Chapter 28

Gentrification, Postindustrialism, and Industrial and Occupational Restructuring in Global Cities

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Gentrification is now firmly established as a major phenomenon of Western cities and is established in both academic and popular discourse. It was first identified and labeled by Ruth Glass (1963) in London in the early 1960s. Her use of the term "gentrification" was ironic to point to the emergence of a new "urban gentry," paralleling the traditional eighteenth- and nineteenth-century rural gentry who comprised the class strata below the landed aristocracy. She identified gentrification as a complex process, or set of processes, involving physical improvement of the housing stock, housing tenure change from renting to owning, price rises, and the displacement or replacement of the existing working-class population by the middle classes.

One by one, many of the working class quarters of London have been invaded by the middle-class – upper and lower – shabby modest mews and cottages . . . have been taken over when their leases expired, and have become elegant, expensive residences. Larger Victorian houses, downgraded in an earlier or recent period – which were used as lodging houses or were otherwise in multiple occupation – have been upgraded once again . . . Once this process of "gentrification" starts in a district it goes on rapidly until all or most of the original working class occupiers are displaced and the whole social character of the district is changed (Glass 1963: xviii).

In the years which followed, a growing body of literature appeared which revealed the emergence of gentrification in a wide range of cities from Vancouver (Ley 1978; Mills 1988), Philadelphia (Smith 1979), Washington (Gale 1979), New York (Schaffer and Smith 1986), Melbourne (Jager 1986), Toronto (Caulfield 1994), Sydney (Engels 1994), Adelaide (Badcock 1992), Paris (Savitch 1988; Carpenter and Lees 1995), and Montreal (Rose 1988). During this period the literature on gentrification has grown enormously and a large amount is now known about the characteristics of gentrifiers in different cities, their social background, cultural characteristics and proclivities and the nature of the processes of residential area transformation.

In 1996 and 1997 at least three major books on gentrification were published (Ley 1996; Smith 1996; Butler 1997). It therefore seems appropriate to briefly reflect on the current significance of gentrification, its scale, extent, causes, and consequences.

The Scale and Distribution of Gentrification

Gentrification is now widespread throughout many of the major cities of the Western world. It may still constitute "islands of renewal in seas of decay" as Berry suggested (1985) in the context of American cities, and it is outweighed in quantitative importance by large-scale suburbanization and exurbanization, but the islands are substantial and growing. There is little evidence for Bourne's (1993) suggestion that gentrification is essentially a historically specific product of the postwar baby boom generation and that, as this cohort ages and moves to the suburbs, so gentrification will gradually decline in importance (Badcock 1995). On the contrary, although there is a continued outward movement of professionals and managers from the inner cities to the suburbs, they appear to be replaced by an even larger flow of young professionals, managers, and workers in finance, business services, and the cultural and creative industries (Hamnett 1990).

As a result, the scale and extent of gentrified areas in cities such as New York, London, and Paris is gradually expanding, pushing steadily outwards into hitherto solidly working-class or minority areas such as Hackney in London (Butler 1997; May 1996), Bellville in Paris (Rhein 1998), and Harlem and the Lower East Side in New York (Schaffer and Smith 1986; Abu-Lughod 1994). Gentrification has been identified in a variety of different types of cities and contexts, and the idea of rural gentrification is now well established as the middle classes have moved into attractive rural villages or small towns, permanently or as second home owners (Cloke, Phillips, and Thrift 1995). It is clear, however that gentrification is a highly selective process: both at the interurban and the intraurban scale. Gentrification is most marked in a number of major cities with large and growing financial and business service sectors such as London, Paris, New York, Sydney, San Francisco, and Amsterdam, Toronto, or Vancouver. It is not widespread in cities with declining old industrial bases such as Pittsburgh, Buffalo, Detroit, the Ruhr, Liverpool, or Manchester. Nor is it very marked in cities which are largely twentieth-century creations such as Los Angeles, Phoenix, or Milton Keynes.

