CULTURE, CAPITAL AND COMMUNITY: GENTRIFICATION AND REDEVELOPMENT IN A ST. LOUIS NEIGHBORHOOD

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ABSTRACT

Gentrification is described loosely as the return of the middle class to poor and working-class urban neighborhoods, resulting in social and cultural changes to the surrounding community. The process of gentrification is tied to both capital (economic redevelopment) and culture (social life), with localized processes related to the way that residents, consumers, business owners and civic leaders negotiate the course of change. A study tracking several decades of change in one central St. Louis neighborhood reveals that even in one small locale gentrification may take multiple, simultaneous forms. The study critiques the divergent theses of “emancipatory” and “revanchist” gentrification, suggesting that the a “both/and” approach to evaluating the costs and benefits of redevelopment. It also reveals the role that religious and moral visions of urban living play in the return of middle-class populations. Finally, the research examines the forces of inclusion and exclusion created by the branding of neighborhoods to attract affluent consumer populations, often drawn from the White middle class. In sum, both cultural and economic redevelopment are shown to operate along lines of class and race, while offering a mixed bag of costs and benefits to the community at large. Gentrification involves the revitalization of spaces and the creation of places via a highly local and nuanced process. The research itself consists of a neighborhood ethnography accompanied by documentary photography of the neighborhood and local people.