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GENTRIFICATION AND DISPLACEMENT POWER, PLANNING, AND POLITICAL ACTION

SPRING 2023 COURSE SYLLABUS

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This photo was taken in New Orleans in 2006. For decades, numerous urban planners, economists and politicians all over the world have called for policies encouraging 'mixed-income neighborhoods' in poor areas of cities, often accompanied by dubious assumptions about how wealthier residents will serve as 'role models' for low-income residents. In 2006, public housing tenants in New Orleans, displaced from their homes by Hurricane Katrina and not allowed to return to them due to mixed-income planning, organized a march around one of the wealthiest neighborhoods in the city, carrying this very simple response. In many ways, it exemplifies what this course is all about: *urban planning for whom, against whom, and who decides?*

TIME: THURSDAYS 11.00am-1.00pm

LOCATION: 115 AVERY

OFFICE HOURS: THURSDAYS 3.00-5.00pm
302 Buell

COURSE DESCRIPTION:

This course offers students a comprehensive and critical overview of the process of gentrification on a global scale. It provides 1) a guide to the competing theories that have been devised to explain why gentrification happens; 2) a strong sense of the implications of gentrification for people living at the bottom of the urban class structure (in particular, the many forms and complexities of displacement); and 3) informed accounts of how gentrification is resisted in several contexts where the threat of displacement is very real.

Via elaborate dissection of case studies from across all five continents, the course traces the history of gentrification research, highlighting gentrification as a profit-driven class and racial reconfiguration of urban communities that have suffered from a history of disinvestment and abandonment. Despite frequent attempts to sugarcoat it and/or celebrate it, gentrification has always been a process resulting in the expansion of housing opportunities for wealthier urban dwellers while reducing them for poorer urban dwellers. With the aid of theoretical and empirical scholarship, this course will explore precisely how this process happens, where it happens, and what can be done about it.

In considering what makes urban land profitable for (re)development, broad critical questions come to the forefront of this course, such as: who does urbanization serve, who is disadvantaged by it, and who has the power to determine what forms it takes? The course takes an institutional political economy approach, one rooted in the pursuit of urban social justice, and it is concerned with the political, economic and institutional factors shaping cities, neighborhoods and communities across contexts in the Global North and Global South.

As the above paragraphs suggest, the course has two broad aims:

- To provide an understanding of why gentrification occurs, who benefits from it, and who is most affected by it.
- To provide a set of analytical lenses to understand and ultimately address the enduring problem of gentrification.

The course also has three broad learning outcomes, to provide:

- An interdisciplinary understanding of the gentrification and displacement debates.

- An appreciation of critical scholarly inquiry vis-à-vis gentrification and displacement in multiple urban contexts.
- Ideas about how to plan fairer, more equitable cities: cities without gentrification.

ASSESSMENT

Your work will be assessed as follows:

- 1) Class participation (10%). Students, in pairs, are required to lead one discussion during the semester, providing their insights into the readings and presenting guiding questions for the class (we will allocate students to particular themes in week 1). Leading a discussion effectively is not simply about demonstrating that you have read and considered the readings carefully - that is assumed. Nor is the purpose to provide lengthy summaries. Rather, *you should take this opportunity to share candid impressions, questions, and things that you find puzzling or contradictory, and engage with course materials in order to push forward our thinking as a group of scholars*. Here are some questions to help you prepare:
 - What do you see as the most valuable contribution, thesis, or idea from this material, and why does it matter?
 - What aspects of the argument do you find especially useful, well argued, confusing, or unconvincing?
 - How does the argument connect to the other required and/or recommended readings?
- 2) Book Review (30%). This must be double spaced, at least 12 pt font, correctly referenced, and submitted via Canvas no later than **Monday, April 3rd at noon**.

