYC neighborhood data profiles, MN10).

With thirty more years of knowledge we are now able to shed further light on the notion of whether or not Harlem is gentrifying and we can better substantiate our findings now more data has become available. Ellen et al. (2012) focus on the integration of African American neighborhoods by white in-movers. According to research done by these scholars, black neighborhoods that originally had high poverty rates and lower levels of income tended to become more integrated than middle-class minority neighborhoods (Ellen et al. 50). This is also true for Central Harlem which had a poverty rate of 36.4 percent in 2000 that declined to 24.1 percent in 2015 and which became more diverse according to census data (NYC neighborhood data profiles, MN10). The racial diversity data is explained in the New York City neighborhood data profile as “the probability that two randomly chosen people in a given geographic area will be of a different race” and went up from .37 percent in 2000 to .62 percent in 2015. Additionally, according to Ellen et al. these integrated neighborhoods are likely to be found in central cities of metropolitan areas with a growing population. Central Harlem is thus a perfect example of an integrated neighborhood where patterns of segregation can be examined.

Loretta Lees defines gentrification through acknowledging that the process of gentrification in and of itself is a “chaotic” process and does not lend itself well to binary analysis. Lees sees gentrification as a site of difference that is “expressive of urban change, transformation, hybridity, and individuality” (“Pursuit of Difference” 455). Lees argues that to position gentrification as a site of difference is strategic on three different levels: an

economic, a political, and an intellectual strategy (“Pursuit of Difference” 456). Academics are using gentrification to “open up a new urban literature,” the media pursues “to illustrate a story,” and realtors are using gentrification for differences in their “niche marketing to attract buyers and renters into inner-city neighborhoods” (Lees, “Pursuit of Difference” 456). This all needs to be questioned according to Lees. Moreover, not much attention has been given to race and ethnicity in the gentrification debate and the scholarly world needs more knowledge on “how race is framed in state-led gentrification” (Lees “Pursuit of Difference,” 208, 213). John Powell and Marguerite Spencer also believe that gentrification has a clear racial component and that this component is often side-tracked in modern day literature on gentrification (436). In addition, Lees is adamant in that “gentrification is the sum of many different parts” and agrees with Newman and Wyly that “all the pressures of gentrification are deeply enmeshed within broader inequalities of class, race and ethnicity, and gender” (Lees, “Pursuit of Difference” 213; Newman and Wyly 51). While I agree with everything Loretta lees brings to the table, I will not solely work with her observations in my research.

Displacement

Ample research has been done on the displacement of residents in gentrifying neighborhoods, and just like in every debate there are two sides when it comes to discussions on displacement. On the one hand, there are those scholars who argue that the rate of displacement is not nearly high enough to speak of problematic side-effects of gentrification (Freeman and Braconi; Freeman, “Displacement;” Freeman, “*Hood;*” Vigdor). On the other, there are those researchers who believe that not enough research has been done on the effects of displacement and concur the findings of scholars who say that gentrification does not lead to displacement (Palen and London; Newman and Wyly; Slater). In the following section I draw attention to these different voices in the displacement argument to show that it is an intricate, delicate, and important debate in which many of the voices have yet to be heard. Moreover, I show that the wording the scholars use already gives a hint as to what their stance is in the displacement argument.

In their 1984 book entitled *Gentrification, Displacement and Neighborhood Revitalization*, Palen and London use several essays by different scholars as an introduction into the most leading topics in urban revitalization and introduce new research findings as well as spur up a discussion on several theoretical perspectives. One of these theoretical perspectives highlights the degree of displacement in gentrifying neighborhoods. According to Palen and London, the “significant displacement of poor people from the neighborhoods

undergoing change” is one of the most unanswered questions when it comes to inner-city revival (12). Palen and London use displacement in a context in which it means that “displacement most frequently refers to the forced or involuntary dislocation of needy households (i.e., the poor, blacks, ethnic minorities, the aged)” (12). Neil Smith and Michele Lefavre state in their essay “A Class Analysis of Gentrification” in Palen and London’s book that while the upper and middle class have everything to gain in the gentrification debate, the cost of gentrification is most certainly the displacement of “individuals, families, and entire communities from neighborhoods undergoing gentrification (43). According to Palen and London it is exactly this group that is the least able to bear the cost of gentrification and while we now have thirty years in hind-sight knowledge, Palen and London already concluded that the “gentrification-induced displacement may be more extensive than the major studies to date have indicated” (13).

While Palen and London already give a compelling argument about gentrification-induced displacement, I do not agree with their definition of displacement. The word ‘needy’ – even though Palen and London give examples in parentheses – invalidates the term displacement as well as giving it an underlying negative connotation. Therefore, I believe that the explanation given in the book *Displacement: How to Fight It* by Chester Hartman et al. is more suitable. Hartman et al. define displacement as “what happens when forces outside the household make living there impossible, hazardous or unaffordable” (3). This is a more neutral statement that does not implicitly judge people, and while I do not believe that judging people was Palen and London’s initial intention, the wording of their explanation does indeed just that. Moreover, I also agree with Tom Slater in that definitions need to be both “analytical and political” as well as the notion that “class inequality” needs to be put at “the forefront of any consideration of gentrification” (Slater 295).

Lance Freeman is a major voice in the pro-gentrification debate. As mentioned earlier in this chapter, Freeman’s research did “not show a causal relationship between gentrification and displacement” (Freeman, “Hood” 4). Three of Freeman’s publications put him center stage in the gentrification debate in which he emphasized how gentrification can function as an urban good. One study Freeman undertook with Frank Braconi focused on the *Gentrification and Displacement in New York City in the 1990s*; the second study called *Displacement or Succession? Residential Mobility in Gentrifying Neighborhoods*, Freeman conducted in 2005, focusing on what extent “gentrification in U.S. neighborhoods is associated with displacement through comparing mobility and displacement in gentrifying neighborhoods with mobility and displacement in similar neighborhoods that did not undergo

gentrification.” In addition, he published his book *There Goes the Hood* in 2006. In these three works Freeman questions if displacement indeed affects low-income citizens and disproportionately impacts the poor. However, Freeman is of the opinion that there is not enough solid evidence to adamantly support the notion on whether or not gentrification harmfully affects the low-income residents. Freeman is correct in being wary of giving clear support to the displacement theory due to the lack of evidence on the harmful effects of displacement. Yet, his stance completely undermines any displacement that is occurring. What is more, for his book *There Goes the Hood*, he cements many of his findings on interviews done with people currently living in Harlem and consequently misses many of the voices that are not there anymore. Precisely those missing voices allow for a better debate on whether or not displacement is happening. Moreover, Freeman’s findings can be damaging in a way that it can be used by the media and the pro-gentrification advocates to do away with displacement and its negative side-effects.

Kathe Newman and Elvin K. Wyly are of the opinion that it is extremely difficult to measure levels of displacement as it is almost impossible to find the people who have indeed been displaced. Moreover, “displaced residents have disappeared from the very places where researchers or census-takers go to look for them” (Newman and Wyly 27). Rowland Atkinson compares the inability to measure displacement as “measuring the invisible” (163). Yet, Newman and Wyly have made an attempt to quantify displacement in gentrifying New York City neighborhoods and found higher rates of displacement than Freeman and Braconi found in their research. In addition, Newman and Wyly conclude that those people who are displaced are practically “torn from rich social networks of information and co-operation” and are hurled into a world with an even “more competitive housing market [...] [and] overcrowding” (51). What is more, low-income residents who have been able to fight off displacement “may enjoy a few benefits from the changes that gentrification brings,” but according to Newman and Wyly, these benefits will quickly turn sour as the “support for low-income renters are steadily dismantled” (52). With this statement, Newman and Wyly highlight the importance of not doing away with the number of displaced residents as being too small to have an impact on gentrification because a thousand people who are displaced due to gentrification should already be too much. Tom Slater also agrees that the urban studies stand before the demanding task to “reject the celebration of gentrification and the denial of displacement” and that “adequate and affordable housing” should be a basic human right and need (306).

Peter Marcuse adds a final dimension to discussion on displacement in his 1985 article “Gentrification, Abandonment, and Displacement: Connections, Causes, and Policy Responses in New York City.” Marcuse expresses that displacement has an impact on more “than those actually displaced at any given moment” (Marcuse 207). Marcuse states that

“when a family sees the neighborhood around it changing dramatically, when their friends are leaving the neighborhood, when the stores they patronize are liquidating and new stores for other clientele are taking their places, and when changes in public facilities, in transportation patterns, and in support services all clearly are making the are less and less livable, then the pressure of displacement is already severe” (Marcuse 207).

According to this statement, displacement is not a question of ‘will it happen to me?’ but simply a matter of time before one is displaced. Marcuse argues that families who live under these circumstances will move as soon as time will let them, rather than waiting on the “inevitable.” Although these residents move under free will, they are still categorized under displaced inhabitants under Marcuse’s theory (Marcuse 207).

I agree with Newman and Wyly that the level of displacement is extremely difficult to measure. The Association for Neighborhood & Housing Development (anhd) also came to this conclusion as they state on their website that displacement is a growing crisis and that “there is little data or useful information on where displacement is taking place, the level of displacement happening, the primary method of displacing tenants, and where organizer[s] can proactively intervene to prevent displacement” (anhd.org). However, the organization created a web-based interactive map which is accessible for everyone and visualizes three different statistics. These statistics are “1. Loss of rent-regulated units in the building, 2. Volume of NYC Department of Buildings permits that indicate a high rate of tenant turnover and 3. Level of building sales prices that indicate speculative building purchases” (anhd.org). The map is color-coded and designed to show whomever is interested where the “residential tenants may be facing significant displacement pressures and where affordable apartments are most threatened across New York City” (anhd.org). According to one New York City council member, the “DAP Map will help address issues that disproportionately affect low-income New Yorkers and Black and Brown communities” (anhd.org). The DAP Map is an impressive collection of various different data findings. The website offers an easily accessible color-coded map that immediately highlights neighborhoods that are subjected to a degree of

displacement. Searching for Central Harlem – community board 110 – one can easily see where the displacement risk areas are and several of Central Harlem’s communities fall in the mid- to high-risk zone.

Race and Place

Earlier in this chapter, I explained why the word ‘ghetto’ was applied to Harlem and that the sheer term already racked up a vast number of negative connotations. Frazier et al. links the notion of ghettoization to the continuing outcomes of racism in the United States. In their book *Race and Place: Equity Issues in Urban America*, Frazier et al. argue that the segregation of Americans into inner-city ghettos with little to no hope of escape lies at the heart of the racism debate in the United States. Frazier et al. also try to explain the concept of place in light of a general concept – used in day to day life – and as an empirical concept. Through talking about place as a general concept people often apply this term in day to day life and give little thought to the different scales in which we apply the notion of place. The concept of place is used by many to “characterize any type of location that carries a special connotation or meaning” (Frazier et al.).

When talking about a place one has in mind, a direct visualization pops up in the heads of the people who are at the receiving end of the description of that place. According to Frazier et al. people often use “locative and environmental descriptors in naming a place,” that can then explain why people outside of Harlem immediately conjure up images of an unsafe, drug and crime infested Harlem when talking to people about this specific place. What is more, how this image is created also has to do with how the meaning of a place can differ for different people. For example, Harlem means home to black people, Harlem provides a connection to the famous people who created the Harlem Renaissance, it gives them a sense of pride and community, while on the other hand, to white people Harlem is just a place to live that is close to the inner hub of New York City. Harlem is interesting to white people because of its rich history but not in a way it is interesting – and part of their heritage – for a black person. Moreover, Frazier et al. explain place in light of an empirical concept and how it can imply “internal homogeneity” (Frazier et al.). Place viewed through this lens means a region, with boundaries encompassed as a place that can be analyzed over time. According to Frazier et al., the U.S. Bureau of the Census is one of those instances that analyzes a specific area – for Central Harlem that is community district 110.

