Carving Up Community

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Abstract

Gentrification presents a political problem for cities. Practicing democracy requires a commitment to and preservation of meaningful public space so as to support community voice. Democracy as a political institution requires the ability for diverse publics to gather and encounter one another in order to flourish. Gentrification threatens democratic practices by withering away of public space, and its effects particularly impact communities of color. Gentrification's negative spatial effects reduce the cumulative impact of voices of communities, reduce the diversity and availability of public space, and results in a thinner concept of urban community.

Keywords: gentrification; diversity; public space; democracy; racism; voice

1. Introduction

Practicing democracy requires a commitment to and preservation of meaningful public space. While public assembly predates democracy's emergence, democracy as a political institution requires the ability for diverse publics to gather and encounter one another in order to flourish. Gentrification[1] is a singular threat to the continued health of democracy, in part because of its withering away of public space and, in particular, the ways in which it targets communities of color. While other scholars have examined gentrification's impacts on communities as a question of resource justice[2], here I want to focus on the way in which gentrification changes the perception and use of public space as it affects the emergence and impact of community voice. My concern for the use of space has a family relationship to the concept of occupancy rights (Stilz 2013), particularly as incorporated into gentrification critiques based on unjust resource allocation (Huber and Wolkenstein 2018, Kohn 2016). But my particular focus on voice follows Bart van Leeuwen (2020) in framing the justice issues of gentrification through their impacts on community recognition and respect. Because gentrified communities don't form accidentally but out of longstanding practices of *de jure* racism like redlining (Rothstein 2017), I contend that gentrification represents a significant diminishment of the vitality and vibrancy of public space, and thus dilutes already marginalized

[1] The examples and analysis in this paper are focused on gentrification as it occurs in the United States. Gentrification is seen elsewhere in the world, particularly in Europe, as other scholars have demonstrated (Schafran 2014). Scholars debate the extent to which gentrification applies to the Global South (Ghertner 2015).

[2] See Putnam (2021) and Brake (2019) for representative recent examples.

community voices. Taking the idea of 'community' seriously as a site of public values, activity, and orientation requires cities that foster a diversity of communities within their boundaries as a contribution to better and fuller political debate and policy-setting. The weakening or elimination of public space, including its transitory or informal uses, mutes the public voice for these communities and thus suggests that cities value only a narrow and homogeneous model of community.

2. Public Space and Democratic Practices

Public space and assembly are crucial for the kind of public deliberation that grounds democracies. While we often focus on formal public assembly, here I stress the value of less formal and more ephemeral public encounters, in particular, the specific value of people from different backgrounds sharing public space. This line of thinking was first developed by Jürgen Habermas (1991), describing the emergence of informal spheres of engagement as spaces of collective encounter and lower-stakes communication that foment political creativity and rebellion. But it has older roots; Melissa Lane locates cosmopolitanism as an ancient political virtue less in formal disputes and more in the daily interaction of migrants in crowded Greek city-states (2016, 66 - 68). More recently, Margaret Kohn describes the public goods of the city, including its public spaces, as "common-wealth, a concentration of value created by past generations and current residents" (2016, 2). Each of these accounts are descriptions of the political value of urban public space as a site of deliberation that functions in part due to encounters with diverse communities.

