

# The Kind of Problem Gentrification Is: The Case of New York

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I.

In this paper I attempt to provide a synopsis of the history and scholarship of what we call “gentrification.” This word is defined by the *Merriam-Webster Dictionary* as “the process of renewal and rebuilding accompanying the influx of middle-class or affluent people into deteriorating areas that often displaces poorer residents.” The *Oxford English Dictionary* is pithier: “The process by which an (urban) area is rendered middle-class.” *Dictionary.com* is more verbose: “The buying and renovation of houses and stores in deteriorated urban neighborhoods by upper- or middle-income families or individuals, thus improving property values but often displacing low-income families and small businesses.”

I have chosen to focus on New York City. According to *Governing* magazine’s “Gentrification in America Report” in 2015, New York City since 2000 has led all U.S. cities in the number of census tracts that have gentrified, a total of 128 (Maciag 2015). The next highest number belongs to Philadelphia, at 84.1. In sheer volume of gentrification, New York City leads the way. It is also the U.S. city with the longest history of gentrification (dating to long before that term was coined). It is the U.S. city that has been most intensively studied by gentrification scholars in academia. And it is the U.S. city with which the present writer is most familiar.

In this paper I make the case for viewing gentrification in terms of four distinct historical phases. The first phase occurred in the 1920s, a decade marked in New York City by a severe housing shortage (much more severe than today) and by developing visions of a deindustrialized Manhattan, as reflected in the *Regional Plan of New York and Its Environs* of 1929. The decade saw the redevelopment of one marginal or working-class neighborhood after another (West Village, Turtle Bay, Yorkville) into the abode of the rich and fashionable. Many other neighborhoods (East Village, Brooklyn

Heights) were set for the same transformation until the stock market crash of 1929 halted the process. The second phase took place from the 1950s to the 1970s. This is the period of what was generally regarded as urban decline, marked by deindustrialization, the movement of educated, middle-class people to suburbs outside the jurisdictional boundaries of major cities, rising crime and other social pathologies, racial tensions, “urban renewal” (which sought to replace traditional city neighborhoods with campuses of subsidized high-rise housing), and, in New York, the near-bankruptcy of city government (with the attendant cutbacks in services). Yet, at the same time, a statistically small but significant band of mostly young, college-educated, and largely professional people, mainly in couples with or without children, chose to reject what they felt to be the bland conformity of suburbia and purchased houses in neighborhoods, particularly in Brooklyn, that were widely believed to have long since passed their heydays. This is the period that saw the gentrification of Brooklyn Heights, Fort Greene, Cobble Hill, Carroll Gardens, Boerum Hill, and Park Slope in Brooklyn and of large parts of the Upper West Side of Manhattan. This was not, generally, a period of housing shortages in New York City. The houses purchased by the young “brownstoners,” while often requiring substantial rehabilitation, were remarkably inexpensive. The third phase is the 1980s. New York City had got back on its fiscal feet, we experienced a Wall Street boom of historic dimensions, and New York began to loom large as a “global capital.” Though crime and other serious social problems, such as homelessness, remained or became very high during the decade, gentrification occurred at a rate reminiscent of the 1920s. Many of the Brooklyn neighborhoods that had gentrified between the 1950s and the 1970s experienced a second wave of gentrification, or went into a kind of gentrification overdrive. Some early brownstoners who had

bought unrenovated houses for tens of thousands of dollars were able to sell their renovated houses for hundreds of thousands of dollars or even more than a million dollars. Places like the East Village, which speculators and developers had been ready to pounce on in the closing months of 1929, were finally (if unevenly) gentrified. The gentrification of the 1980s ended as abruptly as had that of the 1920s, and for the same reason, for in October of 1987 the stock market crashed, and housing prices all across the city tumbled. In some gentrifying neighborhoods, house prices fell by forty percent in the late 1980s and early 1990s. Finally, the fourth phase of gentrification followed the historic reduction in crime that began late in the administration of Mayor David Dinkins and continued through the administrations of Rudolph W. Giuliani and Michael Bloomberg, and what the late geographer and scholar of gentrification Neil Smith called the “revanchist” policies of the Giuliani and Bloomberg years—“broken windows” policing, privatizations of public space, the Times Square and Bryant Park cleanups, and so on—aimed at luring affluent new residents and tourists to the city. Partly as a result of policies (including restrictive land-use policies) and partly as a result of large-scale economic forces that had made investments in the real estate of a handful of major global cities so attractive to global elites, real estate prices in New York City reached, in adjusted terms, all-time highs after taking more than a decade to get back to what they had been before the 1987 crash. Moreover, the rise in prices—and an outward-spreading gentrification that extended its tentacles to remote neighborhoods (such as Bushwick and even East New York) that had never before been considered candidates for gentrification—continued even after the financial calamity of 2007-08, which was in large part a reaction to the nationwide real-estate boom of the early 2000s.

The paper is in three sections. The first section deals with the emergence of the term “gentrification,” dating to its supposed first use in 1964, and with the dawning sense, mainly as reported in the *New York Times*, of urban transformations that could be described under that term, up to 1979, by which time the outlines of the post-industrial city had become reasonably clear. The second section surveys the history of gentrification in New York City, going back to the row house renovation movement of the first decade of the 20th century. It is *very* rare to find a study or survey of gentrification that takes this sort of historical perspective, with the result that many people today, whether scholars at major universities or commenters on real-estate web sites, presume gentrification to be a problem peculiar to our own

time. The third section provides a brisk summary of gentrification studies in and outside of academia. “Gentrification studies” in academia, found principally in departments of sociology and geography, is rarely cited outside of academia. Studies of gentrification from outside of academia, or outside departments of sociology and geography, rarely cite the social sciences scholars who have specialized in gentrification. I thought it would be helpful to have a broad overview of what has been written, and is being written, by a very wide assortment of scholars and commentators. In my Conclusion, I define the four distinct phases of gentrification in the history of New York City. My hope is that this overview may help us to think more clearly about gentrification. No one knows the future of gentrification, as a sense of its past shows.