In his essay, *Race, Ethnicity, and Place in a Changing America*, John W. Frazier explains how culture is important to people in connection to the place where they live.

According to Frazier, “culture and the human geography it produces, persists over a long-time period.” However, culture changes and with it so does the visible landscape that culture produces and the “ethnic meanings by the group that shapes it” (Frazier 1). Culture invokes the integrated way of life of a group, it maintains certain values, practices, beliefs, and behavior that help to characterize and separate one group of the other. In addition, the features of a culture are learned, or traded “within and between groups and are passed from one generation to the next” (Frazier 5). Culture can also be understood as bringing meaning to and “preserving a group’s existence,” as well as being an identity marker or a means for people to identify themselves with (Frazier 5).

Conclusion

Looking at Central Harlem in this light certainly helps in understanding the strong connections that African Americans feel with their community and their place. We can also begin to understand as to how gentrification can have devastating effects on the shared culture of African Americans living in Central Harlem. Moreover, with the theory of race and place in mind we can understand why a place such as Harlem feels like home to so many African Americans and how this sense of belonging and strong community feeling is slowly crumbling down. Questions arise such as what does the rezoning of historic places in Harlem do to the community? What if Malcolm X boulevard or 125th Street is filled with high-end shopping stores and luxury condos? Will it still have the same meaning to the people who have fought so hard for racial equality or has it become hollow and devoid of meaning? What impact does gentrification have on the lived culture for an entire group? A Banana Republic and Red Lobster restaurant now flank the famous Apollo theatre in Harlem. What still remains of a Harlem – once rich with the history of African Americans – now gentrification is turning the inhabitants lighter and lighter over time?

I began this chapter with a brief historical analysis on Harlem and then shifted gears into an examination of gentrification, displacement, and the theory of race and place. I attempted to give a clear overview on where the debate on gentrification started, what its main focus point was – mainly an economic one – and where the debate is headed now. I firmly believe, and thus agree with Loretta Lees, that the debate needs to change its angle and take into account the social context and social cohesion that is being threatened by gentrification. Moreover, I believe that the data that is now available – and will become available after the 2020 census – will change the stance of many scholars on gentrification and will ultimately force scholars to take the social and cultural concept into account. In addition, looking only at

gentrification through an economic lens will do away with many other factors that endanger the people living in rapidly gentrifying neighborhoods and will paint an unjust image of these people. This is also where the notion of race and place comes in. The Race and Place approach offers an angle to investigate the social impact of gentrification and can better help to determine the importance of different case studies.

The inclusion of culture and to have a cultural connection with your neighborhood is of great importance to create a vibrant community. As said before, the degenerating effects of gentrification play a significant role in uprooting communities. My next chapter will deal with another degenerating effect that has its links with gentrification, namely the war on drugs in connection to crime and to the racial component visible in these policies. The second chapter will add to the notion forwarded by Lees that “gentrification is the sum of many different parts” in which the strains of gentrification “are deeply enmeshed within broader inequalities of class, race and ethnicity” (“Pursuit of Difference,” 213; Newman and Wyly 51).

Chapter Two

Gentrification, Crime, and the War on Drugs.

“Simply because you’re in an area that is more affluent, it’s still hard for black boys to present themselves as independent from the stereotype of black criminality”

– Khiara Bridges, professor of law and anthropology at Boston University in “Extensive Data Shows Punishing Reach of Racism for Black Boys” by Badger et al. for the New York Times.

The devastating effects of gentrification on a shared culture of a community are not only visible by looking directly at how gentrification seemingly ‘helps’ a neighborhood to prosper. It is also visible in research that connects, rather counterintuitively, gentrification to crime. However, as this chapter will show, this line of research still has some deep potholes and visible cracks that need to be mended in order for scholars to be able to paint a clear picture as to how crime connects to gentrification and vice versa. This chapter will also deal with the War on Drugs and how this created an overcrowding of the corrections facilities in the United States that surpasses many incarceration numbers of other Western developed nations. At first glance, it can seem as though these two different fields of research are unrelated and have undergone individual development as time progressed. Nonetheless, these two fields find their common ground in the displacement of several factors such as the displacement of disadvantage, crime, opportunity, wealth, poverty and residents.

Scholars who conduct their research in the field of gentrification and related areas almost always investigate numbers and figures but fail to look at – and answer questions on – the human aspect, the people actually living in said neighborhoods, factors that lies in the shadows of these numbers and figures. Though there is a vast body of research already readily available to work with, this chapter will show that it is still incomplete and that important factors are omitted – whether or not intentionally – which are able to alter key findings. As this chapter shows, these two fields of study will meet each other in Central Harlem and will show that displacement plays a very important and heavily underrated role.

The Paradox of Crime and Gentrification

Umpteen questions arise in research conducted on the impact of gentrification on crime. However, countless questions and answers are still very much open to interpretation. One of the many scholars who tries to answer some of these questions is Michel S. Barton, whose research focusses itself on the question as “to what extent gentrification influenced crime in

New York City” (Barton 1180). I specifically chose to highlight Barton’s research because it focusses itself on the area in which my case study – Central Harlem – is situated, therefore giving me the ability to draw clearer parallels between theory and case study. According to Barton, research has shown that crime rates have steadily increased between the 1960s and 1980s in most major U.S. cities but then dramatically declined during the 1990s (1180). This decline can be seen as coinciding with the onset of gentrification, which already took place in Harlem at the beginning of the 1980s and continued its path well throughout the 1990s and 2000s. What also helped decline crime numbers is the onset of the ‘War on Drugs,’ which also saw its birth in the early 1980s. In this so-called war, the government actively doubled down on the growing crack epidemic which was ‘sweeping’ through the nation. Proclaiming to rid the nation of drugs, what this war actually did was to fill correction institutions to the brim with drug offenders and create a historic imbalance in the racial composition of inmates (Alexander). What is more, black Harlemites received the brunt end of the stick as they face harsher punishments than their white counter parts dealing cocaine in Manhattan – this will be further elaborated on in the second part of this chapter.

That is also where the two major points in this chapter – gentrification and (violent) crime/incarceration – converge as Barton’s article links the decline of violent crime with the spread of gentrification in the 55 New York City sub-boroughs between 1980 and 2009 and advances the study of gentrification and crime (Barton 1181). Moreover, results of Barton’s study show that “sub-boroughs that experienced greater rates of gentrification during a given decade were more likely to feature lower rates of aggravated assault, homicide, and robbery at the end of the decade” (Barton 1182). After reviewing Barton’s work, the question arises if gentrification is the sole benefactor of the decline in crime in neighborhoods such as Harlem. For instance, during the 1980s the government was actively intervening in drug use in ghetto’s due to the implementation of government actions as a result of the war on drugs. By taking a step back and looking at the bigger picture one can wonder if gentrification is just another part – as is the war on drugs – of a government sanctified policy to introduce gentrification in dilapidated areas such as Harlem. Connecting Michelle Alexander’s theory as explained in her book *The New Jim Crow: Mass Incarceration in the Age of Colorblindness* to policies acted upon in (Central) Harlem, then gentrification and the war on drugs seem to fall under the same umbrella as both can be seen as euphemisms that displace social problems in black neighborhoods without actually solving these massive inequalities deeply rooted within these communities.

Michel S. Barton forwards distinct theories on crime in his research; several of them I will highlight in the upcoming section. I will first explain what these different theories encompass. Secondly, I will connect these theories to my chosen case study before I try to point out several gaps and shortcoming in the existing research on gentrification and crime. What is more, Barton acknowledges that research falls short on the availability of accessible data needed to determine definitive reasons of assessing causal relationships between crime and gentrification. This in turn makes it difficult to tread the waters of crime and gentrification related research but it also highlights one key aspect – that even more research is needed to be able to paint a clear picture. This also falls in line with the conclusion of the first chapter, that this specific area of research misses – or at times not even highlights – clear social and cultural markers and only looks at the economic aspect of the gentrification debate.

One theory on the relationship between gentrification and crime is the “routine activities theory” (Barton 1184). This theory poses that crime occurred at a higher rate when a more “suitable target” (high value residents moving into Harlem of middle to high-income) “lacking in capable guardianship converged in space and time with a motivated offender” (Barton 1184). This theory suggests a causal relationship between gentrification and crime in which gentrification positively influences crime as young, middle-class professionals settled “into disadvantaged communities populated by impoverished residents who were often resentful that gentrification was occurring in their neighborhood” (Barton 1184). In addition, Elijah F. seems to agree with the theory forwarded by Barton as he states in his book *Streetwise: Race, Class, and Change in an Urban Community*, that gentrifiers could be seen as more *suitable targets* than residents already living in a gentrified area. This is because these so-called new-comers more than likely possessed high-value goods and were not very familiar with the techniques readily available to protect themselves on the streets. What is more, gentrification upended “local guardianship” as newcomers were often far less acquainted with a neighborhood than incumbent residents and those exact incumbent residents might “have been unwilling” to play the role of “capable guardians due to the resentment of the gentrification process” (Barton 1184).

Some of these ‘local guardians’ of Harlem have commented on the gentrification of Central Harlem echoing their sentiment of broken hearts and disappointment in what Central Harlem is turning into. One Central Harlem student tells Gørrild et al. that “the rezoning of 125th street [...] feels like history is just repeating itself. Those people have been there longer but now they do not fit into Harlem anymore with the new buildings and establishments” (Gørrild et al.) Another young resident of Central Harlem came to the conclusion that “they

did not plant those trees for us” when hearing about the rezoning of 125th street and that many of the apartments being build would be way out of the price range that many African American inhabitants of Harlem could afford. While another Central Harlem native, sixty-year-old Stella Davis, proclaimed that “it ain’t Harlem [*sic*]. It is Manhattan now” echoing the sentiments many Harlem residents feel (Ambrosio). While these statements do not necessarily indicate that these residents feel any type of hatred towards gentrifiers, these statements can be seen as indicators as to what the larger group of ‘local guardians’ of Harlem feel and can contribute to what Barton explains as the positive effect of gentrification on crime. While these sentiments seem to underscore Barton’s positive effect theory, I cannot help but wonder if these ‘local guardians’ have ultimately given in to the inevitable truth that their neighborhood is changing, whether they like it or not.

The outcome of Barton’s research indicated a negative association of gentrification on aggravated assault, robbery, and homicide which in turn offers “stronger support” for a “social disorganization framework” as “scholars generally agree that the process results in the deconcentration of disadvantage” and consequently reduces crime rates (1197). Ergo, deconcentration of disadvantage correlates with reductions in crime. Barton acknowledges the shortcomings in available data on the ability to determine definitive reasons for these negative associations, but one explanation might be, according to Barton, that the increase of middle-class culture in lower-class neighborhoods – “as middle-class culture was less likely to promote violent behavior” – plays a large factor in this so-called negative association (Anderson; Barton 1198). Connecting this to census data of Central Harlem one can note that the level of income indeed has gone up in Harlem – \$46,540 in 2015 compared to \$31,500 in 2000 – and certain crime rates slightly decreased – rape numbers have gone down by fifty percent since 2001 – seemingly underscoring Barton’s view on middle-class residents’ role on neighborhood change (NYC neighborhood data profiles, MN10, O’Neill). The problem with this “social disorganization framework” is that it does not actually solve anything. It might solve the problem of crime in that specific neighborhood but it does not get to the root of the problem, which should be actually helping people who resort to criminal activities. Yet again, this line of thinking by Barton is just a short-term solution that can be applied to a specific area while actually transferring the problem to another neighborhood. The deconcentration of disadvantage in Barton’s theory then literally means displacing the problem as lower-class people cannot afford to live in highly gentrified places and have to find a new home somewhere else, thus taking their ‘criminal behavior’ with them. Moreover, Barton actively

ignores the question of what happens to the people that previously lived in this neighborhood and have now moved out of these gentrified areas where crime is on the mend.