Public space can also offer more quotidian community benefits. Bart van Leeuvwen conceives of public space as "normative. . .structured by different patterns of recognition, namely care, respect, and esteem, and that is embodied both by physical structures, institutions and intersubjective relations between individuals and groups" (2020, 170). We can design, build, and maintain spaces so that they welcome and support individual and group recognition and exchange. Jane Jacobs illustrates this at the mundane level of sidewalks, observing that well- and frequently-used sidewalks in cities, and the presence of observant neighbors, are part of what makes cities safe and vital. Jacobs' Greenwich Village neighbors are strangers to each other, but function as spirited citizens in their neighborhood because of a sense of publicity. People are not merely on the streets but share a basic sense of ownership of and responsibility towards the neighborhood, even if and as they behave in diverse and divergent ways in the neighborhood. In other words, the mere physical occupancy or emptiness of streets and buildings is itself insufficient for a neighborhood to be functional if its residents do not have any sense of shared informal ownership or obligation towards one another. As she states, "[p]eople must take a modicum of public responsibility for each other even if they have no ties to each other. This is a lesson nobody learns by being told. It is learned from the experience of having other people without ties of kinship or close friendship or formal responsibility to you take a modicum of public responsibility for you" (1992, 82). Jacobs' city neighbors are not friends; they remain strangers to one another in crucial ways, they diverge in many public practices and values, and yet they fulfill basic obligations of trust and intimacy. Van Leeuwen reminds us social attachment isn't just on the individual level but on the group level; I can recognize the value of shared public goods not just for myself or some vague public, but "for the social group involved" (2020, 174). We see this public recognition and public responsibility observed and maintained on Jacobs' sidewalks. Public recognition and respect is an ongoing, but low-stakes, demand of us, and it is one that gentrification attenuates.

3. Gentrification's Origins and Operations

There are many available definitions of gentrification; the term was first coined in 1964 (Glass). At its core, the term describes a relatively rapid and significant change in neighborhood population from lower- to higher-income residents (Clark 2005, 25). As connoted by the root of the term ("gentry"), gentrification was originally understood mostly through a lens of economic class. But from this narrow definition, there are wide divides in scholarship on gentrification. It can be understood as a consumer-driven phenomenon as an inevitable consequence of market economics at work (Cortright 2019, Jager 2013), which conceives gentrification to be the logical result of relatively free individual economic choices. Alternatively, "production side" theorists argue that gentrification's processes are seeded through the incentives of neoliberal capitalism (e.g., investment firms' capacity to buy up parcels of under-resourced properties and renovate them for significantly higher rents), and emphasize the role of government policies and uneven development between neighborhoods in seeding the conditions that make gentrification a live option, such as rent gaps (Smith 1979, Hackworth and Smith 2001, Smith 1987, Hammel 1999). The dynamics of gentrification have shifted over time (Lees 2000) and in location (Huber and Wolkenstein 2018, 380).

Here, I follow the "production side" theorists generally, and specifically, I focus on the ways in which gentrification in the US is driven not just by class dynamics but race dynamics. Gentrifying neighborhoods in the US so often were primarily working-class immigrant neighborhoods, or majority black neighborhoods during the Great Migration, before becoming mostly white neighborhoods. Richard Rothstein deems racial segregation in the US as *de jure*—caused by law and policy—and lays out the panoply of laws that existed throughout the 20th century that created and sustained racially segregated neighborhoods (2017). To list just some of these policies, segregated New Deal public housing, publicly financed housing for WWII defense workers available only to white families, high-rise public housing to concentrate communities of color in cities, segregated and redlined post-war suburbs subsidized by the FHA, redlining residential neighborhoods from the 1910s through the 1960s, the limiting of FHA mortgages to "desirable" neighborhoods that were segregated for white families, the clustering of industrial and commercial facilities in majority-minority neighborhoods (which depresses the value of the available housing stock), the limiting of VA mortgages to majority-white suburbs, are just the more obvious policy mechanisms that functioned to create and perpetuate racial segregation in US cities (2017, 20–71).

Segregation has many direct and indirect harms. Most directly, segregation dramatically limits families of color's ability to accumulate generational wealth by limiting how much mortgage equity communities of color can accumulate and transfer. But the effects aren't merely financial; as Tommie Shelby (2016) points out, neighborhoods of color are also and not coincidentally disadvantaged by other public structures (availability of work, funding of neighborhood schools, and other public services [2016, 40]). In the United States, lower property values result in lower public investment and availability of public goods and amenities. Finally, there are clear health effects due to the concentration of industrial and commercial properties in communities of color. To take one example, the majority-minority neighborhood of Globeville/Swansea in Denver, which has a high concentration of industrial and commercial buildings and traffic, has the highest rate of childhood asthma in all of Denver, significantly higher rates of children visiting the ER for asthma than Denver overall, and is seeing the rate of childhood asthma rise much more sharply than other Denver neighborhoods (ATTOM 2018). Longstanding government neglect primes these neighborhoods for gentrification and has already isolated communities of color from economic and political en-

gagement. In other words, racial segregation is no accident, and it perpetuates significant and systematic dis- or under-investment in communities of color that has ripple effects beyond the directly economic.