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The word “gentry,” which dates to the Middle English of the 13th or 14th centuries, and shares a root with “gentile” and “gentle” (as in “gentleman”), refers, in its strictest use, to the social class just below the nobility. In modern usage, “gentry” may mean bourgeois, or the meritocratic elite. In this section, I trace the increase in the use of the abstract noun “gentrification,” which in the 1970s appeared in the *New York Times* in an article roughly every other week, and by the first decade of the 21st century appeared in the *New York Times* in approximately two articles a day. In 1979, in one of the earlier *New York Times* articles to mention “gentrification,” the writer Blake Fleetwood noted the trends that, with strikingly little variation, continue to be described in the same terms today. I conclude with a brief description of Fleetwood’s article to show that the *what* and the *where*, if not necessarily the *how* or the *why*, of gentrification were pretty much set in many New Yorkers’ minds as long ago as 1979.

The term “gentrification” was popularized in 1964 by the prominent British sociologist Ruth Glass in her introduction to a Centre for Urban Studies omnibus volume titled *London: Aspects of Change* (Glass 1964). By this word she described what she saw happening to a working-class district of London called Islington. In the postwar years, Islington had been “discovered” by members of the new meritocratic elite, who found the district’s convenient location, low housing prices, and distinctive housing stock to be an irresistible combination. Georgian terrace houses that had been subdivided into multiple dwellings were now be-

ing stitched back together and restored by the new owners, and in the process tenants were sent packing. The starkness of what was happening could hardly have escaped the notice of a keen urban observer and good Marxist like Ruth Glass. (That gentrified Islington would, in 2006, be called by the *Guardian* “the spiritual home of Britain’s left-wing intelligentsia” is thus a tad ironic.) We may note that from its first use the term “gentrification” has been a pejorative.

Using the ProQuest Historical Newspapers database, which allows full-text searching of newspaper archives, we find that the first use of “gentrification” in the *New York Times* occurred in 1972 in an article on the overheated London housing market of the inflationary Heath years. In the article, Suzanne Haire wrote:

“Gentrification”—the expulsion of the working class from their traditional territory—has spread much further afield. “Big money tidal wave hits Wapping,” announced a headline the other day. Wapping, half a mile east of the Tower Bridge, used to be a dockworkers’ community with wharves and warehouses. But the dockers are gone and blocks of flats will rise on the site of old wharves. A modernized old Georgian customs house has already been sold for £65,000—then the equivalent of \$165,000—though everyone admits that transportation to Wapping is bad, shopping facilities are minimal and the environment is depressing (Haire 1972).<sup>2</sup>

“Gentrification” does not appear in the *New York Times* again until 1977 when, in an article titled “Working Class in London Resists Incursion by the Gentry,” Robert D. Hershey Jr. wrote, “The newcomers quickly modernize the interiors, paint the outside trim a brilliant white and add such amenities as plants, iron railings and perhaps a Victorian-era light fixture. At first they also tended to paint the doors a bright color, but doors now are often refinished to expose the natural wood” (Hershey 1977).

In 1978 the *New York Times* wrote of gentrification in the Marais, in Paris (“the driving out of the poor and working class for an influx of chic residents, restaurants and boutiques”) and in Amsterdam (gentrification “has produced impressive renovation of decayed structures, but it has also sparked working-class resentment because the newer residents tend to take up more living space and drive up the cost of housing”) and, again, in Paris before, on December 17, coming to America in an article on, of all places, Cleveland. The article, by Robert Reinhold, quotes Rutgers University’s George Sternlieb, at the time one of the most widely cited urban experts in America (sort of a Joel Kotkin of the late 1970s and early 1980s), as saying that the impact of gentrifi-

cation was being overstated: “What you have is a new small city emerging—young, sophisticated, high swinging—that has very little relationship to the older mass city around it” (Reinhold 1978). It was in the Amsterdam article of June 11 that “gentrification” appears for the first time without quotation marks.

Finally, the *New York Times* applied the word to New York City for the first time on January 14, 1979, in a remarkable article in the *New York Times Magazine* by Blake Fleetwood, “The New Elite and the Urban Renaissance.”

People often snicker when they first hear of it. A renaissance in New York City? The rich moving in and the poor moving out? The mind boggles at the very notion. After all, what about the graffiti, the abandoned buildings, the chronic fiscal crisis? Hard as it is to believe, however, New York and other cities in the American Northeast are beginning to enjoy a revival as they undergo a gradual process known by the curious name of ‘gentrification’—a term coined by the displaced English poor and subsequently adopted by urban experts to describe the movements of social classes in and around London (Fleetwood 1979).

“The signs,” wrote Fleetwood, “are all around us.”

Young professional people are flocking into New York City. Rents are higher than ever before, and vacant apartments are hard to come by. The price of a cooperative apartment has doubled in the last three years. Brownstoners have renovated large sections of the West Side and Chelsea in Manhattan and Park Slope in Brooklyn. It will take a long time for the effects of gentrification to make themselves felt in areas such as Harlem and the South Bronx—if indeed they ever will (Fleetwood 1979).

But, “as the heart of New York revives, it may pump new life into old, outlying neighborhoods. For, as rents rise still higher and the prices of co-ops and brownstones continue to go up, the gentry will be forced to move into and upgrade marginal areas.” Bushwick, anyone? And to the young urban professionals (or “Yuppies,” as they would be called beginning in the early 1980s), “are being added increasing numbers of affluent foreigners who are accelerating the pace of gentrification.” Fleetwood provides a brisk summary of the “urban crisis,” as it was called, and of the conventional wisdom regarding it—such as the view that central cit-

ies were obsolete and that policy should aim at hastening their abandonment. Then Fleetwood writes, “what many people failed to realize during the agonizing period of the early 1970’s—when New York seemed to be running out of money, jobs and even people—was that the bloodletting may well have been a natural adjustment to the problems that had been accumulating for the previous three decades.” Fleetwood quotes the major New York real-estate owner Lewis Rudin: “Our surveys have indicated a dramatic increase in foreigners, out-of-towners and young people coming back to the city”—words that might have appeared, verbatim, in the *New York Times* this morning, thirty-eight years later. “All of a sudden, from having a tremendous number of vacancies in both office space and apartments four years ago, we literally have no vacancies.”