Barton does acknowledge that research falls short on this theory, which then falls in line with my own belief system in that too little attention has been given to what the social and cultural aspect entails of the gentrification debate and how it affects the local culture of a community and the image that is thus created of this community. Moreover, the picture that Barton paints of middle-class people ‘up-lifting’ lower-class neighborhoods shows that he too is a firm believer in the ‘positive’ effects of gentrification and consequently completely side-steps what the process might actually do to poor, low-income, colored, and marginalized people. Ibrahim X. Kendi calls this the myth of uplift suasion (505). In theory, uplift suasion entails that black people would “exhibit upstanding behavior before white people” thinking that black people were able to “undermine the racist beliefs behind slavery” (Kendi 505). Black people thus believed that they were able to “acquire the esteem, confidence and patronage of whites” (Kendi 505). However, as Kendi proclaims in his book, this uplift suasion failed miserably. When black people were actually able to uplift themselves, white people then “routinely despised” these black people (Kendi 505). Uplift suasion has thus brought on “the progression of racism – new racist policies and ideas after blacks broke through the old ones” (Kendi 505).

Without knowing, Barton’s biased opinion showed when he stated that middle-class culture was less likely to promote violent behavior implying that lower-income people *do* promote a culture of violence. In doing so, Barton completely misses the point and falls victim to societal thinking created by systemic inequalities built into the fabric of American society. Such thinking implies a belief system that lower-income people are themselves responsible for the position they hold in American society. This neoliberal rationale fails to acknowledge that these people are held down by systemic racism and inequalities set in place by American institutions. Barton seems to do this on purpose and thus even further cements the image that is created of low-income, colored people.

Even though Barton’s report indicated that “gentrification in New York City was associated with declines in violent crime rates,” gentrification should not be seen as the soul savior of cities (Barton 1198). Another conclusion drawn by Barton is that “widespread displacement may not matter” as research repeatedly indicated that residents were fearful of displacement and this fear might have a negative impact on the relationship incumbent residents will build with gentrifiers, which in turn may lead to the slowing down of effort to reduce crime (Barton 1199; Anderson). Though Barton might praise gentrification for its

causal relationship to crime it is imperative to keep in mind that gentrification is a major player which disproportionately impacted poor and racial minorities by dislocating them from deprived areas with an increased potential for development of new houses (profit) to disadvantaged areas with even less or limited resources at their disposal (Freeman, “*Hood*” Newman & Wyly; Barton 1198). Yet, Barton left these important influences out of his report because he too was aware of the intricate role that displacement has on gentrification and the seeming inability to measure displacement, or in other words – “measuring the invisible” (Atkinson 193).

The role of social mixing – middle-class residents moving into lower-class areas – which Barton highlights is also an area of study for Loretta Lees. Lees is highly critical of the notion that current policies use social mixing to further their own agendas and as such propagate gentrification as a “positive policy tool” in revitalizing inner urban neighborhoods (Lees, “Social Mixing” 2451). Lees highlights three potential rationales that she later deconstructs as hiding a gentrification rationale and with it a “social cleansing agenda” (Lees, “Social Mixing” 2451). The first rationale uses the “defending the neighborhood” argument in which people claim that “since middle-class people are stronger advocates for public resources, socially mixed neighborhoods will fare better than those without middle-class households” (Lees “Social Mixing,” 2451). Deconstructing this first rationale, Lees already can be seen to disagree with Barton’s claim that social mixing will ultimately benefit a gentrified area, and thus have a positive effect, when it comes to crime numbers. Where Barton seems to inadvertently ‘put the blame’ on lower-income incumbent residents for neighborhood crime rates, Lees can be seen as a firm advocate for these residents’ rights. Precisely this viewpoint seems to fall on deaf ears in Barton’s research and even though his research was very thorough and to the point, he missed clear indicators – social, racial, gender and cultural – which also contribute to the effect gentrification has on crime numbers. He consequently turned a blind eye, according to Lees, to the hidden agenda behind the gentrification strategy.

A second rationale is that of the “money-go-round” argument which asserts that “tenurially and socioeconomically mixed neighborhoods are able to support a stronger local economy than areas of concentrated poverty” and thirdly the argument of “networks and contacts” is used that draws on Robert Putnam’s (1995) significant account of “bridging and bonding social capital to promote social mixing as the way to generate social cohesion and economic opportunity” (Lees, “Social Mixing” 245; Putnam). Social mixing is thus used as an overarching term to disguise the harmful side-effects gentrification has on poor and lower-

income neighborhoods. Through using a rhetoric of “urban renaissance, urban revitalization, urban regeneration and urban sustainability” policy makers are able to overstep the word gentrification in order to “deflect criticism and resistance” to the outcomes of gentrification (Lees, “Social Mixing” 2452). Moreover, sidestepping the use of gentrification enables policy makers to avoid the intricate effects that class has on gentrification and thus nullifying it in such a way that it neutralizes gentrification’s negative image and the process that comes along with it, according to Lees.

Lyndsay N. Boggess and John R. Hipp write in their article “*The Spatial Dimensions of Gentrification and the Consequences for Neighborhood Crime*” that criminological research has had its main focus on examining the effects of gentrification viewing the process through a “social disorganization lens” (Boggess and Hipp 588). Even though, as Boggess and Hipp proclaim, the social disorganization framework does not specifically clarify the impact of socioeconomic improvement on a neighborhood. The theory originated “as an explanation of geographic variations in juvenile delinquency rates in urban areas.” It hypothesizes that crime is an outcome of neighborhood social conditions and not so much out of individual characteristics of neighborhood residents (Boggess and Hipp 588). In addition, crime will be highest in those neighborhoods which are filled with high levels of “concentrated disadvantage, residential instability, and ethnic heterogeneity” (Boggess and Hipp 588). These specific neighborhoods are incapable to realize common goals and preserve effective social controls (Boggess and Hipp 588). Taking this back to Central Harlem – a socially mixed and ethnically heterogeneous community – as a case study, even though the neighborhood has gone through significant levels of gentrification, crime rates are still higher than in most other New York City neighborhoods. Though the number of rapes have gone down drastically over the years, other crimes have seen a smaller decline. While the overall number of crimes committed have gone down – between 1990 and 2016, robbery has declined with 80.1 percent – Central Harlem still remains in the top ten of neighborhoods with high crime number in New York City. Data shows that between January 2016 (this is how far back the interactive map goes) and November 2017 between 37,3809 and 50,8978 crimes have been committed per 1000 residents (O’Neill).

While figures definitely paint a positive picture in favor of the case on gentrification relating to Central Harlem it also portrays a rather contradictory image. If gentrification and social mixing have such positive outcomes why is it that more and more people seem to be displaced? With displacing incumbent residents, the problem of ‘crime’ only shifts to a different neighborhood. What is more, how can policies effectively change to uplift the social

conditions within a neighborhood without gentrification being able to dislodge and displace its original inhabitants? Why is it that crime rates seem to be higher when colored people are a part of the majority and then seem to lower when middle-class, often white people, enter the arena and push colored people into the minority group of a neighborhood? This surely cannot only be attributed to a racial component. Moreover, why are colored people put in jail at a much higher rate than white people (Alexander; Kendi; Engel et al. 603)? Recent research by the New York Times shows the “Punishing Reach of Racism for Black Boys” and how it is especially hard for black boys to escape the “poverty trap” (Badger et al). This sweeping research analyzed the lives of over 20 million young white and black boys growing up in the same circumstances and where they end up in later life. The outcome of this research might come as a shock to some while never even being questioned by others, as the outcome is that black boys almost always fare worse off than their white counterparts even though they had equal starting points. According to Ibram X Kendi, this study puts a bomb under one of the “most popular liberal post-racial ideas” that “the fundamental problem is class and not race” (Badger et al). With this comment Kendi adequately lays bare the shortcomings within American society; the inability or even unwillingness to “stare racism in the face” (Badger et al).

Staring racism in the face can be done through many different lenses. One way through which racism can be stared in the face is by evaluating the prison system and police brutality committed within the United States of America. Prison numbers are soaring in the U.S. and an expanding body of research suggests that the increase in incarceration numbers has a lot to do with drugs and substance use and abuse (Alexander; Kendi; Engel et al.; Petersen-Smith; Welch). This research provides the public with a growing body of knowledge that does not shy away from using the racial component present in United States society. Engel et al. acknowledge that research which specifically addresses police bias in drug enforcement is limited and that “those with methodological problems are rare” (Engel et al. 604). Two different explanations for this can lie in the notion that many people are afraid to tread the risky waters of race and (institutionalized) racism or many scholars are afraid to put their name on an article exposing racism and racial bias within highly ranked institutions in the United States. However, the importance of such studies is being highlighted more and more throughout the years and soaring prison numbers are just one factor that contributes to a growing body of research on race, racism and systemic inequalities. In the following section I will accentuate the voices in the debate that are willing to step out of their comfort zone to

highlight where the United States need help in reducing inequality and addressing pressing racial issues.

War on Drugs

The overcrowding of the American prison system began when America acted upon its so called “War on Drugs.” Ironically, this war began at a time when it was proven that illegal drug use was declining (Petersen-Smith; Alexander 6). In 1971, it was president Nixon who started with the rhetoric of the war on drugs when he declared offenses and abuses connected to drugs as “public enemy” number one (Alexander 48; pbs.org). Nixon stated that “[A]merica’s public enemy number one is drug abuse. In order to fight and defeat this enemy, it is necessary to wage a new, all-out offensive.”¹ Nixon proved to be unable to reach a consensus on the war on drugs during his Presidency. It was President Ronald Reagan who, in late 1982, officially started the war on drugs with his administration. What is astounding about this timing is the notion that in 1982, less than two percent of the United States population viewed drug use as the most important concern facing the nation and its policy makers (Alexander 49). However, Reagan was not very much concerned with what his constituents believed. Reagan was much more interested in public opinions concerning race. Rapid decision making ended in towering spending budgets of federal law enforcement agencies. To put these budgets into contrast, excessive cuts were made into the funding of agencies that were authorized to make decision on drug treatment, education and prevention (Alexander 49).