Even this resource-focused account of the roots and effects of residential segregation ignores the value of community for its inhabitants. What Tommie Shelby describes as the "medical model" of examining residential segregation minimizes the affirmative values these communities practice. Black people may still prefer living in black neighborhoods "to maintain long-standing community ties, to sustain black institutions and cultural practices, and to ensure access to establishments that serve black needs" (2016, 71). Kohn reminds us that original residents develop an attachment to their neighborhoods and neighbors, and build up informal support networks and community practices to sustain and support themselves (2014, 83).

Just as many public and financial policies systematically undervalue neighborhoods in which people of color live, those same neighborhoods benefit, once gentrifying, from a wide variety of public and financial policies. "Gentrification. . reorient[s] the purpose of cities away from being spaces that provide for the poor and middle classes and towards being spaces that generate capital for the rich" (Moskowitz 2018, 22). This has concrete instantiations: state-subsidized forgivable loans for areas of gentrification do not go to heritage residents of the neighborhood to improve their property, but to companies to develop condos (Moskowitz 2018, 95). State-subsidized tourist entities like sports stadiums come at the cost of support of public services like schools, creating a ratcheting effect on educational inequity. "Closed loop" models of public transit emerge that serve only a gentrified urban core (Moskowitz 2018, 86). Public money gets disproportionately directed to previously neglected neighborhoods once those neighborhoods are populated with affluent white people. Lifestyle benefits—improved mass transit, publicly subsidized downtown sports arenas, improved recreation centers, and libraries—are created or improved for the affluent folks who now live there.

4. Gentrification's Erasure of Public Spaces

I want to sketch at least three different ways in which gentrification serves to carve up or wither away community space. First, *communities as capital are not communities at all.* Gentrification covers its own tracks by using an entirely economic language to describe and assess the vitality and viability of communities, and reframes gentrifying choices as individual only.[3] The immediate and necessary response to this is for people to stop thinking of social ties and connections (which often cannot be directly economically measured) as relevant at all in policy decisions about how we incentivize or disincentivize tax dollars towards communities. As Moskowitz puts it, people who move into gentrifying or gentrified areas justify their choices through individual, cost-benefit language, framing their choice as one of lifestyle (2018, 141–142). This language extends to public goods like education. The 2013 takeover of Chicago Public Schools (CPS) included district references to a "portfolio of options" to describe a choice process imposed upon an unhappy community (Ewing 2018, 23). The marketplace language suggests infinite choice, but the reality is that the choice is generally available only to affluent, usually white families. Seeing publicly occupied and shared space exclusively in terms of its economic value to be exploited is to devalue other aspects of city life and existence. This capitalization of community is invariably a thinning out of diverse ways of

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[3] And to be clear, even defenses of gentrification as not destructive for communities of color still make this case entirely through economic language and framing. See for instance Cortright 2019.

life, contrary to Kohn's contention that cities are "vibrant and vital because [they] are shared with other people" (2014, 12).

City life is devalued in part because dense housing is hollowed out from within. Expensive urban real estate is increasingly purchased as tax write-offs or investments for absentee owners (Badger 2017). Apps like AirBnB or VRBO turn what had been busy urban apartment buildings into hotels without services. A $21 million lawsuit against a New York realty firm makes this manifest; a brokerage firm illegally rented out apartments in 35 buildings in Manhattan, "including an entire building in East Harlem" (Ferré-Sadurni 2019). But these *ad hoc* hotels do not include the sort of amenities that proper hotels provide as a way of ensuring communal safety, such as outdoor lights or doorkeepers. Less directly, some of the ways of creating density in gentrifying communities, like slot townhomes (a longer, narrower lot filled front to back with townhomes), result in fewer possible windows and doors on the street and no front stoops or steps on which neighbors would loiter. The absence of these features makes it less possible to have the sort of public ownership of space that Jacobs describes and the kind of social recognition for which van Leeuwen advocates.

