Gentrification as Structural Violence:
A Critical Literature Review

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Introduction

• The purpose of this critical literature review is to explain the ways in which gentrification works as structural violence.
• This research addresses the forces behind gentrification and racialized forms of dispossession by evaluating authoritative secondary literature. It identifies and scrutinizes the state government actors and agents of capital as key gentrifiers.
• This project also presents a case study, specifically the preliminary analysis of Minneapolis 2040, which is the comprehensive urban reform plan that addresses the inequalities in the city. This research highlights its inadequacies.

Research Questions

• What are the systematic forces behind gentrification and what is the process of it before the visible symptoms appear?
• How does racialized forms of dispossession and structural violence work in the context of gentrification?

Key Concepts

Gentrification
• The restructuring of urban space where there is potential for profit by agents of capital (Smith 1979), which has the consequence of further displacing historically oppressed and marginalized people.

Structural Violence
• Structural violence occurs when people are disadvantaged by political, legal, economic or cultural traditions (Winter and Leighton 2001). It is a product and property of the dynamic interactions between racism and capitalism. Since this is longstanding, structural inequities usually seem ordinary.

Neoliberalism
• It refers to the ideological position that privileges economic and political interests of those in power and their pursuits of wealth-making over the welfare of ordinary people and their basic human needs and rights (Mele 2013). The government actively participates in this process by changing priorities and taking away life chances and opportunities.

Critical Literature Review

Gentrification is Not
• Solely the consumer sovereignty or the cultural shift of the middle class
• The proliferation of luxury condos, fancy restaurants, and cafes in the cities
• Simply about the market dynamics of supply and demand

Gentrification Is
• Multidimensional, meaning that there are several different components that drive gentrification such as the state, agents of capital, historical legacies of systematic racial oppressions directed at indigenous peoples and minoritized groups
• Tightly linked up with the relentless expansion of capital.
• A process and condition of dispossession that is directed at the historically marginalized and minoritized groups. For this, it is structural violence.

Transforming Urban Space for Profit
• Neil Smith’s Rent Gap Theory: offers an economic explanation for the process of gentrification by describing the disparities between the current rental income of a property and the potentially achievable rental income.
• A housing crisis is not a temporary problem that can be resolved through isolated measures leaving it to big developers, economists, and architects (Madden and Marcuse 2016).

Connecting Race and Class
• The production of gentrified space is not simply about profit maximization.
• Gentrification is deeply rooted in racism and inequality (Maskowitz 2016).
• It is the maintenance of racial order built upon the subordination of minority groups.

Conceptual Approach

• Library and online databases were utilized to obtain secondary sources.
• Reinterprets existing theories that explain the forces and consequences of gentrification.
• Extensive reading of gentrification theories, Minneapolis 2040 policy proposal critiques, and racial equity approaches.
• A critical case-study analysis of the Minneapolis 2040 Comprehensive Plan.

Discussion

Minneapolis, MN
• Since 2000, 50.6% of tracts have been gentrified
• Around 15,000 affordable housing units were lost
• Over 1 in 4 homeowners are cost-burdened
• In 2000, only eight Minneapolis neighborhoods were affordable to African American renters earning median income. By 2014, this number shrank to zero.
• People of color are more likely to live in poverty and are less likely to own their own home.
• Past racism expressed through land-use actions make residents skeptical.

Minneapolis 2040 Comprehensive Plan:
• Consists of 14 basic goals toward equity and diversity.
• Uses racial justice language and acknowledges past historical racist policies such as racial covenants.

However...
• Resources will go towards those who have been responsible for the disparities rather than to the people who have been victimized by the system.
• Does not specify how the city will accomplish their goals around housing affordability and how much power developers will have.
• “Inclusionary zoning” is an ineffective approach.
• No mention of protecting or building public housing, which mostly houses people of color.
• Offers nothing to protect tenants from landlords
• Does not address white supremacy as one of the primary factors for the current housing crisis.

Proposed alternatives:
• Rent control
• Protect and build more public housing
• Tax big corporations
• Affordable Housing Trust Fund
• Tenant’s Bill of Rights
• Reparations
• Public land ownership
• Right to safe neighborhoods and protection from police, INS/ICE, and vigilante repression

Future Research
• How can there be affordable housing and justice for people of color, if the substance of urban policy does little to rectify realities of historical injustices for people who have experienced dispossession since the birth of this city?