Michael Welch argues that as the war on drug escalated, it also overflowed corrections facilities (Welch 43). Booming prison populations are a result of the war on drugs in which offenders are hauled into the criminal justice system and for many of these “law breakers” it is also their final destination. Thus, echoing the words of John F. Kennedy, it is possible to say that “[t]oday’s problems are the result of yesterday’s solution” (Welch 44). Michelle Alexander is of the opinion that the war on drugs is the leading cause for the soaring numbers of people incarcerated in the United States (Alexander 60). In her book, *The New Jim Crow; Mass Incarceration in the Age of Colorblindness*, Michelle Alexander skillfully explains how the “War on Drugs” was constructed in the aftermath of the Civil Rights Movement to criminalize blackness. What is more, convictions for drug offenses seem to have impacted

¹ Richard Nixon: "Remarks About an Intensified Program for Drug Abuse Prevention and Control.," June 17, 1971. Online by Gerhard Peters and John T. Woolley, The American Presidency Project. <http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/?pid=3047>. (accessed November 28, 2017)

black people far harsher than white people. Coupled up with the “tough on crime” notion – a rhetoric many presidents are keen on using – the war on drugs was single-handedly responsible for a 700 percent rise in United States’ prison population between the years 1970 and 2005. This number is even more daunting considering the United States only constitutes up to 5 percent of the global population, yet the country manages to incarcerate up to 25 percent of its citizens (Petersen-Smith; Haney López 1029). Moreover, the United States is the leading country in the Western world when it comes to incarceration numbers, 750 per 100,000 people (Alexander 6; Barkow 1713; Thompson 703; Western and Wildeman 227). The United States even succeeded in eclipsing incarceration numbers of “highly repressive regimes such as China, Russia, and Iran” (Alexander 6). Incarceration numbers for Central Harlem show that 336 of every 100,000 inhabitants were put behind bars, according to a new free mapping and data site, DATA2GO.NYC, which analyses among other things the jailed New Yorker’s last known addresses (DATA2GO.NYC). What is more, these numbers clearly show that Central Harlem is struggling with incarceration numbers as other districts within New York – respectively districts in Queens – see incarceration numbers of just five in every 100,000 adults (DATA2GO.NYC).

The Anti-Drug Abuse Act was drafted up in 1986 and allowed the courts to enforce mandatory minimum sentences for the use and distribution of crack and cocaine. One would think that judges would double down equally harsh on minimum sentences for both crack and cocaine but evidence shows that this is not the case. Distributors and users of powder cocaine – a drug commonly associated with white people – could expect more lenient punishments than users and distributors who were caught with crack – a drug commonly associated with black people (Duvernay; Alexander 53). For example, the Anti-Drug Abuse Act prescribed a minimum sentence of five years for a user or dealer caught with five grams of crack – the load typically handled by poor people and black people – while at the same time white and rich dealers and users of powder cocaine had to be arrested carrying five hundred (!) grams of the substance to receive the exact same five-year sentence (Kendi 435). Haney López believes that “the hundred to one” penalizing gap between crack and powder cocaine is an unmistakable quantifier of how the so-called war on drugs, with its connection to race, predominantly targeted black people (1029). Time magazine even credited crack as “issue of the year” in 1986, but in reality, “crack had become the latest drug addicting Americans to racist ideas” (Kendi 435). In addition, somehow society has been able to stereotype the black man into a scary person who is “intimidating” and has a “propensity toward violence,” thus validating racist thinking (Badger et al).

What is more, in the year 2000, Human Rights Watch also tried to make the public aware of the discrepancies that were taking place in the American prison population. Figures showed that in 2000, in seven states of the United States, 80 to 90 percent of the drug offenders sent to do time were African American men (Alexander 98). Racial disparities can be found “for all age groups and at different levels of education” seeing black men getting incarcerated at a rate that lies eight times higher than that of white men, according to Western and Wildeman (228). Today, more African American men are hoisted into the prison population system – “in prison or jail, on probation or parole” – than ever were enslaved back in 1850 (Alexander 180). Furthermore, the racial component of the United States incarceration rate is its most striking feature. According to Alexander, “no other country in the world imprisons so many of its racial or ethnic minorities” (6). Not even South-Africa could surpass today’s United States’ black incarceration numbers during the height of Apartheid (Alexander 6). Back in 2000, black people constituted to 62.7 percent of “all drug offenders locked up in state prisons” while white people compromised ‘only’ 36.7 percent and this has nothing to do with the fact that black people ‘supposedly’ sell or use more drugs (Kandi 436). A 2012 National Survey on Drug Use and health showed that white youth seems to be selling *more* drugs (6.6 percent) than their black counterparts (5 percent) (Ingraham). Still, black people are far more likely to get arrested for selling or possessing drugs.

This can only partly be explained using the racial differences woven into the drug markets of white and black communities. Drugs tend to be sold outdoors – out in the open and is thus by far more easily seen and caught by police – in African American neighborhoods while white neighborhoods often sell their drugs within the safety of their own homes (Ingraham). Gentrification plays a major role in whether or not drugs *can* be sold in or outdoors. While I am certainly not advocating that African Americans should be able to sell their drugs indoors, I do want to point to the reason why gentrification pushes black people out into the street. Displacing – “forces outside the household make living there impossible, hazardous or unaffordable” – low-income people from their communities, dislocating them and ripping them out of their place of comfort does not do any good to their cause (Hartman et al. 3). Torn out of their rich social networks and thrown into a society much less equipped for black people – i.e. lesser schools, no community centers, no affordable housing – many fall back or are drawn into illegal activities just to keep their heads above water in a society that seems to be structured to constantly work against them. And once in the system it is very hard to get out, especially for a person of color.

Conclusion

Tara D. Warner and John H. Kramer argue that “the criminal justice system is often viewed as a revolving door for drug-dependent offenders [...] and repeating incarceration of drug-dependent offenders has contributed to prison overcrowding” (Warner and Kramer 89). This revolving door principle is kept in-check due to the racist structures built into American society. Once a person walks out of the prison system – jail or prison – he or she immediately starts a second-class citizenship. Branded as a felon, one is legally stripped of virtually every right an individual has in the United States. Getting out of the sticky hands of the prison system “in short order are slim, at best,” says Michelle Alexander (94). One is swept into a “parallel universe in which discrimination, stigma, and exclusion are perfectly legal, and privileges of citizenship such as voting and jury service are off limits” (Alexander 94). A person does not even have to have seen the inside of a prison to be branded a felon, according to Alexander. A second-class citizenship already awaits at the exact moment one is branded as a felon (Alexander 94).

“Barred from public housing by law, discriminated against by private landlords, ineligible for food stamps, forced to “check the box” indicating a felony conviction on employment applications for nearly every job, and denied licenses for a wide range of professions, people whose only crime is drug addiction or possession of a small amount of drugs for recreational use find themselves locked out of the mainstream society and economy – permanently” (Alexander 94).

The figures of incarcerated black men – Human Rights Watch reported in 2015 that black men were incarcerated at a rate which lies six times higher than that of their white counterparts – paint a stark racist picture which does not bode well for the United States of America and its inhabitants. In sum, these numbers show that black people are – legally – discriminated against by the state. A released convict will return home to his or her community with the label of “formerly incarcerated” and this label will hover over them for the rest of their lives (Gottschalk 248; Thompson 714; Human Rights Watch 2).

The earlier mentioned ‘getting tough’ on crime policy often returns in the rhetoric of presidential candidates and presidents alike. However, this rhetoric often feels very hollow and most president-elect and presidents use this phrase to keep their base – “often poor and working-class whites, who live economically unstable lives and feel threatened by racial reforms” - happy and content (Alexander 55). We see this attitude of ‘tough on crime’ also

being used by Donald Trump who often tweets – and deletes – his opinions about whether or not a certain candidate – running for governor or senator – is fit to govern by using the phrase ‘tough on crime’ or ‘soft on crime,’ while hardly ever elaborating on what he exactly means by saying tough on crime. If Trump does elaborate on his tough on crime policies it is his belief that the United States should send more people to prison which will ultimately lead to a safer America (Williams). Outside of the people who voted for Trump and his policies, this stance does not seem to generate broad support. In a New York Times article, one interviewee argues that the traditional way of “lock ‘em up and throw away the key” is not what many victims – referring to people who were caught at the wrong end of an assault or robbery – want and need in the tough on crime policies (Williams). What people do need is “more rehabilitation services for crime victims” in order to be able to reduce crime numbers as many perpetrators “had been victims of crime themselves” (Williams). This approach can then work as a guideline to a first step in solving social problems within a community itself instead of going for the short term solution of displacing the problem by locking people up.

Michael Welch reaches the same conclusion as he believes that “any attempt to deal with America’s drug crisis without addressing social and racial inequality leading to poverty, unemployment (underemployment), substandard education, and inaccessible health care, is doomed to fail” (Welch 57). In addition, Welch also concluded that local drug misconduct has a strong correlation with “mass deprivation, economic marginality, and cultural and community breakdown” (Welch 57). Cultural and community breakdown links to gentrification as gentrification is a deciding factor in the dismantling of low-income and poor communities, though this cultural sphere needs even more thorough and further research. As the lives of many members of the United States lower-classes become desolate and stressful, the push into the drug trade becomes ever more appealing to people who are struggling to make ends meet (Welch 57). This conclusion by Welch also falls in line with the conclusion on the ‘revolving door principle’ and how a convict enters a vicious circle of arrest, time in prison, being stripped from almost every right a person has, consequently resorts back to illegal activities when out of prison which will ultimately lead to a new arrest.

The discrepancies in incarceration rates in the United States have several causes as outlined earlier in this chapter. Police bias is also a factor that highly contributes to unequal arrests based on race alone. Engel et al. reports that “racial disparities in drug arrests” cannot be explained through a race-neutral lense of community complaints and crime rates (604). With Seattle as their case study, the overrepresentation of black people among those jailed for drug sales in Seattle can be contributed to organizational practices by the police. These

practices include “a focus on crack cocaine enforcement, outdoor drug sales, and the failure to treat similar drug markets alike” (Engel et al. 604). This racial bias is also present in the New York City police force in which a report outlines the bias New York City’s Police Department when it comes to administering sentences and arresting people on the basis of marijuana possession.

The Drug Policy Alliance garnered arrest record data from the New York state criminal justice system and in doing so paints an alarming picture of police racial bias. The evidence in this report shows that the NYPD arrests black Americans at a rate seven times higher than that of whites even though evidence shows that young whites use marijuana at a higher rate than young African American men (TDPA 2014). Moreover, these arrest numbers are another source of evidence that shows the imbalance between black and white drug use arrests. Central Harlem is shown to have a marijuana arrest rate of 328, a rate that lies seven times higher than the arrest rate in Brooklyn’s Borough Park (TDPA 2014). Interestingly enough, 78 percent of inhabitants of Central Harlem are of Latin and black origin while only 15 percent of the inhabitants of Borough Park are of Latin or black descent (TDPA 2014). The bias in the system is once again not because minorities use more marijuana than white people. It can be attributed to the disproportionate enforcement that vigorously targets minority communities. The Huffington Posted reported in July 2014 that 87 percent of marijuana related arrests in New York City from 2002 to 2012 fell on Latino and Black residents (Mathias). Drawing the conclusion that the decriminalization efforts set in place by the New York Police Department only seemed to apply to whites and not to minorities.

This chapter dealt with two different fields of study and highlighted their shared common ground; displacement. Moreover, this chapter also tried to intricately deal with the issue of racism and how it effectively shaped and is still shaping American society. As Michelle Alexander’s book *The New Jim Crow* skillfully explained the meaning behind the War on Drug’s rhetoric given by former United States Presidents, interviews underscored her findings. Through Nixon’s former domestic policy chief, the real meaning of the War on Drugs was revealed in later interviews (Edelman). John Ehrlichman acknowledged that they “full well” knew that the administration of that time was unable to “make it illegal to be against [...] blacks, but by getting the public to associate [...] blacks with heroin, and then criminalizing” it heavily, the United States government was able to disrupt the black community from within, even though Nixon’s administration knew full well that they were lying about the drugs (Edelman).

