

Fighting Gentrification
A Call for a Diversity of Tactics
By: Ty Tumminia

Gentrification has begun in Binghamton in recent years. This is also true for most of Broome County, many areas of New York city and many other major cities across the United States. We have to ask ourselves, “What is gentrification? Who does it affect the most and how? How is this process being funded? What are some of the pros and cons of gentrification? How do we fight against it, and what are some examples of communities that have successfully fought against this?” Lastly, I will briefly state my opinion on this matter.

First, the definition of gentrification is the process of renewal and rebuilding accompanying the influx of middle-class or affluent people into deteriorating areas that often displaces poorer residents. The process can be clearly seen through the building of student luxury high rise apartment buildings. We have seen how our local government wishes to increase the police surveillance within the downtown area. Slowly, more and more property owners are leasing exclusively to student or young professionals. So, who exactly is affected by this change the most and how?

This process affects all of us one way or another. For the university students and upper middle class. Gentrification provides many benefits. Typically, the crime rate is lowered, large corporations move into the area, the cost of living is lower than major cities, and there is an existing culture that these people get to feel a part of. However, for the poor, minorities and current residents. Gentrification has many negative side effects. Rent begins to rise, large development companies begin to buy up properties, lease practices become discriminatory, these same corporations are giving large tax breaks that hurt property value for current residents, an increase in police surveillance usually means a crackdown on Black communities and of other minority communities. We have seen this take place in Brooklyn, San Diego, Boston and now here.

I touched on it already, but how is it gentrification is funded. Typically, an urban area will have issues such as a high crime rate, communities hurt by drug use, gang violence, a poor job market and such. This will bring the property value down. In this society, this is the prime opportunity for capitalist to come in and make some easy money. Large corporations with deep pockets target these areas to being developing because of this low property value. Also, many of these corporations take advantage of programs such as PILOT or Payment in Lieu of Taxes. Here are some recent examples:

- Twin River Commons will pay \$91,144, 26 percent of the \$344,504 it would pay without the PILOT.
- University Lofts will pay \$23,093, 11 percent of the \$205,862 it would pay without the PILOT.

- 20 Hawley St. will pay \$105,872, 48 percent of the \$218,466 it would pay without the PILOT.
- Chenango Place will pay \$40,730, 21 percent percent of the \$194,308 it would pay without the PILOT.
- The Printing House will pay \$33,651.13, 10 percent of the \$340,302 it would pay without the PILOT.

Then there are the investors themselves. This list is too long for me to read, but it includes companies from all over New York state. Let's not forget Binghamton University's invested interest in this as well. With the NY Suny 2020 Challenge Grant. There is a lot of pressure to meet a demand for enlisting new students. These students need places to live, shop and need to be shown that there is a life in Upstate New York after college.

Boston, Massachusetts' Chinatown fought against gentrification well. These were some of the steps they followed.

1. Have Rent Controlled Areas
2. End discriminatory lease processes
3. Reduce or freeze property taxes to protect long-time residents
4. Protect senior homeowners
5. Prohibit large scale luxury development in at-risk neighborhoods
6. Continue to develop rental units, but not at the expense of the poor.

Lastly, I will try and be brief, but precise about my opinion. Gentrification is just the aftermath of the Great White Flight of the past. Now that the cities they abandoned are ripe for profit, have a culture that is attractive, and the people who lived there will be forced out. It couldn't be a better time. However, Black people and minorities are not welcome in the suburbs either. Mass incarceration, poor job conditions, racism, and capitalism will continue to destroy the Black and minority communities. Only through using various tactics including activism, non-violent resistance, and militant action can we see a true change. We all have to work together in order to change this society and the world around us, or we will continue down the same paths as before. New York City has done the community gardens, we have seen non-violent action during the Civil Rights Movement, and we have seen militant action by the example of the Black Panther Party. Where is the true change? Where is the hope that it will truly get better? There will be none until we recognize we need to take control over our lives, we need to take over how the money is spent in our communities, and destroy the barriers between us.

Thank you.