Fleetwood cites the English urban geographer Peter Hall’s *The World Cities* (a 1966 book reprinted in 1977) on how a handful of major cities around the world were taking shape as “idea factories” where brokers, lawyers, consultants, academics, media and advertising workers, writers and photographers—all those Robert Reich labeled as “symbolic analysts” and said formed, despite the wild discrepancy of income between the freelance writer and the successful fund manager, a cohesive class of common interests—produced work meant to be consumed globally (Reich 1991). It is well to note that this kind of “globalization” was already a much-discussed phenomenon half a century ago. The “renaissance” of New York, and its concomitant gentrification, were thus seen as consequences of the fundamental economic shift taking place in New York and, to a lesser extent, in other cities that were also experiencing gentrification. Fleetwood quotes the *Economist* magazine: “New York City is becoming the capital of the world even as it is becoming noticeably less the all-dominating city of the United States.”<sup>3</sup>

The word “gentrification,” according to the ProQuest Historical Newspapers database, occurred in 28 articles in the *New York Times* between 1970 and 1979, in 684 articles between 1980 and 1989, in 400 articles between 1990 and 1999, and in 780 articles between 2000 and 2009.

III.

Virginia Pope wrote, in the *New York Times* of November 20, 1927:

Things are happening down Greenwich Village way.  
Old landmarks are disappearing. Houses in which

celebrities once lived are giving way to tall, modern buildings. Even the old frame dwelling south of Washington Square—where the city hangman is said to have lived when the gallows stood where Stanford White’s arch now stands—has given up the struggle. (Pope 1927)

In this section I will show that though the term “gentrification” may date from the early 1960s, and did not gain traction in New York until the 1970s, it describes a phenomenon that is much older. Indeed, New York City has experienced several waves of gentrification. A row house renovation movement in the early 20th century made “silk purses from sows’ ears” and led rich New Yorkers to move into recently poor neighborhoods. The “roaring twenties” saw gentrification cover broad sections of the city in a process halted by the onset of the Great Depression. The next major wave occurred in the 1950s through the 1970s. The third wave, in the 1980s, picked right up where the 1920s wave ended, until it, too, was halted by a financial calamity, the stock market crash of 1987. A fourth wave took root in the 1990s and reached a crescendo in the second decade of the 21st century.

“The transformation,” wrote Virginia Pope of Greenwich Village in 1927, “began some time ago when people of discriminating taste began buying old houses and changing them within and without. Today a walk down any street west of Sheridan Square toward the North River will show whole blocks of houses being made over.”

Pope noted that “The westward movement is most noticeable along the queer streets that run on the bias and execute unsymmetrical angles between Seventh Avenue and Hudson Street. Morton, despite bands of happy children, whose playground is the pavement, bears a promise of taking on quite an aristocratic air, and so do Commerce and Bedford Streets.” The “gentrification” of these streets was well under way in 1927. But by the time Jane and Robert Jacobs bought their house at 555 Hudson Street in 1947, the process of gentrification that Virginia Pope wrote about had ended—or, more accurately, gone into a protracted hiatus. The Great Depression, World War II, and postwar “urban renewal” put the brakes on a process that had already transformed many parts of New York—and was set to transform many more—until the stock market crash of October 1929 put a (temporary) end to it.

Virginia Pope wrote about the West Village. An example of abortive 1920s gentrification would be the area not yet known as the East Village, the northernmost portion of the

Lower East Side, situated to the east of Washington Square. This had been an “aristocratic” neighborhood of substantial row houses carved out of the old Stuyvesant estate in the early 19th century. In the second half of the 19th century the patricians were mostly gone, replaced by German immigrants. The Germans in turn yielded to newer immigrants from eastern Europe, especially Jewish immigrants from the Russian Empire, and Second Avenue between Houston and 14th Streets became the fabled “Yiddish Rialto.” But for all the glitter of the Yiddish theaters and of the Café Royal, this was one of the poorest parts of Manhattan, an overcrowded neighborhood of tenements, and one of the least likely parts of Manhattan to go upmarket.

But in 1929 the marketing brochure for a new high-rise apartment building at the northeast corner of Second Avenue and 10th Street stated: “In the heart of the old aristocratic Stuyvesant and Astor Place section, a new and distinctive residential neighborhood is rapidly springing up. This district, so rich in City tradition, is once more coming into prominence as a desirable location for the modern home” (Columbia University Libraries 1929). The building, Warren Hall, developed by Henry Kaufman, was designed by Emery Roth, famed for his luxury towers on Central Park West. “The roof apartments are designed in the form of country bungalows, yet have all of the city conveniences, large private roof gardens and wood-burning fireplaces.” The brochure concluded: “The building will be completed in October, 1929.”

It was not just one starry-eyed developer who had his sites on this neighborhood. Across the street, the venerable Church of St. Mark’s in the Bowery also sought to cash in on the red-hot real-estate market. The pastor, the Rev. William Norman Guthrie, hired no less than Frank Lloyd Wright to design three distinctive high-rise apartment buildings to be grouped around the church. “Odd-Type Buildings to Overlook Church” said a *New York Times* headline—on October 19, 1929.

Here was a neighborhood primed for gentrification. But the gentrification was nipped in the bud. Warren Hall opened as scheduled, but the Frank Lloyd Wright buildings were never built, and for the next half century or so the neighborhood remained poor, with high rates of disinvestment, abandonment, and crime. Nonetheless, it followed a kind of blueprint when, beginning in the 1950s, many writers, artists, actors, dancers, musicians, filmmakers, and their bohemian hangers-on, no longer able to afford Greenwich Village to the west, moved into the old tenements, row houses, and lofts from the Bowery east to

Avenue D. Soon the press began calling the area the “East Village.” By the 1980s gentrification went into overdrive, symbolized by the conversion of Christodora House, a unique, high-rise settlement house overlooking Tompkins Square, into luxury condominium residences. Christodora House was vandalized on the August 7, 1988, during an anti-gentrification demonstration that turned into an ugly, violent riot (Purdum 1988). The demonstrators—which included young people who lived as “squatters” in abandoned buildings—could do nothing to stem the tide of gentrification.