Precisely this association is also blindsiding Michel S. Barton. He is one of the

scholars who fell into the trap of stereotyping black people and connecting factors of crime to gentrification without looking at the full scope. Furthermore, what this chapter also tried to show is that a lot of research conducted on the effects of crime on gentrification deal with numbers and fail to answer specific questions as to what happens to the people who actually live and are displaced in the studied areas. It is implied that neighborhoods who undergo significant gentrification see a positive relationship on crimes committed in that specific area. However, these researchers actively ignore the question of what happens to the people who formerly lived there. Research in this area is available, although it is still very much in its infancy. It is my observation, however, that the social problem within these communities will persevere and will displace itself to other cities and neighborhoods if root causes are not properly dealt with within a neighborhood itself, and to my opinion, gentrification research has not yet adequately dealt with this specific issue.

What is more, it always appears to be the same group who bears the brunt end of the stick and are constantly negatively stereotyped. Brought to the forefront in this chapter is the notion that there is still a lot of research that needs to be done into missing factors within the gentrification debate. Missing important markers within this debate will only perpetuate the vicious cycle which people of color find themselves in. Staring racism in the face is difficult, but it is the only way to help America to move forward.

Chapter 3

Identities Lost or Found – a Community on the Rocks?

“There is something about black neighborhoods, or at least poor black neighborhoods, that seem to make them irresistible to gentrification... everywhere I travel in the U.S. and even in Brixton, in London, a place as culturally vibrant as Harlem, wherever people of color live, we and the landmarks that embody our presence, unprotected, piece by piece, are being replaced.” – Valerie Jo Bradley, advocate for the Save Harlem Now group in “The End of Black Harlem” by Michael Henry Adams.

Harlem, Central Harlem. The name itself props up iconic representations of the famous New York City neighborhood’s African Americans, all of whom have successfully turned the district into the Black Mecca of the United States. Intellectuals, activists and artists like Langston Hughes, Zora Neal Hurston, Malcolm X and W.E.B Du Bois – to just name a few – succeeded in the creation of a new hub for black intellectuals and created a prosperous breeding ground for others alike, to form a rich cultural life for which Harlem has been known ever since. Yet, there are people, more specifically real estate professionals and developers, who have tried to rebrand the southern part of Central Harlem into SoHa, South Harlem, signifying a ‘trendy’ new area tucked away in Central Harlem. (Bakare; C. Clark; B. Clark). This strategy is nothing new for New York City itself as different areas of the city carry catchy nicknames such as SoHo – south of Houston street – in lower Manhattan, Nolita – north of Little Italy – also in lower Manhattan, and Dumbo – down under the Manhattan Bridge overpass – in Brooklyn.

What is more, the rebranding of different areas is used by real estate agents to help bolster its sales, turn these neighborhoods into brands and then monetize on them (Bakare; C. Clark). One can wonder if this strategy works for an area so enriched with culture such as Central Harlem and opposition to the rebranding of the neighborhood grew instantly. Many Harlem natives saw the renaming of parts of Harlem as “a further attempt to erode the culture of Harlem” and connected the ongoing gentrification of Harlem to it as being part of “a real takeover of Harlem” (C. Clark). Danni Tyson, a Manhattan Community Board 10 member, which covers Central Harlem, classifies the initiative of rebranding parts of Central Harlem as “pretty arrogant” and an attempt to try and take “the black out of Harlem” (C. Clark; D. Clark). The bold move by these real estate agents not only invigorated many residents of Harlem but it also insults the legacy of the neighborhood and at the same time seems to be a

bid to try and disown Harlem of its identity and culture. Still, this attempt is yet another example of the long fetching tentacles of the gentrification process in which it either tries to capitalize on the history of an area or literally annihilates it. The outcomes of this process and consequences on identity building is the topic of this chapter.

Identity

Trying to determine what Harlem stands for in this day and age, residents of the neighborhood are divided and unsure. On the one hand, there are Harlemites heavily condemning rebranding practices. On the other hand, there are Harlem residents who try to capitalize on branding Harlem and trying to figure out “how to sell Harlem instead of selling out Harlem,” Nikita Stewart writes in a 2014 article for the New York Times called “Beyond Rangel, Harlem Wrestles with Its Identity.” Questions are asked on what Harlem really represents and one ‘pro-branding’ Harlem native answers this by stating that it is something “we are trying to determine,” while later adding that “Harlem’s identity is being formed as we speak. It is like a mother baking a cake before it is in an oven. Let it bake” (Stewart). This can in turn can then be questioned, is it not possible to overcook the cake? Will the cake ultimately burn? And what happens when you have overcooked the cake, completely burnt, who will pick up the pieces and help clean up the mess left behind? If it resembles anything like the period after WWII, then middle-class black people and affluent white people will leave the neighborhood again, leaving the poor and unemployed to fend for themselves.

With Harlem making up “less than half of the congressional district, which includes a swath of the Bronx and more than half the district’s voting-eligible residents are Hispanics,” Black Harlemites seem to have been stripped down of their voting rights – without physically taking their voting rights away – and unable to vote into office those that will have the best interest of their neighborhood at heart (Stewart). In turn, Harlem is “less a clearly identified voting bloc than an idea. A brand” (Stewart). Banking on its legacy individuals who are pro-branding feel that this is the only way to help save the neighborhood and are consequently not opposed to use the authenticity of the area to their advantage – and thus to the disadvantage of others. Neal Shoemaker, a Harlem native who runs a successful walking tour of the area, states that it is his firm belief that “Harlem had to capitalize on its own history and cachet to help low-income residents” (Stewart). While Mr. Shoemaker employs high-school students from the projects in which he himself grew up in, most of the high-end fashion and food stores do not seem to follow his lead, making him look extremely gullible for buying into the gentrification narrative that has been fed to the local people living in Central Harlem.

Research also debunks the notion of gentrification helping low-income residents as figures show that since 2000 “affluent white highly educated people begin moving in, and less educated whites and particularly less educated and less affluent blacks begin moving out” (Stewart). Moreover, with the level of displacement in place in neighborhoods as Central Harlem it is really difficult to investigate whether or not gentrification is actually helping those that need it the most.

Making an area more welcoming to newcomers through renaming certain sections of a neighborhood erases the lived experiences and lived culture of the people who grew up and are still living there. Though the name SoHa never caught on due to efforts taken by Central Harlem residents, it is important to find out what other identity markers might have been affected within a community due to gentrification processes and the displacement of longtime residents. How have Harlem natives tried to defend their neighborhood and uphold their cultural legacy fighting against the all-encompassing reach of gentrification? Forming an identity never stops and includes discovering the new and recovering “the old, forgotten, or appropriated” as well as the “synthesis of the new and old” (Kirk and Okazawa-Rey 10). The image of Central Harlem is challenged, but what does this do to the existing identity of a neighborhood? That is what this chapter sheds light on. First it will start off with an explanation on what exactly is understood when one talks about identity. Using theory by Gwyn Kirk, Margo Okazawa-Rey, and Seaton et al. the chapter then goes on to define the different markers which are used to create an identity and what the importance of an ethnic/racial identity entails. I will also use Jeremiah Moss’ book *Vanishing New York* and his blog which carries the same name to illustrate what the removal of iconic buildings does to people living in Central Harlem. Jeremiah Moss is an alias used by Griffin Hansbury, a social worker and psychoanalyst, who has lived in New York since 1993. I will also use Michelle Coghill Chatman’s theory on Black churches and why they are important institutions within black communities. Lastly, this chapter will answer the question if all is lost for a neighborhood such as Central Harlem.

A set of several complex factors are what form our identity, according to Gwyn Kirk and Margo Okazawa-Rey. Kirk and Okazawa-Rey state in an excerpt taken out of their book *Women’s Lives: Multicultural Perspectives* that the identity of a person works as a “specific marker” as to how an individual defines themselves “at any particular moment in life” (8). To discover one’s identity is a gradual process and to claim an identity one has to experience growth, renewal and change throughout the course of one’s life. Forming an identity “is the result of a complex interplay among a range of factors,” such as “individual decisions and

choices” one makes throughout a lifetime, “particular life events” such as going through puberty or the death of a parent, “community recognition and expectations,” and “classification and socialization” (Kirk and Okazawa-Rey 8). Answers to questions like “Who am I?” “Who do I want to be?” “Who do others think I am and want me to be?” “Who and what do societal and community institutions, such as schools, religious institutions, the media, and the law, say I am?” and “Where/what/who are my “home” and “community”?” form the foundation of our world (Kirk and Okazawa-Rey 9). But what if these questions become harder to answer as each day passes and community members see their neighborhoods changing in front of their eyes? What happens to the safe places these natives can retreat to in order to find shelter and comfort?

The word identity is described in *The American Heritage Dictionary* as

“The condition of being a certain person or thing;

The set of characteristics by which a person or thing is definitively recognizable or known;

The awareness that an individual or group has of being a distinct, persisting entity;

A set of behavioral or personal characteristics by which an individual is recognizable as a member of a group;

The fact or condition of being the same as something else;

The fact or condition of being associated or affiliated with something else.”

The *American Heritage Dictionary* construes the meaning of ‘to identify’ as “to establish or recognize the identity of; ascertain as a certain person or thing; to associate or affiliate closely with a person or group.” These explanations mark the intricate interplay between the individual and how one is perceived by other people and “classified by societal institutions” (Kirk and Okazawa-Rey 9). Individual agency, or at least a sense of, and the personal choice of association to others is also an important factor in the identification of oneself and others. “Gender, race, ethnicity, class, nationality, sexual orientation, age, religion, disability, and language” are all powerful and important “social categories” through which people “are recognized by others” (Kirk and Okazawa-Rey 9). Based on the above listed categories alone people often tend to believe to know who an individual is, what they stand for and how one should behave. This way of thinking feeds into the creation of stereotypes of certain groups living in the United States and functions as a reminder for people to know their social order (Kirk and Okazawa-Rey 13).

Identity Building

As a colonized minority, black people faced structural inequalities based solely on their race which in turn prevented them from successfully participating in United States society. As early as 1790, the Naturalization Law restricted people of color to become United States citizens and it is shameful to realize that this law has been repealed only sixty-six years ago in 1952. The Slave Codes forcefully barred every facet of life for disenfranchised African people. What these laws effectively did was to make race “into an indelible line that separated insiders from outsiders,” thus creating the well-known us versus them divide (Kirk Okazawa-Rey 14). Creating the myth of the American Dream and equal opportunity for all in which the “common belief” of “descendants of European immigrants” who, due to fortunate assimilation of their forefathers, are perceived to be the clear example that everyone can make it in the United States if one just works hard in turn completely neglects the racialization of immigrants of color coming to America in favor of white people (Kirk-Okazawa-Rey 14).

This feeling of white privilege and white authoritarianism stems from the idea of being “just human,” according to Richard Dyer. Dyer connects this to the notion of whiteness and how this functions as a problem when whiteness is seen to operate as “the human norm” according to which white people are “just people” while a person who is not white is racially stereotyped (Dyer 2). To hold such a position is extremely powerful and consequently cripples white people to be able to see their own privilege. Classifying white people in such a way feeds into the dominance of a “traditional society” and further segregates its society creating two categories: “whites and non-whites” (Pastrana 77). Thus, the perceived identity of black people became tarnished due to their enslavement and subsequent domination and in later decades via the heavily questionable ethics of the war on drugs. Government institutions created false perceptions through using traits of identity markers which helped American institutions to uphold racial stereotypes, while further cementing them into the minds of American citizens. Which then upholds the us vs them divide.