Each student is required to write a 1500-word review of a book of your choice on the topic of gentrification. The reading list in this syllabus includes plenty of books from which to choose. The main requirement is that the book must have a detailed focus on gentrification (if it only mentions the process briefly (or, for example, just in one chapter) then it will not be acceptable to review it). The most important element of a book review is that it is a critical evaluation of a text, NOT merely a summary. Once you have chosen your book, your review will be assessed on the following criteria:

- An understanding of the author(s) contributions to the field
- An identification of the strengths and weaknesses of the book
- A grasp of how the book fits into broader debates on the topic of gentrification
- A critical assessment of the author(s) argument

- 3) One 3000-word essay (60%). This must be double spaced, at least 12 pt font, correctly referenced, and submitted via Canvas **no later than Monday, May 1st at noon**. A list of essay questions is below, but you may want to develop your own essay question (with my approval).

Criteria for Assessment: The aim of the essay is to present a convincing and well-informed *argument* in answer to the question selected. I will not be able to read or provide feedback on drafts of essays, although you are very welcome to discuss your essay with me in my office hours. Your work will be assessed on the following criteria:

- Grasp of core themes and concepts
- Use and understanding of sources
- Logical structure of your argument
- Quality of the argument presented
- Style and grace in presenting the argument, with particular attention to grammar: ***the difference between knowing your shit and knowing you're shit!***
- Accurate and appropriate referencing

Essay questions to follow!

COURSE TIMETABLE (subject to change between now and January)

January 19th Introduction/Overview: Unsettling False Choice Urbanism

January 26th A Brief History of Gentrification

February 2nd Gentrification and Class I: The Rent Gap Theory

February 9th Gentrification and Class II: Stigmatization and the Revanchist City

February 16th Gentrification and Gender

February 23rd Racial Capitalism and Gentrification

March 2nd *Walking Tour of Lower East Side/Tompkins Square Park*

March 9th Understanding Displacement

Spring Break

March 23rd Planetary Gentrification

March 30th Resisting Gentrification 1: *Not in My Neighborhood* film and discussion

April 6th Resisting Gentrification 2: Manhattanville versus Columbia University

April 13th Short Term Rentals and Gentrification

April 20th Green Gentrification

April 27th Course Summary

BEFORE WE START:

The format of this course mixes lectures, presentations, and group discussion. It demands intellectual engagement (listening, reading, thinking, writing), so **please attend every session**, as each one builds and extends on the other, and **READ! You are expected to read and ruminate over the assigned materials each week prior to class meeting**. The readings for this course are copious and you should budget your time well to ingest and digest them as we proceed; otherwise, you will not benefit from the lectures and you will not be in a position to contribute to the discussion.

Furthermore, you'll need to take extensive notes on both readings and lectures - *which do not fully duplicate each other* - to assimilate the materials we will cover. In addition to hard work, you should be prepared to approach the subject matter, readings, lectures, and any class discussion with a wide-open mind and with the firm intention to learn to think about things that may seem familiar in novel and sometimes startling ways. As a great thinker once pointed out:

"What makes a subject hard to understand – if it is something significant and important – is not that before you can understand it you need to be specially trained in abstruse matters, but the contrast between understanding the subject and what most people *want to see*. *Because of this the very things which are most obvious may become the hardest of all to understand*. What has to be overcome is a difficulty having to do with the will, rather than with the intellect."

Ludwig Wittgenstein (1977) Vermischte Bemerkungen [Culture & Value] (Frankfurt: Suhrkamp) p.17

You should be willing to consider new ideas that may unsettle you, facts that may disturb you, and subject your preconceptions and your personal experiences to the disciplined scrutiny of critical reasoning and systematic empirical observation. Talk to each other, not just to me, and never be afraid to speak up if you find yourself thinking, "Help!" That's what I'm here for!

READINGS

Every effort has been made to ensure that you have access to the materials listed below. If you have any problems accessing particular readings, please let me know as soon as possible. For the vast majority of readings not available at this university, I can circulate copies via Canvas.

The most important book you should all get hold of in order to get the most out of this course is, conveniently, co-authored by me - and written specifically for students:

Lees, Loretta, Slater, Tom and Wyly, Elvin. 2008. *Gentrification*. New York: Routledge.

It's perhaps a little dated now, but as we proceed I'll be updating you all on the debates since 2008.

READINGS FOR EACH WEEK TO FOLLOW