Explanations for Gentrification

The key question is why gentrification became significant when it did and where it did. There are two principal explanations for the emergence of gentrification. The first, supply-side explanation, put forward by Neil Smith (1979) sees gentrification as essentially a product of the urban land and property market. More specifically, he views it in terms of the emergence of a growing "rent gap" between the current value of property on a site and the underlying value of the land. In his view suburbanization and subsequent inner-city decline leads to the existence of devalued inner-city property on potentially valuable land which opens up the potential for profitable reinvestment. Thus Smith is extremely critical of explanations which stress the

choices and preferences of gentrifiers, arguing that it is capital, and the institutions of the capitalist land market – developers, real-estate agents, mortgage lenders and the like – who hold the key to understanding gentrification, and that the culture and preferences of individual gentrifiers are largely irrelevant, or at most secondary aspects of the process which influence the specific manifestations of the process but not much else. As he puts it: "the needs of production – in particular the need to earn profit – are a more decisive initiative behind gentrification than consumer preference." He adds: "A theory of gentrification will need to explain the detailed historical mechanisms of capital depreciation in the inner-city and the precise way in which this depreciation produces the possibility of profitable reinvestment" (1979: 542).

The alternative view, which is argued here, is that while gentrification clearly involves changes in the structure of the land and property market, it is better seen as a product of the shift from an industrial to a postindustrial society in particular cities and associated changes in class structure, particularly the growth of an expanded middle class and their social relations, cultural tastes, and consumption practices. I see gentrification not as an inevitable consequence of the prior existence of a rent gap, but primarily as a result of the continuing economic transformation of major Western cities from manufacturing centers to centers of business services and the creative and cultural industries, with consequent changes in occupational structure, income distribution, gender relations, the housing market, and cultural tastes. In this respect, gentrification can be viewed as a major component of the transition from industrial to postindustrial cities, and it seems likely to be an important feature of urban life and structure for some time (Badcock 1995). To a significant extent, the expanded postindustrial middle class has replaced/displaced the industrial working class from desirable inner-city areas in cities where the financial and business and financial services sector has grown rapidly.

There is a third explanation, advanced by Redfern (1997), which argues that gentrification is best explained in terms of the availability and cost of domestic technology. More specifically, Redfern argues that it is existence of domestic technologies, and their falling real cost, which permits gentrification to occur: "you cannot have gentrification without being able to do up a house," as he puts it. Redfern claims that both the supply side and the demand side explanations share a common presumption: that "gentrifiers gentrify because they have to." He argues instead that "they gentrify because they can." I think Redfern has identifed an important issue here, but the falling real cost of domestic technologies which enable old houses to be modernized seems to be a necessary rather than a sufficient factor in explaining gentrification. If the supply of potential gentrifiable properties was not present, and the demand was not there, all the domestic technology in the world would be unlikely to lead to gentrification. Indeed, in many American inner cities the reality has been large-scale abandonment rather than gentrification (Dear 1976; Marcuse 1986).

In the declining industrial cities the class and income structure is not appropriate to support widespread gentrification, and in the latter there is not much in the way of gentrifiable, old inner-city property (though Smith would probably argue that a rent gap has not developed in such cities). There are small patches of gentrification in many old industrial or small provincial cities, but they are generally small scale.

Put simply, it is argued that gentrification is primarily a phenomenon of the late twentieth-century postindustrial service-based city. As the economic structure of these cities has evolved, so the social and occupational structure of the city has changed, and a new group of residents with different educational backgrounds, cultural values, preferences, and orientations has emerged (Ley 1980, 1996).

Cultural values, preferences, and orientations are necessary to underpin gentrification but they are not sufficient. If, hypothetically, members of the "new class," to use that term in a very loose way, working in central city financial, business, and creative and cultural industries, were not interested in living in inner-city properties (new or old) or inner-city neighborhoods, and were uninterested in what the city center had to offer in terms of culture, lifestyles, food, and entertainment, I see no reason why gentrification should emerge. Instead, the new urban elite would get on the train or in their cars and disappear into the suburbs every evening. In this respect, the cultural dimensions of gentrification are crucial and should not be downplayed or ignored. Gentrification is not simply a class or income phenomenon. It is also crucially linked to the creation of a new set of cultural and residential preferences. However, cultural factors alone are unlikely to bring gentrification into being on any significant scale. While it is true that Greenwich Village or Chelsea, London, were centers for artistic and bohemian culture in the 1950s, they were essentially small scale.