American cities, not least New York, grew by the “upward and outward” model: The more “upward” one’s income, the more “outward” from the center of the city one tended to move. As improvements in transportation in the early 19th century made commuting possible for the first time, well-off New Yorkers went constantly on the move. The first commuter suburb was Brooklyn Heights, across the East River from lower Manhattan. The development of Brooklyn Heights as an affluent commuter suburb resulted from the introduction in 1814 of steam ferry service between Brooklyn and Manhattan (Jackson 1985, pp. 25-32). The steam ferry was the first practical form of urban mass transportation, and in the decades that followed various land-based forms of transportation, such as the horse omnibus, the horse streetcar, and the steam railroad, together with the cutting through of streets, led New York’s middle and upper classes to move ever northward up Manhattan Island from their original base at the southern tip of the island. Beginning around 1820, the well-to-do shunned density and crowding, seeking always to live in the most up-to-date houses in the quietest, most salubrious neighborhoods, where everything was new and where commerce and residences were “zoned” in strictly separate sections. (Before zoning laws, which in New York date to 1916, this “zoning” was accomplished through restrictive land covenants.) The well-to-do moved north from the Battery to the area we now call SoHo, where today you can see interspersed among the late 19th-century cast-iron loft buildings a number of 1820s Federal-style row houses attesting to those long-ago days when this was an elite residential zone. In his 1880 novel *Washington Square*, which is set in the 1840s, Henry James has his protagonist, Dr. Austin Sloper, reminisce about his late wife: “in 1820 she had been one of the pretty girls of the small but promising capital which clustered about the Battery and overlooked the Bay, and of which the uppermost boundary was indicated by the grassy waysides of Canal Street.”

Dr. Sloper has moved to the north side of Washington Square, where the houses were built in the early 1830s. (The oldest house on the north side of Washington Square, No. 20 Washington Square North, was built in the late 1820s as a *country house* by a wealthy man whose primary residence was downtown at Bowling Green.) Fashionable New York of the 1830s formed a lateral band in the blocks just north of Houston Street, from Washington Square east to Lafayette Place and St. Mark's Place. From there, the elite moved north to Union Square, which was once an elegant residential square, and Gramercy Park, which is still an elegant residential square, thence to Murray Hill, in the East 30s and 40s, thence to the Upper East Side of Manhattan (Lockwood 1976). The most desirable areas were those farthest from the rivers. New York's working waterfronts were once the city's economic lifeblood, far too valuable in their wealth-producing capacity to be replaced by residential or recreational uses. Not until recent years, when New York has shed the waterfront industries that had been a mainstay of the city's economy for more than 300 years, has the city been graced with glittering waterfront parks and esplanades and condominium towers. Thus, Fifth Avenue and Park Avenue, as inland as you can get on Manhattan Island, became the most prestigious addresses.

The well-to-do tended, throughout the 19th century, to stay put for, on average, about fifteen years before marching off to the newest *faubourg* to the north, usurping farmland for new subdivisions of row houses and mansions. We have a name for this process: *sprawl*. We may view the development of Manhattan as a glass filling with milk. The island filled to the brim around 1900. That is when the last of Manhattan's farmland yielded to the developers. Of course, the process continued—as it continues to this day—beyond Manhattan, and many people happily left Manhattan for new subdivisions, typically much more in line with our modern idea of “suburbia,” in the outer boroughs of New York City and beyond in New Jersey, New York State, and Connecticut.

There were, in the 19th century, excellent reasons for moving outward. Perhaps chief among these was the metropolitan scourge of infectious disease. If the same percentage of New Yorkers today died in an epidemic as died in the cholera epidemic of 1834, we would count as many as 200,000 deaths, a figure that makes the mind reel. The movement uptown was a movement to greener pastures, so to speak, away from the crowded and pestilential conditions that inevitably engulfed any established neighborhood in these years of historic population increases.

In addition, from the 1830s on, the rise of the commuter lifestyle meant that whole sections of the city were, for the first time, exclusively domestic. This domesticity—“family values,” we might say—became an ideal that accounts, in part, for Americans' desire—not shared by Jane Jacobs!—to keep sharply separate the domains of commerce and of the nuclear family.

The Manhattan ideal had always been to own a new house in the latest style. If one's budget did not permit the construction or purchase of a new house, one bought (or rented) a house that was “pre-owned.” That was *déclassé*, and it was a measure of J.P. Morgan's disdain for fashion that he chose to live in a pre-owned house. By the time of the Civil War, the middle class found itself in a squeeze, unable to afford even a pre-owned house, and desperate to avoid the fate of the very poor, which was to live in the multiple-unit residences known as tenements. Many middle-class New Yorkers chose to reside in boarding houses. For all their inconveniences, especially for families, at least boarding houses were *houses*. The second half of the 19th century may even be called the boarding house era in New York's history, and most of the city's row houses put in a stint as a boarding house (Cromley 1990, pp. 11-31). Eventually, marketers gently coaxed the middle classes to accept apartment living, and within a very short period of time Manhattan became an island predominantly of apartment dwellers. Apartment developers piled on the amenities, marketers touted convenience, and architects strove to make middle-class apartment buildings look nothing like the tenements of the poor. Some neighborhoods developed from the start, or nearly so, with a mix of apartments and row houses. The Upper West Side of Manhattan is the most famous example, where such apartment buildings as the Dakota, on Central Park West, date back to the earliest years of the neighborhood's development. But other early apartments for the middle class were inserted into older, downtown, neighborhoods. Famously the first of all the city's middle-class apartment buildings, the Stuyvesant, was built on East 18th Street, just south of Gramercy Park. Where Henry James's bourgeois physician Dr. Austin Sloper lives in the 1840s in the still-fresh 1830s row houses of Washington Square North, in 1882, every one of the five full-floor apartments in the “French flat” building at 21 East 21st Street, near Gramercy Park, was occupied by a physician and his family (Gray 2007).

But what most comports with our idea of gentrification is perhaps the row house and stable renovation movements of

the early 20th century, which may be regarded as the first of four phases of gentrification in New York City's history.