Seaton et al. agrees with Kirk and Okazawa-Rey on the notion that questions such as “Who am I?” and “What am I?” form the core of one’s identity forming (Seaton et al 683, Kirk and Okazawa-Rey 9). However, where Kirk and Okazawa-Rey talk mostly about individual agency in forming an identity, Seaton et al come to the conclusion that constructing an identity is not solely a “matter of one’s idiosyncratic self-perception,” but, rather, “shaped by one’s social context, including one’s social role and place in society” (Seaton et al 683). Calling this the ethnic/racial identity (ERI), Seaton et al. have provided scholars with new findings on identity building in connection to race and ethnicity. ERI is construed as “the

significance and meaning that individuals ascribe to being a member of their ethnic/racial group” (Seaton et al. 683). Understanding ERI and how this works for society is especially important in cases such as Central Harlem, as neighborhoods become more and more diverse, how are individuals still able to connect to their ethnic and racial identity in a positive way?

Ethnic and racial identity forming is not “composed of private beliefs or personal convictions that can be sustained without social expression and social validation” (Seaton et al 684). ERI is mostly about the place of an individual in the “social world” and invokes the question of what one is “assumed to be socially,” meaning that ERI is dependent on the awareness and affirmation through others and connects to the need for verification of who an individual is as a racial/ethnic group member (Seaton et al. 684). However, the scholars confess that ERI is only viable to uphold if it “is expressed and affirmed in identity-defined practices, contextualized in specific ethnic-racial ecologies” (Seaton et al 684). In addition, the social context is, according to Seaton et al, not only fixed but also constructed through ERI, both on an individual level as well as a collective level (685). As such, people are able to act as an individual or as a group on the basis of their ERI and these shared actions “can change the social setting to reflect or recognize what they are” (Seaton et al 685).

“A dynamic model of the relation between context and ERI should also consider the importance of identity validation in social contexts and the shaping of these social contexts by ERI enactment. Enactment includes the manner in which members of stigmatized groups [...] attempt to manage one’s stigma status through a crafted and highly intentional presentation of oneself in everyday life” (Seaton et al 685).

In short, *enactment* is how ERI is handled and accomplished amid daily synergy with interracial and intraracial individuals.

It is the basic need of humans to belong. Through using various behaviors and signals such as cultural practices and language, a person is able to thread the waters of “racial and ethnic self-understanding” to in-group members (Seaton et al 685). Moreover, the recognition of one’s ERI is not only “gated” by people in the “in-group” but just as much by “out-group” members as the “intergroup sensitivity effect implies that people are more sensitive to out-group than in-group critics” (Seaton et al 685). Maintaining an ERI becomes ever more challenging when one lacks the acknowledgment and validation by “relevant outside groups” (Seaton et al 685). Equal treatment and rights come under attack as well as the public affirmation and social recognition of a specific group’s culture, history, and lifestyle. In light

of cultural and historical aspects, this is especially problematic for the people living in Central Harlem as gentrification ravishes through their neighborhood swallowing up historic landmarks and leaving high-end developments in its wake. Comparing Central Harlem to other neighborhoods in New York City, it is painfully evident that Central Harlem has “far fewer city-recognized historic landmarks” (Nunez). This lack is contributed to the heavy gentrification taking place in the neighborhood north of Central Park, lack of proper resources, and some even bring up the alleged discrimination against African-American neighborhoods (Nunez).

Equally questionable are answers to questions such as who makes the decisions of what stories are told and what stories are preserved in neighborhoods such as Central Harlem. For New York City that is the task of the New York City Landmarks Preservation Commission (LPC). According to its website this commission consists of 11 commissioners, and “is required by law to include a minimum of three architects, a historian, a City planner or landscape architect, a realtor and at least one resident of each of the five boroughs” (LPC). The commissioners are appointed “for staggered three-year terms by the Mayor, who also designates the chair and vice chair” in which all commissioners, except the chair, receive no compensation (LPC). Taking a look at the website and the faces behind the names it should not come as a surprise that just one person in this committee is black. The website does not include a photo of the neighborhood members; therefore, one can only speculate at their racial/ethnic background. Nevertheless, it is this – almost completely white – commission who designate, and consequently decide what stories are preserved for historical black communities.

The lack of designated landmarks in Central Harlem becomes clear when finding out what happens once a landmark gets its classification. Having “special historical, cultural, or aesthetic value to the City of New York, state or nation” a designated landmark is protected against any form of restoration, alternation, or demolition unless given a specially permitted license, according to the LPC website (LPC). In other words, the fewer designated landmarks a neighborhood has, the more freedom real-estate agents and government have to demolish buildings and replace them with high-end luxury apartments which low-income people cannot afford. In Central Harlem only two sites have the stamp of being a historic district, there are also 28 individual landmarks sites “whose exterior features have been designated, permitting interior renovation” as well as two interior landmarks, “interior-designated spaces that must usually be accessible to the public” (Nunez). At first glance these numbers seem to be proportioned. However, comparing them to other neighborhoods, a 2012 rapport on

preservation completed by Community Boards 10's Land Use and Landmarks commission shows that only 3.6 percent of Central Harlem is covered by LPC historic districts. Other neighborhoods have a much higher coverage: 10.6 percent of Manhattan as a whole is covered, 26 percent of the Upper West Side, and 45 percent of the West Village is covered by LPC historic district landmarks (Comprehensive Historic Preservation Plan). The interactive map the LPC created – which is up to date – shows that not much progress in designating new historic landmarks has been made since.

What also did not help Central Harlem to attain more historic designated landmarks was the plan of rezoning 125th Street. 125th Street, before the rezoning plan, consisted of “a variety of cultural, commercial and residential uses, and some of the most important cultural institutions of Harlem” and therefore could be seen as an important street that gave the area of Central Harlem its character and provided sources for identity formation for many of its inhabitants (Busá 55). The rezoning plan came on the agenda in December 2003 and was forwarded under the idea that to “sustain the ongoing revitalization of 125th Street as a unique Manhattan Main Street” the city officials must “enhance its regional business district character and reinforce the street’s premier arts, culture, and entertainment destination identity” (DCP 2007). When the rezoning plan was finally on the drawing board, 125th Streets’ neighborhood was by and large inhabited by low-income, predominantly black people with an average income that equaled to less “than one-third of the average median income of the city as a whole” (Busá 53). This median income was already under duress due to “escalating housing prices, large development schemes by neighboring Columbia University and extensive waves of foreclosures and bankruptcies of small businesses” (Busá 53). That this plan would displace at least 500 residents living on 125th Street, create a job loss of 975 jobs and would demolish century-old buildings was not of any particular interest to the officials behind the rezoning plan. In the end, the plan got approved – not without heavy protest of Community Board 10 – on March 10, 2008 (Busá 54; Moss 313).

The rezoning of 125th Street struck Central Harlem right in the heart, continuing to threaten the African-American character of the community (Irwin). Many local Mom and Pop stores – small, independent, usually family-owned businesses with a minimum number of employees – conveyed their concerns on whether or not they would be able to hold on to their livelihoods or, if they were to be relocated, that the “heightened competition from large national retailers or escalating rental prices” would be their ultimate downfall (Busá 58). Their fears were justified as data by the Greater Harlem Chamber of Commerce shows that since 2007 countless locally-owned businesses left their stores along 125th Street, between

July 2008 and June 2009 alone almost one-third of locally-owned businesses closed their doors. While some had to close their shops due to the ongoing recession, many others just were not able to compete with the influx of “large corporate retail” and a “changing customer base” (Busá 62). “Disney, Old Navy, HMB Records, The Body Shop, and Marshalls, as well as Starbucks, Ben and Jerry’s Ice Cream, and a host of restaurants have encroached upon and gradually replaced numerous “Mom and Pop” businesses,” according to Sabiyha Prince (395). These Mom and Pop stores sold “soul food, stationary, clothing and other merchandise” to many Harlemites over the years (Prince 395). Again, that the rezoning would lead to the displacement of businesses was well thought out by the city. Their Environmental Impact Statement stated that even though several businesses were under threat of being displaced these businesses however, did not automatically contribute to “the character of the neighborhood” meaning that the rezoning would not have “a significant adverse environmental impact” to the existing Mom and Pop stores in Central Harlem (Moss 313). Ultimately, the City hereby rendered the inhabitants of 125th Street, their businesses and homes, useless and not being worth much.

The Consequences of Gentrification on Identity

The examples of Central Harlem and 125th street tell us a lot about the consequences that gentrification has on identity. But the overall rendering down of the identity, value and contribution of people’s lives to the culture of a neighborhood happens time and again, especially when people talk about minority – and especially black – citizens in the United States of America. There are many other examples that confirm this pattern. One is given by Amanda M. Burden, chairwoman of the Planning Commission, who told a reporter of the *New York Times* that her revelation on rezoning 125th Street came after she visited a concert by Roberta Flack at the Apollo Theater located on 125th Street (Williams). Leaving the concert hungry, Burden and a friend wondered on where to grab a bite to eat after her friend concluded that it would be best if they were to go “downtown” as there were not any suitable places to eat in Central Harlem (Williams). But what about the places such as Manna’s (one of the soul food restaurants forced out of its building on 125th Street due to the rezoning plan), Sylvia’s, Bayou or Miss Mamie that are located on or around 125th Street (Busá 62)? Are they not sufficient enough to eat in? That is when Burden concluded that there should be “a million different eateries around there,” adding that “this would be a once-in-a-life-time opportunity to frame and control growth on 125th Street” (Williams). With this statement Burden embodies the personification of white supremacy, completely eviscerating the already

existing culture that is rooted deep within Central Harlem. However, this culture does not match up with what Burden's own feelings are and therefore she is unable to recognize the people already living in that neighborhood – poor, working class black people – and with it many different eateries already present in Central Harlem.

Burden's tunnel vision thinking once again reared its head when she gave an interview to the *Palm Beach Daily News* in which she described 125th Street as “a dull succession of one-story buildings with no cultural center, no residential development and no restaurants” (Moss 311). That 125th Street did not have any cultural significance to Burden – a blond, white woman – does not necessarily mean that it lacks cultural significance to others as Jeremiah Moss points out in his book *Vanishing New York*. 125th Street was quite the opposite of a dull-succession of one-story buildings. On the contrary, they were once buildings full of life and local businesses. These buildings and its owners/renters stimulated “the nervous system” and kept the people living in Central Harlem alive, “what kills us, literally shortening our life spans, are the blank boxes of condos and chains,” one blogger states in Moss' book (Moss 311). With her statements, Burden also signed the death certificates of several buildings on 125th Street that could be eligible to become historic landmarks. Apart from two historic public libraries, built in 1904 and 1914, no other historically important buildings have been brought up for review to the LCP since (Busá 59). In other words, with the rezoning of 125th Street, the City of New York handed over free reign to major development companies to do as they see fit and entice landlords to double their rents or vacate lots to build even bigger (large retail) stores. Casualties of these money hungry landlords include several mom and pop shops, restaurants and bars which had been “cultural fixtures and that had served the community for decades” (Busá 62).

One of these casualties was Bobby's Happy House. Opening in 1946, this music store was the “first black-owned business on 125th Street” (Busá 62; Moss 314). Bobby Robinson, whose grandparents were slaves, opened the music store down the block of the Apollo Theatre. Over time, Robinson's shop became “legendary” as a place where black music was shared and created, and “where neighborhood people gathered together” (Moss 314). Thus, Bobby's Happy House could be seen as a spot that functions as a safe place in which community bonding and identity forming were important factors for (young) black people growing up and living in Central Harlem. The shop was able to withstand the ghettoization of Central Harlem, its drug infested era, the dilapidation of the neighborhood and high crime, but eventually had to succumb to state-led gentrification. Other victims to rezoning efforts were to be seen all across 125th Street. The Boro Hotel and the world-famous Lenox Lounge are

just two other examples of identity markers that left Central Harlem due to gentrification. The Boro Hotel, located at 125th and 5th has been demolished mid 2008. Its first floor was home to La Famille, a small restaurant and jazz club which opened in 1958 and was owned by two sister, Willette Craine Murray and Viola James (Moss 2008). These African-American women were among the first women to work at 125th Street, a position they acquired through marching in picket lines.