Second, carving up happens literally, in the sense that *previously public spaces are privatized*.[4] Jane Jacobs' praise of city sidewalks speaks to the value of public spaces; "they bring together who do not know each other in an intimate, private social fashion and in most cases do not care to know each other in that fashion" (1992, 55). This description suits urban public spaces like parks. Because cities are looking for income opportunities, monetizing public parks for events and festivals that require tickets and passes, or transferring public school buildings to sometimes profit-seeking charter businesses, work to deprive cities of the kind of informal but lively diverse use of space that was previously a given. Gentrification is closely associated with this sort of repurposing of public space for private, income-producing purposes. In her account of gentrification and urban justice, Margaret Kohn describes the legal incentives that produce the oxymoronically named "privately owned public spaces" (2016, 146). For example, New York City passed statutes that allowed real estate developers to build taller buildings than zoning limits allowed as long as they also created and maintained public gathering spaces therein, but the features of these spaces make it clear that they are not substantively public. They can be located in ways that are less accessible or visible from the streets and can be lit or designed to be useful only for residents. These are popular strategies, cropping up in parks in Atlanta (Cole and Immergluck 2022, 141) and Dublin (Anguelovski et al 2022, 207). These "public" spaces can also be use-restricted for revenue generation that primarily benefits their private owners, not the city, and result in placing the park off limits to all but a paying public. Moskowitz describes New York's Union Square as "often blocked off by BID [Business Improvement District]-sponsored barricades, its grassy areas protected with BID-approved netting. . .thanks to the BID, Union Square is less dirty than it once was, but it's also no longer a public space in any true sense" (Moskowitz 2018, 171). Ray Oldenburg's ode to "third spaces" of public community (1999), while in theory highlighting Habermasian public gathering spaces, focuses most of its attention on commercial spaces like coffee houses and bookstores that prioritize patrons with ability to pay; these are not fully free spaces.

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[4] This practice has a historic precedent. As Kevin Kruse describes in his history of Atlanta after *Brown v. Board*, the "city too busy to hate" responded to official desegregation orders by closing up or neglecting public facilities used primarily by black people (pools, parks, golf courses, transportation, schools) while white Atlantans created lavishly funded private or quasi-private versions of these utilities for themselves (2005, 105–130, 240). This practice was widespread throughout the Jim Crow South.

Public space can be privatized informally as well as formally. As Isabella Wilkerson describes it, public spaces are "test tubes of caste interaction" because they bring together people from diverse backgrounds for sharing of space, and gentrification too often reveals sharp disparities in who feels a right to assert entitlement to public space (2020, 293). Margaret Kohn reminds us of the value of the unexpected "interstices" of cities: streets, impromptu visual displays, public parks, and libraries that welcome a variety of uses and patrons (2016, 6). These "in-between" places, as she describes them, can be zones of contention and struggle (*ibid*). Many of the instances of racist harassment that became publicized through the #livingwhileblack threads on Twitter are about white people asserting "proper" uses of public space against longstanding practices of long-time residents. For instance, a white woman called Oakland police on some folks who were barbecuing in Lake Merritt Park because they were barbecuing in a section where grills are not allowed (but in which residents had grilled for years without interference).[5] Disputes over suddenly privatized access to public soccer fields in the Mission district in San Francisco and the Columbia Heights neighborhood in Washington DC were a fraught and visible symbol of the ways in which neoliberal logic created visceral clashes over who had access to "free" park space (Kohn 2014, 156-159; Kukla 2021, 111). New systems, which required credit card deposits for reserving fields through the park department's online system, while ostensibly neutral, served to displace the neighborhood children's ability to play pickup games after school and favored adults with disposable incomes, the time and ability to navigate websites, and credit cards.