In 1909, a prominent Denver architect, Frederick J. Sterner, had recently moved to New York when he renovated a 60-year-old Greek Revival row house at 139 East 19th Street. The block, between Irving Place and Third Avenue, had once been fashionable, but by 1909 was tired and shabby, with loft buildings coming to dominate Irving Place and the Third Avenue El roaring past at the other corner. It had been many years since figures of fashion had made their homes in the area. "It took Frederick Sterner to reverse this trend" (Gray 1997). Sterner removed the house's front stoop (he considered it pompous), covered the house's red-brick facade in a cream-colored stucco, put in a sloping, red-tiled roof, and around the entrance added accents of beautiful, museum-quality Mercer art tiles. When he was finished, the house was like a shaft of sunlight on an otherwise dark and dreary block. From a house exactly like thousands in the city, he crafted a Mediterranean fantasy, or, as Helen Lowry put it in the *New York Times* in 1921, he made "a silk purse out of a sow's ear" (Lowry 1921). Sterner's house garnered immediate and sustained attention. It alerted New Yorkers to the possibilities of old houses. In 1911, *House Beautiful* magazine, in an article on 139 East 19th Street, asked: "Why does anyone build a city house when a remodeled one can be made so fascinating?" Sterner started a revolution. He was, said Helen Lowry, "the father of a new period as truly as was ever George Washington, Father Abraham or the Pilgrim Fathers." That "new period" was the one of "gentrification," although it would be many more years before the term was coined. And indeed Sterner, in collaboration with the banker and aesthete Joseph Thomas, undertook the renovations of several other houses on the block, as major figures from the worlds of the arts and fashion—from the silent film superstar Theda Bara to the banker and legendary art collector Chester Dale—moved to the street. None of these people would have considered moving there only a few years earlier. Sterner himself moved to Yorkville, a working-class section of the Upper East Side of Manhattan, where he did much of what he had done on 19th Street, and helped make Yorkville into a place of fashion. The area would, with the construction of ultra-luxurious high-rise apartment buildings along the formerly very modest East End Avenue in the 1920s, become one of the most chic sections of all New York.

Something of the sort was in the air even before Sterner. In 1902 the sculptor Frederick Triebel leased a disused stable in MacDougal Alley, in Greenwich Village. The stables

of this mews once served the fine houses of Washington Square North, where Henry James's Dr. Austin Sloper lives. But as the patrician class decamped for northerly precincts, it took with it its horses. Newer residents of the Village were poorer, and did not own horses and carriages. And that left many superannuated stables. Triebel's inspiration was that one of these structures would make an ideal sculptor's studio. And so he installed skylights and moved in with his family (Gray 1994). MacDougal Alley, a "dirty, foul-smelling court," according to the *New York Sun*, was soon transformed, as Triebel's friends—including such prominent sculptors as Daniel Chester French, Henry Kirke Bush-Brown, and James Earle Fraser—joined him in the alley. In 1906 the *Craftsman* magazine wrote of MacDougal Alley: "in the summertime the doors of the studios are thrown open, and the artists' wives take their chairs on the clean, cemented court, while the children play in perfect safety around them." And then, a year later, a MacDougal Alley studio was purchased by another notable sculptor, this one named Gertrude Vanderbilt Whitney. This remarkable woman was very serious about her art, and about her patronage of other artists, and wished to be right in the center of things, which in 1907 meant being in MacDougal Alley. She was also one of the richest women in America. And thus began the downtown diaspora of uptown plutocrats' children.

The January 9, 1921, *New York Times* ran a front-page headline "Mrs. W.K. Vanderbilt to Live in Avenue A." More precisely, Anne Harriman Sands Rutherford Vanderbilt was moving to a then little-known two-block section of Avenue A called Sutton Place. Mrs. Vanderbilt, the widow of the grandson of Commodore Vanderbilt, had recently sold her and her late husband's 50-year-old house, one of the city's most stupendous mansions, on Fifth Avenue and 52nd Street, in order to renovate a by comparison extremely modest house in a neighborhood the *Times* said "a generation or so ago was the heart of a charming home district" (Mrs. W.K. Vanderbilt... 1921). Since then, however, it had become a working-class neighborhood, even a "slum," with tenements and factories and subdivided row houses adjacent to the noisome working waterfront of the East River. Mrs. Vanderbilt's new house faced across 57th Street to a brewery. The movement, not only of Mrs. Vanderbilt but of a whole group of society figures, including Anne Morgan, the daughter of J.P. Morgan, to Sutton Place was, said the *Times*, "due to the scarcity of homes and also to the renewed activity in private dwelling buying for occupancy. This condition of affairs has led to the development of several east

side blocks.” As Helen Bullitt Lowry, a sharp-eyed observer of the quirks and mores of her time, wrote in the *New York Times* in 1921: “The Vanderbilts and Morgans and Judy O’Grady have become sisters under the stucco. For the first time in the history of respectable cities...the millionaires are moving into the cheap old dwelling houses that were foreordained at their beginnings to harbor, in the relaxation of their evening suspenders, middle-class filing clerks and floorwalkers with tired feet” (Lowry 1921). Soon, Sutton Place was, as it has remained to this day, one of the most exclusive neighborhoods in Manhattan, home over the years to such people as J. Paul Getty and Aristotle Onassis.

Note what the *Times* said: “renewed activity in private dwelling buying for occupancy.” This is something much like what we have seen in recent years, as old houses that had been put to other uses, perhaps become schools or been broken up into apartments, have been bought and returned to use as single-family homes. In addition, and more significant, the people, like Mrs. Vanderbilt and Miss Morgan, who did this buying sought not to live in apartments, which suited most other people of their rank (by 1921 a Park Avenue apartment was already the ritziest address in America), but in the kinds of old houses that, as *House Beautiful* put it in 1911, “can be made so fascinating.” All of the gentrification of the 1910s and 1920s can be seen to have, as today’s academic social scientists like to say, both a “production side,” in which old, marginal areas of the city could be seen to have great potential for profit, and a “consumption side,” in which those moving to these areas seek out a certain lifestyle or, to use a phrase beloved of academics, “habitus.” And this habitus, if you will, can be seen in all the gentrified developments of the era, in which new tastes and modes of living sprang up in reaction to the Gilded Age excess, well known to Mrs. Vanderbilt and Miss Morgan and Mrs. Whitney of MacDougal Alley, that seemed no longer to make sense after World War I (when many Francophilic New York society ladies volunteered in French military hospitals) and at a time of tremendous personal liberation, especially for women. Women’s clothing was no longer constraining, architecture was simpler and jauntier, manners more relaxed, servants many fewer. There was sexual experimentation. And café society was born.