After 73 years of service in Central Harlem, the renowned Lenox Lounge located at Lenox Avenue and 125th Street saw its demise on December 31st 2003 as its rent was doubled from 10 thousand dollars to 20 thousand dollars per month (Moss 2013). Lenox Lounge once hosted celebrated jazz performers and high-end names such as Zora Neal Hurston, James Baldwin, Langston Hughes and Malcolm X (Gannon). Now, fifteen years after its closing a new replacement is proposed, one that is a very less jazzy commercial building. According to CityRealty, renderings of the new building “show a nondescript, four-story building [...] incongruous with the red-brick neighbors on either side” (Mazzarella). Retail space will take up the ground floor and offices will fill up the second through fourth floors of the building. This proposed new building is thus completely erasing what took its place 73 (88, if the 15 years of abandonment are counted) years before. Several commenters on Moss’ blog echo their sentiment via one person stating that she “literally cannot believe how quickly that long stretch of street became a long large mall. Anything with any sort of personality and history to it is being wiped out at a really rapid pace” (Moss 2013). Another commenter says that she has lived in Harlem most of her life and “year by year my neighborhood is becoming more granola,” signifying hippie-esque, all-natural and predominantly white people coming to live in Central Harlem (Moss 2013). A third commenter criticizes the rezoning by arguing that “folks just do not seem to have any sense and just seem intent on making every part of this city downright ugly and completely alienating” (Moss 2013).

Another example of the lack of validation and acknowledgement by out-group members of another person’s ERI in Central Harlem is the rechristening of Marcus Garvey Park – named after the black nationalist in 1973 – by realtors and newcomers to the neighborhood (Moss 319). This rechristening is an example of the changing face of the community and with it the entire feel of the neighborhood in which newcomers either try to mix with the existing culture or react violently against it. Jeremiah Moss uses an example of African American drummers who have played their drums every weekend in Marcus Garvey Park since 1969 (319). Their presence in the park alone created a safe haven through tough and dangerous times. That is, until 2008. At this point in time a high-end luxury condo was

built adjacent to the park. New residents of the building – “most of them young white professionals” – started to voice their complaints about the drums. The police were called multiple times and the residents “circulated racist emails advocating violence against the musicians” (Moss 319). In the end, the drummers removed from their traditional spot, a spot they held for almost fifty years as the white people living in the neighboring building rechristened the park with its original nineteenth-century name, Mount Morris Park, though no one quite knew who Morris was (Moss 319). The basic need for these African American drummers – as well as other people in their quest forming an ERI – to belong came under attack and a part of a culture is played down as irritating noise.

What is more, whenever black people state their concerns about the changing face of Harlem the often-heard phrase is that ‘White people were here first.’ In 2015, a first-year student of Columbia University wrote an op-ed article for the *Columbia Spectator* titled “Is Columbia Really Destroying Harlem’s Authenticity?” The article was in favor of the university’s expansion into Harlem, and contended that the authentic culture of Harlem is not African-American, rather, it is ever-evolving and started with Dutch settlers (Zaharia). In his closing paragraph Zaharia disputes that “it is immoral to limit a neighborhood’s natural progress by desperately defending a concept of ‘authenticity’ that is not even properly defined. Why is preserving Harlem’s present identity more important than preserving any of its former identities” (Zaharia)? Not only is the entire piece disingenuous and nauseating to read, the comments underneath it might even be worse and seeping of ignorance, wrongful stereotypes and white privilege. Especially when one reads comments such as “those blacks are statistically guilty of crimes anyway. Flush them out.” “Living in one of the world’s richest cities is not a right it’s a privilege [...] I’m not trivializing the plight of the people who will be displaced but that’s part of living in a free market, capitalist society.” However, one just takes the crown, of course commenting anonymously – as most of the commenters on the article do – this person states that “I am white as the driven snow. I have been priced out of several living areas – waterfront property in Hawaii, the entire city of San Francisco, for example – but who is bitching about that “gentrification?” Though I do not want to do away with the feelings of this person, I do wonder if the bubble of white privilege this person is living in will ever burst. Comparing pursuing greater economic opportunities elsewhere with the criminalization and forcible removal of black people out of their neighborhood is one stretch too far.

There are some sensible voices in the debate that is going on underneath this op-ed article, however. Binijuktya Sen responds that the Italians, Jewish and Black people who lived

and are still living in Harlem are “cultural groups with proud history & heritage. Through food, music, dance, literature and art they contributed to the vibrancy of the community” (Zaharia). And local historian Michael Henry Adams, and writer of the *New York Times* article “The End of Black Harlem” replied that

“Harlem has numerous lovely old buildings reflecting varied cultures, even former synagogues. But throughout history, nothing about Harlem has made it renown, world-wide, apart from black people. One may talk all one likes about other earlier Harlems [*sic*] populated by people who were not black. By contrast, these white Harlems [*sic*] were insignificant. African Americans alone – our culture, drive and creativity, have accorded Harlem a status as fabled and fabulous as that held by Paris or Rome.”

Although Adams is very vocal in his answer on why Harlem’s identity is being destroyed, he also sees the damage that gentrification is doing to the heart and soul of a place he loves so much. In “The End of Black Harlem,” Adams voices his concern about the fate of Harlem’s poorest residents and lists several indicators that show that Harlem’s identity and face is changing, one of these indicators, which I have not yet mentioned in this chapter, is the black church.

According to Michelle Coghill Chatman, the expression “*there’s a church on every corner*” goes for almost every city in which black people dominate the landscape (Chatman 38). Chatman writes in her essay “Talking About Tally’s Corner: Church Elders Reflect on Race, Place, and Removal in Washington, DC” that the black church functions as high culture for religious and spiritual virtue as well as conveying economic and material aspects of Black life (38). She adds that black churches call “to focus on the structural and historical factors that have created vast inequities in housing, health care, education, employment, and justice for black people” and also play an “integral role in the uplift of black people and communities in the United States, serving as a site of spiritual, and political, and economic mobilization” (Chatman 38). But “their days are numbered” according to Michael Henry Adams, talking to DNAinfo New York about black churches (Solis). These powerful cultural institutions have slowly been losing their relevance and Chatman concurs as she states that the impact of black churches is dwindling due to “chronic unemployment, police brutality, family instability, and other challenges” affecting black communities (Chatman 38). Conquering every church there is a take-out restaurant, a grocery store or a large retail store. According to Chatman this “sobering reality” functions as a reminder that

“communities are designed not only by who can afford to live in them, but also by structures and political decisions that determine investments and infrastructure. The creation of poor, racial ghettos in the United States was an intentional effort to suppress the freedom and upward mobility of Blacks and other minoritized groups. Black churches have often stood in the gap where government-sponsored social and economic services were lacking. Now, these institutions, once the social heart of Black communities, are facing tough decisions about their place in a changing community” (Chatman 39).

Several of the churches in Central Harlem had to face this so called ‘tough decision.’ For instance, Child’s Memorial Temple Church of God in Christ – where the famous funeral of Malcolm X was held – had to make place for “a 10-story apartment building,” and Downtown Baptist Church and Second Providence Baptist Church have also made way for residential buildings (Dunlap; Solis; Sandoval and Bekiempis). If it is not the lure of the money to sell out then the onset of tourists might spur on the closure of black churches around Central Harlem. Ask any tourist out and about on the streets of Central Harlem and they will probably have visited a black church to “listen to soulful gospel music,” rendering down specific black identity markers as something they can enjoy in their leisure time as a form of entertainment (Freedman). Though tourist hardly pay any respect for the congregants attending church ceremonies – to actually pray – these churches are, however, in dire need for these tourist’s dollars because “buildings need to be repaired” (Dunlap). With the displacement working-class and low-income black people, these black churches are slowly losing their relevancy in a neighborhood which they helped build up. Black churches created a safe place for many and protected its congregants in order to receive recognition from the outside world as well as securing their own foothold within society.

This act is called the “self-categorization theory,” according to Seaton et al and is part of the ERI performance related to groups (685). The theory basically argues that “a coherent social identity is the basis for group coordination and organization” as social identity is seen as “the cognitive mechanism that makes group behavior possible” (685). This mutual feeling, or shared sense of “us,” provides a degree of solidarity and creates common goals, and in turn is very important as it provides a basis for “shaping the social world as preferred” (Seaton et al. 685). Therefore, the possibility to convert individual behavior into social movements transpires when individuals share an ERI and act upon it. The Black church thus facilitates

and provides opportunities for interactions that “link past and present” and provide a “set of resources, including a location for meaningful associations” (Deener 63). This is also what led to the creation of the #BlackLivesMatter movement and was evident in the Civil Rights Movement. People within these movements shared a strong sense of “us,” it gave them unity and a common direction, and thus ERI and identity forming became a strong basis in trying to shape their preferred social world within the comforts of a neighborhood and within the United States as a country.

Connecting this shared sense of ERI back to Central Harlem, questions can be asked whether or not one is breaking up a collective sense of ERI – which has been formed throughout the years within a group –when a big chunk of African Americans are displaced, in turn crippling their sense of unity and common direction? After all, these displaced individuals have to find their footing in a new place where they do not (yet) belong, a sense of identity is lost and the cycle of searching for validation begins anew. Linking ERI back to the first chapter of this thesis on *Gentrification, Displacement, and Race and Place*, it becomes clear just how detrimental the effects of gentrification are to the people who are displaced. What is more, the people who are able to just barely afford to live in Central Harlem lose ‘allies’ and the ability to influence local and political processes along the way. Furthermore, intensifying the vulnerability of people who are in dire need of affordable housing, employment, and community safety nets, the process of displacement has the ability to eliminate “what has energized” a community and attributed to the initial charm and allure of Harlem (Prince 394).

Conclusion

Has Harlem then completely lost its identity or is it well on-route to losing its identity? Not if it is up to the Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture, located at 135th Street and Malcolm X Boulevard and organizations such as Save Harlem Now. The Schomburg Center is seen as a “one-stop” connection “with the global black experience (Lee). The center has firmly rooted itself within the Harlem community as one of its cultural anchors, documenting the changes going on in Harlem and is a “bearer of the idea that [African-American] history and culture is important” (Lee). The center functions as a place in which community meetings are held for “local politicians, for schoolchildren and eminent researchers” (Lee). The center also harbors many art movements such as murals, which preserve the black identity of the neighborhood, even if some are vanishing in the streets due to gentrification. Murals are a pathway into the working of a community at specific points in time. These murals share with

us an unofficial history of a neighborhood, whether it is in protest or in celebration. Therefore, the fact that the Schomburg center displays these murals is very important to a vastly changing community.

Save Harlem Now is “a membership not-for-profit advocacy organization dedicated to protecting, preserving and celebrating Harlem’s irreplaceable built heritage” according to the mission statement on their website. Save Harlem Now not only advocates to save outstanding structures, the organization also “works to preserve contextual buildings, landscapes and other elements that contribute to define Harlem’s sense of place and special character” (saveharlemnow.org). To enrich “Harlem’s quality of life through continuity with the past while enhancing awareness” and Harlem’s local economy, the organization collaborates with local organizations, neighbors, elected officials, and “other stakeholders to increase landmark protections in Harlem” (saveharlemnow.org). Although they try to educate old and new residents about the treasures located within Harlem, as this chapter also highlighted, it becomes increasingly more difficult to attain these treasures. Yet, organizations such as Save Harlem Now and the Schomburg center for Research in Black Culture try and help in the upkeep of giving a face to – vanished – iconic institutions within Harlem.