Interstitial places can be sites of contention because informal conflicts are about how neighbors explicitly or implicitly allow space to be used, what uses have social legitimacy, and which uses are deemed deviant. Jane Jacobs[6] reminds us that parks get used for reasons that far surpass their originally intended uses; "[p]laces to wash bikes. . .dig in the ground, places to build ramshackle wigwams and huts out of old lumber, are activities usually crowded out of cities. The Puerto Ricans who come to our cities today have no place to roast pigs outdoors unless they can find a private yard for the purpose, but outdoor pig roasts and the parties that follow can be as much fun as the Italian street festivals many city dwellers have learned to love" (Jacobs 1992, 110).[7] What counts as a public space can be expansive; Quill Kukla's analysis of gentrification in one Washington DC neighborhood reminds us that alleys, along with porches and sidewalks, can be public gathering sites for long-term residents before they become surveilled and policed by gentrifiers (2021, 105). Gentrifiers acting to restrict or surveil public space uses to a narrow band of social acceptability is an insidious way in which community is weakened; only some people have legitimate claims to

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[5] There are many other available examples, but just to illustrate the aggressive reclaiming of public space, "Permit Patty" called the police on an 8-year-old girl selling water without a permit, but her initial complaint was that the child was too loud on the sidewalk while she worked from home with her window open. See https://www.theguardian.com/us-news/2018/jun/25/permit-patty-eight-year-old-selling-water-san-francisco-video.

[6] Some recent critics, particularly Peter Moskowitz, criticize Jacobs' theory as enabling gentrification, in particular due to her advocacy of what she calls "unslumming." I think the criticism is misplaced, as Jacobs clearly critiques or anticipates what we now see as dangers of gentrification (147, 207, 249). But regardless, the criticism does not bear on the concepts of community as I describe them here.

[7] Indeed, the Oakland PD did not arrest or issue citations to anyone, and the community sponsored a "BBQing While Black" festival in Merritt Park two weeks later as a response to the angry gentrifier. https://thegrapevine.theroot.com/oakland-holds-massive-bbqingwhileblack-festival-at-lak-1826201280?/setsession

public space.[8] "Appropriate" uses can be apparently similar, but differently valued depending upon the community doing the use. Sharon Meagher and Quill Kukla both cite instances of behavior (public drinking and eating, idle gathering) that looks innocuous to gentrifiers when done in the acceptable framework (expensive restaurant patios or street tables) but becomes threatening and disorderly when occurring on a porch or sidewalk absent QR code menus and craft beer (Meagher 2007, 17; Kukla 2021, 105–106). These collisions matter because they serve as an assertion of power and exclusion. Valli reminds us that the fact that these encounters occur in places longtime residents "(formerly) experienced as 'home' is perceived as a threat. . .to the very identification of that place *as* 'home' " (2016, 1195). While brief, these informal collisions can be disorienting and alienating for longtime community members.

Informal carving up also occurs because of how space is re-allocated in gentrification, both within gentrified neighborhoods and for the displaced longtime residents. Many scholars have described the ways in which longtime residents can be dispersed across metropolitan areas when they become priced out of their longtime neighborhood, and this brings with it communal costs. In the US, the suburban poverty rate has risen at a faster rate than the urban poverty rate since 2000 (Moskowitz 2018, 8); I suspect part of this is due to the effects of 21st-century gentrification and the dispersal of neighbors. In some respects, it is easier to live on a lower income in a city than in a suburb: public transit, public space, and public services are often located near, if not in, the neighborhoods most at risk of gentrification, making it easier to, for instance, not own a car. Increasing numbers of city poor moving into suburbs out of financial necessity when cities are gentrified highlight this problem. Suburbs are not built for common space and public use; they were built as retreats from more public cities. They typically have quite limited public transit options. Additionally, those who leave gentrifying neighborhoods lose their neighbors as well as previously accessible services. Many commentators rightly observe that the loss of informal support neighborly networks for child and elder care, which has philosophical value for Jacobs, are vitally important for long-term residents in gentrifying neighborhoods (see Kohn 2014, 34; Huber and Wolkenstein 2018, 385; Putnam 2021, 170). The loss of this informal support for displaced residents can have significant impacts, making it difficult for residents to find and hold employment, or provide care for their families.