In 1927 the literary critic Edmund Wilson wrote, in the *New Republic*, in tones reminiscent of the plaintive blogger of *Jeremiah’s Vanishing New York*, “Returning to New York at the end of the summer, one was astounded to find...whole blocks of familiar shops, delicatessen stores and old saloons snatched away without warning from under one, so as to

change the very configuration of the streets....during the summer, there have been erected on lower Fifth Avenue two monstrous apartment houses....They loom over the Village like mountains, and they have completely altered its proportions....Such distinction as still lingered in the Village with the low roofs of the old provincial city has thus been rendered largely vain: one can see nothing but those coarse swollen mounds, blunt, clumsy, bleaching the sunlight with their dismal pale yellow sides and stamping down the old fashionable square and the newer Bohemian world alike” (Wilson 1927). Two things here bear pointing out. One is Wilson’s invocation of the “old provincial city,” presumably an ideal to be upheld, however *unprovincial* New York, and Greenwich Village, had become by 1927. Second, those “coarse swollen mounds” are, in 2016, many sensitive and nostalgic New Yorkers’ very idea of “old New York,” and are protected landmarks.

As Robert Fogelson notes in his illuminating book *The Great Rent Wars: New York, 1917-1929*, between 1903 and 1917 New York City developers added an astonishing 400,000 rental apartment units to the city’s inventory—more than 28,500 a year (Fogelson 2013, p.18). In 1909, the vacancy rate was 8.1 percent (*ibid*). Beginning in 1917, the year the U.S. entered World War I, this all reversed. A standstill in residential construction led to housing shortages. In 1920 the vacancy rate fell to 0.3 percent (Fogelson 2013, p. 29). By comparison, the 2014 residential rental vacancy rate was 3.45 percent (Gaumer 2015). In 1920, in response to the dizzying rise in rents, New York State enacted rent control. Challenged in the courts by landlords, the matter was finally adjudicated by the U.S. Supreme Court in April 1921. Justice Holmes said rent control was “too obviously justified to need explanation” (Fogelson 2013, p. 249). Rent control expired in 1929, was hardly needed in the 1930s, and, as a result of the wartime emergency, was re-instituted, this time by Federal decree, in 1943. There are several respects in which the New York City of today resembles that of the 1920s: income inequality (which peaked in 1929), the housing shortage (even more severe than now), and gentrification.

The gentrification of the 1920s ended abruptly with the stock market crash of October 1929 and the ensuing Great Depression. Gentrification did not resume for a while. The 1950s and 1960s were decades of what was widely described, with good reason, as decline in most older American cities, including New York. Many old neighborhoods were transformed by “urban renewal” (or, as some of its critics termed it, “urban removal”), other old neighborhoods continued a

spiraling physical deterioration that began with the disinvestment of the Great Depression, crime soared, and many urban problems began to appear to be intractable as the vast majority of well-educated, middle-class Americans chose to live in suburbs well outside the jurisdictional boundaries of major cities. In New York, the inevitable conflict between escalating costs to deal with increasing social problems and a declining tax base led to the city's perilous fiscal condition of the mid-1970s. The situation in New York City seemed so dire that in February 1976 Roger Starr, Housing and Development Administrator in the administration of Mayor Abraham Beame, advocated "planned shrinkage" (Fried 1976). "Under this," wrote the *New York Times's* Joseph P. Fried, "the population losses occurring in certain slum areas, including Brownsville in Brooklyn and the South Bronx, would be 'accelerated' by public policy." According to Starr, the goal was "to hasten the population decline already begun in these neighborhoods so that, ultimately, further cutbacks in city services could be concentrated in a limited number of areas." In the 1970s, New York City lost more than 800,000 residents. In defense of his South Bronx district, Representative Herman Badillo said, "If there is no money for rebuilding, you certainly can demolish the abandoned buildings and give money to community people to plant crops and flowers." It is shocking from the standpoint of 2017 to recall how closely, forty years ago, discussions of New York City resembled early 21st-century discussions of Detroit. But what today seems most salient about New York from the 1950s through the 1970s is not physical deterioration, or crime, or population losses, but rather the trickle back into the city of a portion of the educated middle-class and the resumption of the row house renovation movement that had been a feature of the 1920s. In the 1950s, Brooklyn Heights was "rediscovered" by a hardy band of young professionals who appreciated the old houses—and the one-stop commute to Wall Street. (This movement even featured in the popular culture: The family—the Lanes—in the *Patty Duke Show*, which aired from 1963 to 1966, were one such Brooklyn Heights family.) In the 1960s, young professionals seeking to buy old brownstones set their sights on Fort Greene and Cobble Hill and Park Slope. At the same time, the Upper West Side of Manhattan emerged from a decades-long torpor. Artists, especially sculptors (who have the most peculiar spatial needs), began moving into the disused manufacturing lofts of lower Manhattan, just as they had once moved into the disused stables of Greenwich Village. While all of these movements of people are ones we associate with gentrifica-

tion, it is important to note that from the 1950s through the 1970s these movements took place against the background of what appeared to be a declining city. Not until the 1980s, when New York had pulled back from the fiscal brink and Wall Street enjoyed an historic boom, did something like 1920s-style gentrification return to New York, and property values throughout the city skyrocket.

On October 19, 1987, the Dow Jones Industrial Average, having reached an all-time high in August (2722.42), fell by 508 points, losing 22.6 percent of its value in one day. Just as happened in 1929, a real-estate slump followed in New York City. Four years later, in the *New York Times*, Thomas J. Lueck wrote of a woman who bought a 400-square-foot apartment in Christodora House in 1986, "near the height of New York City's real estate boom," for \$125,000. In 1991, she was trying, without success, to sell, "even at a loss" (Lueck 1991). According to the Consumer Price Index, \$125,000 in 1986 would be \$173,000 in 1995. Yet in 1995, a 400-square-foot apartment in Christodora House sold for \$70,000, and a year later an apartment of that size sold for \$80,000.<sup>4</sup> It was looking as though the anti-gentrification protesters of 1988 were having the last laugh. The next year a 400-footer sold for \$150,000. That's more than twice the price of two years earlier, but still not keeping pace with inflation (in 1997 our original \$125,000 was worth \$181,000). Not until 2000 does that change, when a 400-square-foot unit went for \$230,000. In 2005, an apartment of that size sold for \$600,000 (almost three times the rate of inflation). In 2013, when our original \$125,000 was worth \$261,000, a 350-square-foot apartment in Christodora House sold for \$750,000. Last year, a 500-square-foot apartment sold for \$931,000.