Gentrification and the Postindustrial City

What was required to underpin large-scale gentrification was a fundamental change in the economic base and occupational structure of cities: a shift from industrial to postindustrial or service-based economies. This only began to happen in the 1970s on a significant scale. The old, manufacturing-based cities of the nineteenth century and first half of the twentieth century had occupational class structures which were largely dominated by skilled, semi-skilled and unskilled manual workers. These workers were relatively poor and tended to live in relatively close proximity to their workplaces in the inner cities. The urban elite was small in size and although many of them lived in, or in close proximity to, the city center until the second half of the nineteenth century, at least in cities such as London, there was absolutely no pressure for expansion of the elite into surrounding working-class areas. On the contrary, there is some evidence that the middle classes left or were squeezed out of some parts of the inner-city as the industrial working class grew in the late nineteenth century. When the middle classes grew in size it was a relatively simple matter, using the new suburban railways, to construct new housing in what are now the nineteenth-century inner suburbs in areas such as Islington, North Kensington, or Brooklyn. It was still a relatively easy commute to work in the central city for the predominantly male office workers of that period (Prince 1964).

With the long decline of manufacturing industry and the growing importance of the service sector, particularly financial, business and professional services such as law, advertising, management consultancy, public relations, and public services such as health and education, the occupational structure of modern Western societes has changed dramatically. There has been a decline in the size of the manual working class and a sharp increase in the number and proportion of the professional,

managerial, and technical groups: the so-called "new middle class" (Wright and Martin 1987; Myles 1988; Marshall and Rose 1985; Esping-Anderson 1993; Butler and Savage 1995) over the last 30 years. In addition, as Butler (1997) and others have pointed out, there has also been a sharp increase in the number and proportion of the workforce with higher educational qualifications.

It would seem that Bell (1973) was broadly right in asserting that postindustrialism has created a postindustrial society with a different occupational class structure and cultural characteristics and aspirations. This assertion has been strongly challenged by a number of Marxist commentators including Braverman (1974), Walker and Greenberg (1982), and Smith (1987) who instead argue that we are seeing a process of proletarianization and gradual deskilling of an expanded working class along with the shrinkage of the petit bourgeoisie. The evidence (Wright and Martin 1987) does not appear to support this view, however, even though the earnings evidence in the USA does clearly point to a fall in real earnings for a majority of the population in recent decades. There is also clear evidence of growing earnings and income inequality in a number of major global cities such as New York, London, and Paris (Hamnett and Cross 1998a and b).

Gentrification and Global Cities

As David Ley (1978) pointed out 20 years ago, the geography of postindustrial society is not even. Instead, the transition from industrialism to postindustrialism, at least in terms of industrial and occupational structure, has been most marked in a small number of major cities: the global or world cities. A number of commentators (Friedmann and Wolff 1982; Friedmann 1986; Sassen 1984, 1991) have argued that these cities are characterized by a new and distinctive class structure. Friedmann and Wolff (1982) suggested that "The primary social fact about world city formation is the polarisation of its social class divisions. Transnational elites are the dominant class in the world city and the city is arranged to suit their life styles and occupational necessities" (322). So too, Sassen (1991) argued that "New conditions of growth have contributed to elements of a new class alignment in global cities" (13).

The empirical evidence for this argument is strong and consistent. The changing socioeconomic structure of London over a period of years (Hamnett 1976, 1984, 1996) shows a clear picture of consistent upwards shift in occupational class structure of the economically active population. Similar evidence for the Netherlands (Hamnett 1994), Paris (Preteceille 1995), New York (Brint 1991) reveals the professional, managerial, and technical occupational groups have expanded considerably since the early 1960s, clerical and other junior white-collar workers have remained broadly stable, and skilled, semi-skilled and unskilled groups have shrunk. The result is a far more "professionalised" class structure than that of the traditional industrial city. At the same time, Burgers (1996) notes that there is a growing polarization in the Netherlands between an increasingly professionalized economically active workforce and the economically inactive and unemployed. Brughel (1996) also points to the downgrading of some occupations.

To argue for the importance of an expanded middle class is not, as Smith (1979) has suggested, an individualistic choice and preference-based explanation of gentrification. On the contrary, it is very firmly grounded in the changing industrial