Finally, the carving up happens procedurally. *Gentrification minimizes or silences opportunities for diverse community voice* as neighborhoods change. Procedures for seeking, recording, and utilizing community input are put in place late, poorly advertised, and not done iteratively. Those attending one public forum out of several about the re-zoning of their building or a school takeover have no idea what other community members think of this. They may be unable to attend other forums due to their work or family obligations; meeting notes may only be posted on complicated-to-navigate city websites, which would be unavailable for those who do not have internet access at home; translators may not be available for those who need them. Meetings are scheduled at locations far from the community members' homes, at times inconvenient for work or without necessary supports like childcare for low-income attendees. The effect of this is that any resulting policy decisions about one's community look like a *fait accompli* because community voice is dispersed and muted.

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[8] Homeowners' Associations (HOAs), common in both suburbs and gentrifying 'infill' neighborhoods, do not represent an improvement on this practice, despite their outwardly democratic trappings. The time commitment of the boards can mean that inexperienced members can use them to, as Spencer MacCallum tartly phrases it, "politicize[] daily life" (2005, 419).

At their most extreme, bureaucratic structures that mute community voice can approach the Kafkaesque. Kohn recounts Chicago residents of Section 8 housing following laws that supported residents' councils to participate in deliberation. Residents used these councils to protest the ways in which the transformation of formerly dilapidated public housing was going to result in less available low-income housing and to disperse the neighborhood. While the threat of legal penalties led to a plan by the housing authority and residents to meet residents' needs, "then Congress changed the law, which allowed the [Chicago Housing Authority] to permanently decrease the supply of housing" (2014, 83). Similarly, a New York judge invalidated the protestors' claims to space in the 2011 Occupy New York protests (in which gentrification was a prime target of protesters' anger) as illegitimate "camping," while recognizing that the rules he used to justify the removal were adopted *after* the protests began (2014, 146). In both cases, the substantial effort required to expend community political voice was only momentarily recognized before a governmental end-run erased it.

This isn't a new tactic; Jacobs quotes one elected official in New York acknowledging the trivializing of community voice in 1961. Decisions are made in executive session shortly before the public hearings, which are then hosted "with complete courtesy and with deaf ears" (Jacobs 1992, 406); a public show of democracy is pure political fiction. More recently, Ewing's account of public resistance to CPS's attempted takeover of Chicago's South Side schools documents pervasive public silencing (2018, 41–42). Indeed, several parents at public meetings would question whether or not their comments were even recorded or if the city was listening, or emphasize that their comments were on the record. The fact that multiple parents make versions of this claim indicates the deep level of skepticism community members have that the public officers are working from any sense of obligation to the diverse public they serve (Ewing 2018, 114). There is a dual effect of this procedural community silencing; first, the community loses its concrete input on policies that most directly affect it, and second, this kind of dismissal can lead to a general destructive apathy about political engagement. As one longtime resident of a gentrifying neighborhood sums up, "I don't mean anything, my likes and what I think don't have a place at the table here anymore, even if I've been here when it was so shitty and tried to make something of it" (Valli 2016, 1204).