"In some corners of the city, the experts say," writes Lueck, "gentrification may be remembered, along with junk bonds, stretch limousines and television evangelism, as just another grand excess of the 1980's." Lueck quotes Columbia University urban planning professor Elliott Sclar: "As the dust settles, we can see that the areas that underwent dramatic turnarounds had severe limitations. Rich people are simply not going to live next door to public housing." I wonder what Professor Sclar (who is still at Columbia) thinks of the north side of 18th Street between Ninth and Tenth Avenues, in the shadow of the High Line. On that block stand the Fulton Houses, a 945-unit New York City Housing Authority low-income project from the early 1960s. Just to its west stands Chelsea Modern, a chic, glassy 27-unit condominium building designed by the acclaimed

architect Audrey Matlock and built in 2009. One apartment in Chelsea Modern sold for nearly \$11 million.

In reference to such places as the Lower East Side and Manhattan Valley, where gentrification had extended its tentacles just before the crash, Clark Halstead, a Manhattan real-estate broker, used the term “degentrification.” And Lueck quotes an anti-gentrification activist in Manhattan Valley: “Gentrification hasn’t done as much damage as we feared. Perhaps because it has ground to a halt.”

Park Slope, in Brooklyn, is a poster child of gentrification. Since 1982, the *New York Times* has four times featured Park Slope in the newspaper’s popular “If You’re Thinking of Living in...” column in the Sunday Real Estate section. In 1982, the column noted that houses in “prime areas” were going for \$200,000 (Bird 1982). In 2015 dollars that’s \$495,000. In 1987 (the height of the eighties boom), the *Times* reported that a 3-story brownstone in central Park Slope cost \$750,000 (McKinley 1987), or, in 2015 dollars, \$1.578 million. In 1992, the *Times* said a central Slope house went for \$500,000 (Senft 1992), which is \$852,000 in 2015 dollars. Note the drop. It’s nearly half. Prices did drop precipitously between 1987 (the year of the stock market crash) and 1992, citywide by about 30 percent, but by more when expressed in real dollars. Then, in the 1990s, prices began to rise again: In 1998, a high-end Park Slope house went for \$1 million (Rather 1998), the 2015 equivalent of which would be \$1.48 million—showing, as in the case of Christodora House, how long it took New York City real estate to get back, in real-dollar terms, to where it had been in the 1980s.

#### IV.

“Gentrification studies” is very hot in academia. While economists and urban planners certainly study gentrification, the most intense group of gentrification scholars is to be found in university departments of sociology, geography, and anthropology. The sheer volume of academic writings on gentrification is daunting. As Tom Slater, of the University of Edinburgh, one of the most prolific figures in gentrification studies, has noted, gentrification studies represents “an immense body of scholarship, one so large that it makes summaries, syntheses, and concise critique a considerable challenge” (Slater 2011). Having described the basic history of gentrification in New York City up to just before our own time, my purpose of this section is to provide a brief, and inevitably sketchy, account of the interpretative strategies applied by the gentrification scholars

who have grown numerous in recent years both inside and outside of academia.

Among the academic scholars of gentrification belong Slater, the late Neil Smith of the City University of New York, David Ley of the University of British Columbia, and Peter Marcuse, professor emeritus at Columbia University. To this group we might add Suleiman Osman, of George Washington University, the author of the provocative, widely reviewed, and remarkably even-handed book *The Invention of Brownstone Brooklyn: Gentrification and the Search for Authenticity in Postwar New York* (Osman 2011), and Sharon Zukin, of the City University of New York, author of the widely cited *Loft Living: Culture and Capital in Urban Change* (Zukin 1982). It should be noted that Slater, Smith, and Ley are geographers, Marcuse an urban planner, Zukin a sociologist, and Osman a historian. On the other side are the writers and scholars Slater rather sneeringly labels “pseudo-intellectuals,” including Harvard economist Edward Glaeser, the University of Toronto’s Richard Florida, the architect Andrés Duany, who founded the Congress for the New Urbanism, and the writer Leo Hollis, author of *Cities Are Good for You: The Genius of the Metropolis* (Slater 2014). Recently, Tom Slater has written of University of Strathclyde urban design professor Sergio Porta, whose idea that gentrification naturally arises from the location of “betweenness centralities” in city plans, in such a way as to leave no doubt that he is the latest inductee into the ranks of the “pseudo-intellectuals” (Slater 2015).

In general, leading gentrification theorists such as Smith and Slater do not believe that economists or urban designers have a broad enough perspective to grasp the true nature of gentrification. As Tom Slater says, “The rising house expense burden for low-income and working-class households, and the personal catastrophes of displacement, eviction, and homelessness, are symptoms of a set of institutional arrangements (private property rights and a free market) that favor the creation of urban environments to serve the needs of capital accumulation at the expense of the social needs of home, community, family” (Slater 2011, pp. 571-572). In 1986, Neil Smith and Peter Williams argued against a too-restrictive use of the term “gentrification.”

If we look back at the attempted definition of gentrification, it should be clear that we are concerned with a process much broader than merely residential rehabilitation. Even into the late 1970s, this particular definition of gentrification *vis-à-vis* redevelopment may have made some sense. But as the process has

continued, it has become increasingly apparent that residential rehabilitation is only one facet (if a highly publicized and highly visible one) of a more profound economic, social, and spatial restructuring. In reality, residential gentrification is integrally linked to the re-development of urban waterfronts for recreational and other functions, the decline of remaining inner-city manufacturing facilities, the rise of hotel and convention complexes and central-city office developments, as well as the emergence of modern “trendy” retail and restaurant districts. Underlying all these changes in the urban landscape are specific economic, social and political forces that are responsible for a major reshaping of advanced capitalist societies: there is a restructured industrial base, a shift to service employment and a consequent transformation of the working class, and indeed of the class structure in general; and there are shifts in state intervention and political ideology aimed at the privatization of consumption and service provision. Gentrification is a visible spatial component of this social transformation (Smith 1986, pp. 2-3).