and occupational structure of advanced capitalist societies. In this respect, it is a strongly materialist explanation. Where it differs from Smith is in the relative emphasis it accords to the changing industrial and occupational structure of major cities rather than simply to changes in the structure of the property market and urban ground rents. I have argued elsewhere (Hamnett 1984, 1991) that a devalued inner urban property market is no guarantee of gentrification, as areas like Detroit and the Bronx readily testify (Deskins 1996). The link between an expanded middle class and gentrification is based, at least in part, on the fact that this new class is not only larger than hitherto but has a much higher income than the traditional inner-city working class. They are therefore able to systematically outbid existing residents for inner-city housing. But the changing industrial and occupational structure of Western cities does not automatically produce gentrification. As noted earlier, it is quite conceivable that the greatly expanded "new class" of managers and professionals could simply opt to live in the suburbs and, of course, many of them (and arguably the great majority) do precisely that. This is why the suburban areas of cities like Washington, DC, have continued to expand (Knox 1993) and why many potentially desirable inner-city areas have not been gentrified. If the whole, or even a majority, of the new class had opted for gentrification, the social and spatial structure of cities would be very different and prices in the inner cities would have spiralled out of sight. Indeed, there is an argument that, to some extent at least, a proportion of the new class have already been effectively priced out of desirable gentrified inner-city areas and forced to live further out where prices are more affordable. This argument would hold for London, Amsterdam, Paris, San Francisco, and much of Manhattan.

Gentrification, Education and Culture

But why do a significant proportion of the new class choose, and I use the term quite deliberately, to live in the inner-city rather than in the suburbs. This is where the role of education and culture become crucially important as Ley (1978, 1980, 1996), Mills (1988), Munt (1985), Lees (1994), Butler (1997), and others have pointed out. The principal argument is that gentrifiers constitute a specific fraction of the new middle class, distinguished by their generally high levels of education, high levels of cultural capital, and their cultural preferences and consumption norms. In addition to a prediliction for the cultural and entertainment facilities offered by the central city, they place a high esthetic value on the types of period property available in the inner-city, with their distinctive features. Ley terms this the estheticization of consumption. In addition, Butler (1997) argues that gentrifiers are frequently typified by relatively liberal social and political outlook and affiliations. They are disproportionately centre-left in political orientation and place a high value on interaction with those holding similar values or "people like us" as one of Butler's respondents put it. Jon May (1996) reached similar conclusions. While this is unlikely to be true of all gentrifiers in all areas, and Butler found sharp differences even within his study area of Hackney, it suggests that there is a high level of cultural and political self-selection among gentrifiers. Butler argues that gentrifiers constitute a specific fraction of the middle class characterized by high levels of cultural capital rather than financial capital (Butler and Savage 1996).

Butler also suggests, following Rose (1984), Bondi (1991), Warde (1991), and others that gentrifiers are also characterized by a distinctive structure of gender relations. Gentrifier households contain a disproportionate number of dual-career households characterized by high female economic activity rates and a disproportionate representation in city center service jobs which, it is argued, predispose them to locate within easy access of central city workplaces in order to both minimize commuting time and to make child-care arrangements more manageable. Warde argues that a change in gender relations is perhaps the central defining characteristic of gentrification and is more important than class. Butler and Hamnett (1994) argue, however, that while changes in gender relations associated with gentrification are important they have to be viewed in the context of a specific middle-class formation. Changes in gender relations within and without the home, or increases in the proportion of working women are unlikely to generate significant gentrification in their own right. However, allied to the increase in the number of women working in professional and managerial jobs and an increase in dual-career households they are of considerable significance. They are part and parcel of the transition from a male-dominated industrial society to a more feminized postindustrial society.

Conclusions

While there is no doubt that gentrification is consistently associated with a sharp increase in property prices in the areas where it occurs, I am dubious of the extent to which the rent gap is the principal driver of this process. There is no doubt that property prices in potentially gentrifiable areas are relatively low and that this is, or was, one of the key attractions for gentrifiers, but it is not a sufficient explanation. Without the demand from the expanding postindustrial urban service class, gentrification is unlikely to take place, however low property prices are. This is why there are large derelict inner-city areas in some American and European industrial cities. It may even be that there is no rent gap in these cities and that inner-city land and property prices are both depressed due to lack of effective demand. A developed rent gap may only be characteristic of cities which have a large, growing middle-class workforce (see Bourassa 1993; Badcock 1989: Clarke 1988 for discussion of the rent gap thesis.)

Smith developed the rent gap thesis as an alternative, materialist, explanation to what he viewed as excessively idealist explanations based on individual choice and preference (Smith 1979). It can be argued, however, that an explanation based on the structure of the urban property and rental market does not exhaust the range of possible materialist explanations. I would argue, on the contrary, that a focus on the changing industrial and occupational class and earning structures of capitalist cities, combined with an understanding of changes in the educational, gender, and cultural composition of the expanded urban middle class, is likely to prove equally productive. This said, it is important to link the analysis of changes in industrial and occupational structures and cultural change to analyses of changes in the structure of the residential and commercial property market in different cities if we are to achieve a comprehensive understanding of the processes producing gentrification.

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