This chapter highlighted the meaning of identity, and with it an ethnic and racial identity. It dealt with several markers which are key in forming and retaining an identity and a sense of community feeling. Black neighborhoods within Central Harlem were once a cultural and social hub for black people. Areas such as 125th street were filled with black businesses and cultural institutions such as the Apollo Theater and the Lenox Lounge, which in its heyday hosted many famous black intellectuals and entertainers. People conceive, at any given moment, “a combination of signs, building structures, bodies in public spaces, and other observable qualities that filters their perception of a place through a storied lense” (Deener 47). Some distinct features have fused together to engender a “collective visibility” for Africans Americans in Central Harlem, a group that is able to achieve this form of “collective visibility” becomes intertwined “with the identity of a neighborhood” (Deener 47). However, what this chapter has shown is that slowly but surely the aftermath of gentrification is breaking down several of these distinct features of African American visibility in Central Harlem.

Today, these same neighborhoods are being overrun by a “hip, non-Black urban” populace (Chatman 37). The expansion of development and rejuvenation taking place within these communities captured the eye of white residents coming to these areas. While white and black middle class gentrifiers seem to find new identities in Central Harlem, the people who

are displaced – who vehemently build up and have contributed to the iconic identity of Central Harlem – are losing themselves and their identity due to government led and sponsored gentrification. The cry for cultural preservation seems to fall on deaf ears with the people who push a gentrification narrative and with it countless numbers of people are pushed out of their safe communities leaving to fend for themselves. Moreover, decisions such as those taken by the Landmark Preservation Committee have unprecedented outcomes for iconic neighborhoods such as Central Harlem. These decisions by government institutions seem to chip away at the heart of a black neighborhood and invalidate the importance of historic markers that are essential to the black community living in Central Harlem.

Conclusion

To many the changing face of a neighborhood is ascribed to the notion that communities and neighborhoods are always ‘in flux,’ these neighborhoods are purportedly fluid and part of an organic process that supposedly happens throughout the passage of time. However, this specific narrative falls completely in line with how intricate racial dynamics work in the United States. The process of gentrification, indeed, does not only revitalize upward mobility or the American Dream, it entails the rise of crime, mass incarceration, displacement and so on. Only a thorough analysis encompassing all these dimensions can render the complexity of the social-economic consequences that gentrification has on neighborhoods, local communities and common people.

To offer such a thorough analysis, I have offered the reader a review of the current discourse on gentrification and the displacement that goes hand in hand with it. I have connected the issue of gentrification to broader policies that were once used to keep (African) Americans in their place – such as the War on Drugs – which in turn go hand in hand with the mass incarceration of (colored) citizens of the United States. Lastly, this thesis offered a look into what gentrification can do and is doing to the identity of the people living in these changing neighborhoods. To have an identity is important if the basic need for a human is to just belong. Each chapter separately could not have sufficed to fully account for an explanation on the importance of including a social and cultural viewpoint into the gentrification discourse, but their amalgamated interpretation based on the notion of displacement and identity forming offered a strong theoretical approach.

Yes, Harlem was inhabited by other nationalities before African Americans turned the suburb into their renowned cultural hub. However, these former inhabitants have not been able to leave such a lasting impression as did the African Americans. With iconic representations such as Malcolm X, Zora Neal Hurston, W.E.B. du Bois, Louis Armstrong, Marcus Garvey and Langston Hughes – to just name a few – Black Harlem has left an everlasting imprint on the world’s stage, that is, until gentrification set in. What once seemed as being an unbreakable connection, cracks are beginning to show. While the neighborhoods iconic representation might always hold, what happens to the people who have built up this community and called it their home? The public perception of Central Harlem – as a predominantly black neighborhood – is able to cloak the dramatic shift in demographics taking place between 2000 and 2015. Gentrification might seem as though it is uplifting neighborhoods, it is also pushing economically vulnerable black households who are already

struggling deeper into the margins of society, and especially in black neighborhoods, this fact tends to be overlooked very often. What is more, the displacement of black people will ultimately lead to a decreasing influence and visibility of African American culture in Central Harlem. When there are less and less black people living in Central Harlem, how are these black people going to preserve their vibrant culture and thus helping other black people create a firm ethnic and racial identity?

According to the documentary on the *Changing Face of Harlem* made by Shawn Batey, proponents of gentrification argue that gentrification brings with it cleaner streets, lower crime rates, and other quality of life improvements (Batey). Although this all may hold some truth, the factors listed above are all attributed to the ‘looks’ of a community, not to the heart of a community. This complete neglect of social aspects is like treating an infection without looking into the actual cause, and without searching for the cause of the infection, the infection will never truly be cured. Ergo, policies have to drastically change, they have to change in such a way that all people get equal opportunities in life. Gentrification should not be used as yet another guise to stereotype black people as criminals and least deserving of decent respect and humanity while forwarding the idea of ‘cleaning the streets’ and spiking up rent prices knowing that many of the black residents are not able to foot the bill.

Central Harlem inhabitants also feel the heat: while many are displaced, as the first chapter made clear, one does not have to actively be displaced to feel some degree of displacement from their own community while still living there. Gabyer Guzman states in the short video of *Gentrification in Harlem* that “gentrification is only right if it is for the best of the community and the people that lived here are now being pushed out.” With Denise Brown adding in the same clip that gentrification has been “good and bad,” according to Brown the good aspects of gentrification have been the notion that a lot of “areas have been cleaned up” though “a lot of people have been left out.” The existing literature on the issue of displacement is also divided, luckily the voices of scholars who demand more research in displacement practices is growing. ‘Measuring the invisible’ seems like an impossible task but it is up to us scholars to give a voice to those who have been left voiceless. Especially giving a voice to the people living in black neighborhoods is important because across many disciplines, the experiences of people of color have often been left out of the narrative or have not been seen as a “central inquiry site” (Hunter and Robinson 18). But when these voices have been heard, findings typically show “the detrimental impact of flawed policies, large-scale economic shifts, and segregation” (Hunter and Robinson 32). The impact on Central Harlem is clear as data taken out of the New York City Neighborhood Data Profiles, MN10

shows us. With a decline of 23.1 percent of black inhabitants between the years of 2000 and 2015, these figures paint a stark picture of who benefits from gentrification and who does not. Although there can be given many factors as to why the number of black inhabitants is declining, at the end of the line it means that these people are shut out of their neighborhoods due to gentrification and war on drug practices who find their common ground in the displacement of people.

This neglect of African American voices does not seem to be something new however. While gentrification as a practice has been around for some fifty years now, the displacement of African Americans has been around for decades. Even when African Americans are trying to advance their own cause they are “displaced, denied, prohibited, attacked, and even robbed by formal and informal policies through institutions that they have not controlled” (Maurrasse 17). Diversifying a neighborhood through gentrification might seem as a good thing to the pro-gentrification camp, eliminating the number of black people within said neighborhood also strips them of their political voice. Without the ability to form a solid voting bloc, black people are not able to vote what is in the best interest of their own community. People outside of the African American communities are slowly getting the upper hand thus having the ability to make far fetching decisions. The creation of stereotypes and the inability for others to understand one’s identity then becomes a very dangerous practice. Moreover, lacking this political power only keeps in place the unjust practices that are hailed upon black people through the so-called war on drugs. This war has effectively targeted – and is still targeting – black people in the United States as the drug commonly associated with this demographic – crack – received far harsher punishments. Consequently, paving the way for racist stereotyping and addicting Americans to racist ideology (Kendi 435). A person should get a fair chance after having done his or her time. However, in the United States, and especially for black people, once an individual has entered ‘the system’ it is very hard to get out of this vicious cycle he or she now finds themselves in.

The practice of stereotyping a certain group of people can also hinder scholars in doing their work. Especially in the gentrification debate, scholars who forward the notion that gentrification has a positive effect on crime need to take into account the history of how specific groups of people are (unjustly) overrepresented in the prison system and how various acts of crime have evolved in said neighborhoods. A scholar has to step into the intricate waters of racism, this will not be easy but to be able to create clarity and a complete picture of racial bias within the American system and its practices, this needs to be done, and these practices should be exposed for what they really are. This is the only way to move forward. In

addition, the social factor has to be taken into account, by only looking at the economic gains a community or a neighborhood receives will sidestep any form of injustice that falls on the people who find themselves displaced out of their community. There is no social system set in place to help people who fall through the cracks, to help them get back up on their feet again. Throwing young people in prison for minor offenses will not help them learn how to ‘better’ their lives, go back to school or find a job to sustain them for the rest of their lives. Invalidating peoples ethnic and racial identity will not help them to create a stable foundation from which to build on. Taking people out of their safe spaces and displacing them to amenities deprived communities will not help them to fulfill their “American Dream” or give them the ability to ‘climb up the social ladder.’

What the aftermath of gentrification seems to do is to destroy the social contract for the black people living in Central Harlem. Though there are several actors who try to preserve what Harlem once meant to black people, it is becoming ever more important to become aware of what gentrification is doing to these neighborhoods. A call has to go out about the importance of cultural preservation within these communities, not only does the culture of the people who have given the neighborhood its fame need to be preserved, economically vulnerable minorities should also have the possibility to be able to stay put in their neighborhoods. There are many other factors than ‘only’ gentrification doing its detrimental work in these neighborhoods. Not only does gentrification keep black people ‘in their place,’ all of the silent bystanders who buy into the narrative that the gentrification debate is pushing are guilty as well. Gentrification and the war on drugs are just one side of the coin of the oppression black people still find themselves in, and laying these practices bare is what needs to happen in this day and age.

Michael Henry Adams states in his essay “The End of Black Harlem” that the economy and political system in the United States has been “stacked against” black Americans. The process of gentrification seems to be a tool within this system to work against the interest of black Americans. As I have shown in the first chapter of this thesis, although there is a lot of discourse to be found on gentrification, omitting the social context and social cohesion within a community is very dangerous, especially for economically vulnerable black people, and creates an incomplete body of research which in turn can function as a tool to allow for racism within the system. Moreover, many of the research that is available on the notion of gentrification cements its findings on figures dating from before 2008, at this time the dramatic demographic shifts in the racial make-up of many communities was not yet visible. The census of 2020 will be able to give a clearer picture on the true effects of

gentrification and the displacement of people. This census becomes even more important when one keeps in mind the current political climate the United States now find themselves in. Gentrification is the sum of many different parts, economic aspects is just one part, it is up to scholars to fill in the other parts – social, cultural, gender, to just name a few – that are just as important but tend to be overlooked most of the time.

Methodologically this thesis has positioned itself at the crossroad of several fields, including social, cultural and political history. Although this thesis has broadly researched the notion of gentrification and its effects on Central Harlem, it is not without its limitations. To be able to paint a clear picture on what gentrification does to black neighborhoods, future research should focus on comparative analysis of predominantly black neighborhoods across the United States. Such analysis may produce a firm theoretical framework from which other scholars can help uphold social cohesion within black communities and work against the racist practices which are still prevalent in the United States. Though there are still many factors that can be researched within a community that link to gentrification, I specifically chose to highlight displacement, crime and identity formation. Further research is also needed to explore and highlight gender relations and how they have been sculpted by gentrification. I would like to believe I have taken my responsibility in filling a part of the gap that exists within the gentrification debate.

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