Theories of Gentrification
Gentrification

• Term was coined by Ruth Glass (1964) looking at middle-class people colonizing working-class parts of Islington, London

• Core idea: Gentrification involves wealthier people taking over neighbourhoods where poorer people used to live
  • Rich displace the poor
Demographic

• The baby boomers were a large generation, who put pressure on the housing stock
• Led to major expansion of suburbs, but also major refurbishment/new construction in old inner city areas
Sociocultural

• The attitudes and values of the middle class shifted and became more pro-urban, making them more inclined to settle in the inner city
Political-economic

• Civil rights movement discouraged open racial prejudice and segregation.
  • Enabled Black Americans to move to suburbs, whites to inner city
• Marxists argue that decay of inner city was a deliberate policy
Community networks

• People seek community networks
• In the suburbs: difficult to build local community, achieved through transportation, technology, meeting places
• Inner city greater density allows greater nearness, denser and more visible community networks
• Suburbanites tire of auto-dependent disconnectedness
Social Movements

• Social movements are powerful in an urban area
• Gentrification has many of the characteristics of a social movement
Economic Factors: Production Side

• Capitalist economy is constantly restructuring urban space

Rent Gap Idea:
• Industrial capitalism once drove the wealthy to the suburbs, abandoning their former inner city homes
• Wealthy people panic to exit falling inner-city property market
• Capitalism restructures, old inner city industry declines, high-income white collar jobs intensify in urban cores
• Wealthy people panic to get back into rising inner city property market
Rent Gap in Toronto

• To get housed c 1960 you could
• Buy a Yorkville Ave fixer-upper for $25,000
• Buy a new suburban home in North York for $15,000
• Buy a cheap slum house in Corktown for $5,000
Rent Gap in Toronto

• Rent Gap Theory:
  • The gentrifiers should buy the slum house in Corktown

• Reality
  • Gentrifiers buy in Yorkville

• Does not fit the rent gap idea
Economic Factors: Consumption Side

- Urban economy shifts from manufacturing to services
- The middle class (employed in services) expands in size and buying power
- They rehabilitate the inner city and the old industrial districts
Globalization

• The emergence of a global economy has led to new patterns of difference between cities.

• Some global cities become global control points. Finance and services sector with global reach
  • Housing market inflation and gentrification active
My Theory (currently)

• Based on my work on Toronto
• Based on historical primary sources
  • Most gentrification theory not created this way
• Starts with the wealthy heading to the suburbs
My Theory, pre 1950

• Wealthy abandoned the inner city for the suburbs in 1910s
  • But suburbs inhibited close social networking
  • Traffic issues, distance, make access to downtown difficult

• Retail strips serving suburban women (retail gentrification) emerge in vacated inner city
  • Bloor-Yorkville (1910s onwards)
  • College-Grenville (1910s onwards)
  • Gerrard West “Greenwich Village” 1930 onwards

• Retail strips showcase the creative economy, feminized social networking
My Theory, 1950s

• We had a powerful emerging creative economy by the 1950s
  • Young adults who need to work/network in dense environments downtown
• Access to downtown and inner areas crucial
  • Discourages suburban living, too far out, too disconnected
• Evening shopping broadens gender appeal of retail gentrification strips
• Demand accommodated by new-build high rises in North Toronto (a wealthy inner suburb) and the Yonge subway corridor
• Some infiltration of inner city by creatives
• New build private sector investment avoids the remaining pockets of severe air pollution
My Theory, 1960s onwards

• Creative economy continues to expand, change
• 1960s onwards: Creatives ready to refurbish old inner city housing
• 1970s: gentrification continues, but incoming creatives join with remaining working class to resist new-build high rises in inner city
  • Emergence of community activists, social movements
• Gentrification starts with the most desirable areas, then spreads
  • Avoids active industrial areas, areas of remaining severe air pollution
  • De-industrialization, air quality improvement opens entire inner city to gentrification by the 2000s
My Theory

• **Retail** gentrification arises from the 1910s departure of the wealthy to the suburbs, is shaped by the automobile

• **Residential** gentrification starts with new-build high-rises displacing rich people in North Toronto in the 1950s

• **Creative economy**: Gentrification is essentially the living arrangement for the creative economy

• Gentrification: involves new ways of using urban time as well as urban space