5. Gentrification's Damages to Democracy

This resident's observation describes the most basic harm gentrification has on democracy. Its erosion of public space sends a clear message to neighborhoods that its space is not for neighbors to govern, but for the city to manage, and that the city's interest and the neighbors' interests are opposed. Public space is valuable to a community in part and especially because its use is indeterminate, indeed sometimes chaotic. Margaret Kohn reminds us that the lack of control of public space itself represents the value and existence of popular voices, as opposed to governmental ones (2014, 136). Gentrification functions to replace this indeterminacy with the ostensibly smooth and efficient functions of capital, but its effects are unequal; some voices and uses of space get privileged and prioritized at the exclusion of others. The authority of investors is taken for granted such that it is observed even when the investors themselves are absent. Quill Kukla describes protests against gentrifying developers that take place "outside empty, small, regional offices of international developers. . .companies that have, literally, no meaningful *location*—no embodied existence" (2021, 88). Even physically absent voices can exert outsized pressure; the investments do the speaking for the remote developers.

By obvious extension, the longtime neighbors themselves are also disrespected and silenced; their voices do not count to the larger community. Van Leeuwen rightly observes that the kind of neighborhood neglect that facilitates gentrification is an "*intersubjective* expression of a lack of concern by city government," and "dehumanizing" (2020, 180). Sometimes, the lack of concern is expressed explicitly rather than implicitly. Most baldly, one real estate developer casually and callously describes a historic neighborhood of New York as a "blank canvas" for their gentrifying efforts (qtd. in Valli 2016, 1191). Residents are literally erased from this neighborhood. A newcomer to a gentrifying DC neighborhood complains about having to "step over" unhoused people who've long occupied the neighborhood; Quill Kukla acerbically suspects that gentrifiers never contemplate "'step[ping] over' the middle-class White people who often lie in the sun in the [neighborhood's] plaza" (2021, 108). Longtime residents register this erasure. A resident of Chicago's Cabrini-Green values his neighborhood and playground as "home. . .and it's precious from right here (pointing to the heart)" and sees his forced relocation from a closed Cabrini-Green as a loss of community and familiarity (Kohn 2014, 65). As Ewing phrases it when writing about Chicago schools, "[a] fight for a school is never just about a school. . . [W]hether you're in Detroit or Austin or Louisiana or Chicago, you want to feel that your school is your school. That you have some say in the matter, that your voice can make a difference. . .*You want to feel like a citizen*" (Ewing 2018, 47, emphasis added). The fact that this activist resident describes citizenship as an aspiration, if not a simulation, illustrates her sense of whose voices count in her city. Ewing documents at least one case in which Chicago neighbors successfully fought the city, but this was in part due to a neighbor-organized hunger strike, the extremity of which speaks to both the importance of schools for neighborhood identity and the degree of anger towards a callous city government. Even a successful protest against a school takeover comes with a high cost for its protestors and reveals a fundamental alienation from and antagonism to a supposedly representative government. While Lance Freeman reminds us that some longtime residents appreciate the improvement in amenities that come with gentrification (2006, 66–71, 98–106), the residents still experience alienation in their neighborhoods. Chiara Valli quotes one longtime resident describing how she self-surveils and self-silences as she walks around her gentrifying neighborhood. "[Y]ou feel different from how you felt before. You become more aware of yourself, you watch how you behave and how you speak, not to fulfill a stereotype" (2016, 1202). This sort of communal alienation and hostility is destructive for democratic rule; cities can not effectively represent their communities if significant portions of their communities see themselves as alienated from their neighbors and their city.

6. Restoring Voices by Respecting Community

Margaret Kohn provides the principle for thinking about why the privatization of community should be addressed through practice and policy; privatized community perpetuates a falsely zero-sum understanding of property. She argues for the paradigm shift of recognizing that property is "naturally social," which implies that providing for and supporting public goods and public spaces is a defense of the common rather than an unfair taking from another's acquisition (2014, 18). Since federal and state action and funding led to residential and commercial neglect in some neighborhoods, federal and state policies can provide redress to make it easier for longtime residents to buy housing (so

they are not trapped in rent cycles of gentrification) or to support local commercial tenants.[9] There are existing federal and nonprofit programs that provide assistance and funds for those who receive rental assistance to make down payments for home purchases (Rothstein and Rothstein 2023, 68).

Responsibility for remedies should also extend to the businesses that profited from the predatory lending and contract leasing that drove some of the gentrification. Richard Rothstein and Leah Rothstein's *Just Action* argues that since some of the US's biggest real estate lenders have profited handsomely from past redlining (and have publicly acknowledged their responsibility), they should respond more than symbolically by, for instance, diverting a small fraction of agents' commissions to funds that could work to support black home ownership (2023, 209). Licensing organizations for real estate agencies and credit reporting agencies could also change their standards so as to make future discrimination in mortgage approval less likely. The Rothsteins rightly note that not everyone wants to own a home, and there are ways that public housing and rental housing could be made more sustainable and appealing for long-term residents of a neighborhood and also more resistant to gentrification pressures. Francesca Mari's recent profile of Vienna's "social housing" (2023) illustrates a model of public investment for neighborhoods that are targets for gentrification that does not require its residents to invest in mortgages and to commit to ownership. Inclusionary zoning and rent control policies can also make it easier for longtime residents to stay in neighborhoods and avoid displacement. Additionally, the kinds of public disinvestment present in communities that become targets for gentrification (under-resourced public parks, schools, recreation centers, libraries) should be a priority for federal, state, and local rectification. Tax dollars should follow need rather than property values. To that end, early gentrifiers often benefited from getting houses and blocks designated as historic, which made available federal funds for maintenance and improvement. These gentrifiers had the social capital to take advantage of these programs—postgraduate education and awareness of political processes—which means that these funds are often a form of indirect federal subsidy for the already privileged (Freeman 2006, 41). Historic designation policies could be revised so that they benefit the historic residents of neighborhoods and not just the physical buildings. The practice of public-private partnerships in city renovation should be discontinued, as its benefits flow disproportionately to the private investors, and it results in sham or disingenuous use of public space.[10]

But in addition to formal responses, there are informal ways in which communities at risk of or experiencing gentrification can resist and respond by using their voices. In addition to conventional means (public protests or assembly), longtime neighbors can simply, visibly, and collectively assert their presence. Melissa García-Laarca and Aaron Vansintjan (2022) describe ways in which long-term members of a gentrifying Montréal neighborhood visibly claim space (physically and aurally) by "hang[ing] out on their balconies, sidewalks and in public parks, where they make connections with other residents who share food with them. . . [one] elderly resident began a guerilla community garden behind her apartment, which led to connections and neighborhood meetings in the garden" (2023, 196). These are gentler versions of what Kohn refers to as "expressive outlaws," or visibly and publicly breaking the law for the persuasive purpose of demonstrating the injustice of

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[9] These were policy *choices*, Bart van Leeuwen reminds us (2020, 185). As governments made choices to commodify housing and prioritize capital accumulation, they can make different choices to prioritize community flourishing and recognition.

[10] Uberoy and Collins (2023) provide a vivid illustration of how lopsided these partnerships are in New York City real estate. They calculate that developers have gained roughly $10 billion for 20 million additional residential square feet, while providing 3.8 million square feet of "public" spaces that are often gated or fenced off, or otherwise maintained for inhospitality to an actual public.

the law (2014, 52). The fact that expressive outlaws can work in such pro-social and benign fashions as creating a community garden or hosting a block party (see fig. 3 in Valli 2016, 1205) demonstrates how appealing, accessible, and persuasive some forms of informal resistance can be.

7. Conclusion

"Public space—the parks, plazas, schools, and promenades—are sites of low-level conflict, but they are also places where we imagine ourselves as connected to one another" (Kohn 2014, 173). At their core, cities are spaces in common, and Kohn reminds us that common space gives us the possibility for connection, even in conflict. Gentrification, particularly in the US, serves to divide and weaken these possibilities by limiting and minimizing shared public space and by prioritizing the use and claim of public space to those with capital. Losing opportunities for inhabiting shared space is a loss for shared governance and should be resisted through policy and through collective action.[11]

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