The original use of “gentrification” by Ruth Glass referred specifically to the rehabilitation of terrace houses in an old urban district. Smith and Williams, twenty-two years later, suggested a more expansive use to cover basically *anything* associated with the transformation of city economies from ones based on manufacturing to ones based on finance and services. We see in the New York City of the 1920s that gentrification was about both Frederick Sterner’s renovated row houses in Yorkville and the new high-rises of East End Avenue, about both the renovated stables of Washington Mews and the new high-rises (decried by Edmund Wilson) of lower Fifth Avenue. And it was even about Christodora House at Tompkins Square: Yes, it was a settlement house serving the poor residents of the area, but it was designed to incorporate an income-producing apartment hotel. In the 1920s, the deindustrialization of New York had yet to take place, and the city would remain the largest manufacturing center in the world until well after World War II. But it is worth noting in this context that some historians see in the *Regional Plan of New York and Its Environs* of 1929 a blueprint for that city’s transformation from a manufacturing to a financial and service center, and that it is hard, in reading that remarkable document, to tell where prophecy leaves off and prescription begins. (Neither Smith and Williams nor any of the other contributors to the seminal

1986 book *Gentrification of the City* mention the *Regional Plan*.) In their book *New York: An Illustrated History*, Ric Burns, James Sanders, and Lisa Ades call the *Regional Plan* “the most ambitious and far-flung reconception of the city ever undertaken” (Burns, Sanders, and Ades 1999, p. 374). The plan was sponsored by the Russell Sage Foundation beginning in 1921, when “a group of the most powerful men in New York,” from bankers to foundation heads to real-estate developers, came together to discuss and plan the future of the city. The plan was regional in scope, covering twenty-two counties in three states. Manhattan “was to be a new kind of center, stripped now of its port and manufacturing functions and given over largely to the new ‘clean’ industries arising in midtown and downtown: finance, banking, insurance, law, advertising, communications, and the executive offices of national corporations.” The plan envisioned Manhattan as the first post-industrial city of the world. It would be a place stripped of its grittier aspects, a place of offices, shopping and entertainment, and exclusive residential neighborhoods housing the captains of industry and the growing meritocratic elite. The plan did not foresee the globalization and other economic trends that would, some decades later, bring about the displacement of the city’s manufacturing. Rather, the plan suggested the relocation of Manhattan’s industry to the outer boroughs and suburban counties, where it could more readily be served by truck transportation. The plan envisioned a dramatic increase (that never happened) in regional rail transportation, and also the construction of a vast and intricate network of high-speed automotive roadways. The roadways, or many of them, were built, by Robert Moses, who was guided by the plan (though he played no role in creating it). The *Regional Plan* bears mentioning because it shows that there has been a persistent dream among an elite segment of New York society of transforming Manhattan into a gleaming post-industrial city. And this dream, it may be said, and the plan it created, shows, to some extent, the intentionality behind the city that has been gentrified in the broad sense described by Smith and Williams.

The work of the late Neil Smith (1954-2012) has been particularly influential. I would go so far as to say that in my own experience, Smith’s account of gentrification is as close to mainstream as any account gets among academic social scientists. Smith offers us two (among other) key concepts. These concepts are the rent-gap theory, and the revanchist city theory. Smith is said to be the leading figure in “production side” gentrification theory, which stresses the defining “role of capital and its institutional agents (public

and private) in creating gentrifiable spaces” (Slater 2011, p. 574). The “rent gap” is “the gap between the actual *capitalized* ground rent (land value) of a plot of land given its present use and the *potential* ground rent that might be gleaned under a ‘higher and better’ use. The latter might be brought about through the rehabilitation of existing structures on the land, complete redevelopment, or other transformations of existing uses and structures. Gentrification...is clearly one means by which the rent gap can be closed” (Smith 1987, p. 462). Smith is also known for his concept of the “revanchist city.” *Revanche* is French for “revenge.” In France after the Franco-Prussian War and the fall of the Second Empire, a nationalist political movement emerged both to regain Alsace and Lorraine, which had been lost to the Germans, and to ensure that nothing like the radical Paris Commune, which had briefly filled the power vacuum left by the fall of Napoleon III, would show its face again. Smith claimed that New York, following the urban decline and the failure of liberal urban policy in the 1960s and 1970s, and the tremendous rise in crime in the 1980s (New York City’s homicide rate peaked in 1990), was primed for an analogous revanchist movement, which was led by Mayor Rudolph W. Giuliani and involved “broken windows” policing, the privatization of public space, the clean-ups of Times Square and Bryant Park, and so on, all to make the city more comfortable for the middle and upper classes, to lure tourists, and to abet gentrification (Smith 1996).

Smith’s insistence, and that of many other academic scholars of gentrification, that gentrification inevitably leads to displacement is not shared by *all* scholars in the field of gentrification studies. In their paper “Gentrification and Displacement,” Columbia University urban planning professor Lance Freeman and Frank Braconi, of New York City’s Citizen Housing and Planning Council, and Freeman in his book *There Goes the ‘Hood: Views of Gentrification from the Ground Up*, argued that displacement caused by gentrification is not only overstated (Freeman and Braconi 2004; Freeman 2006). In fact, gentrification may work *against* displacement. Though the authors don’t say so, they echo a point made by the urbanist William H. Whyte in his 1988 book *City: Rediscovering the Center*: “Check the year-by-year changes in neighborhood households and you will find very few cases of direct displacement; that is, a renter going out the door as a homeowner comes in. Low-income renters are frequent movers; 40 percent of the renters in a city neighborhood will move” (Whyte 1988, p. 328). As Freeman and Braconi note, gentrification brings neighborhood improvements that provide an incentive for people to

stay. Overall, fewer people will move out of a gentrifying than out of a non-gentrifying or deteriorating neighborhood. Freeman’s and Braconi’s data was from the 1990s, and the situation may well be different now. It is also worth noting that the authors cite rent regulation as one of the ways disadvantaged people are able to stay put in a gentrifying neighborhood. In 1979, Hunter College’s Peter Salins, an urban planner and a great authority on New York City’s housing market, told the *New York Times* “there have been many more people pushed out by abandonment than have ever been moved out by so-called gentrification” (Freeman 1979).

“Those explaining gentrification from a consumption perspective,” wrote Slater, “reacted to simplistic neoclassical accounts of demographic changes and lifestyle preferences by illustrating how changes in the industrial and occupational structure of advanced capitalist cities, occurring as they did at a time of significant social and cultural upheaval (post-1968), produced an expanding pool of gentrifiers with a disposition towards central-city living, and an associated rejection of suburbia for the blandness and monotony it symbolized” (Slater 2011, pp. 574-575). The dominant figure in “consumption-side” gentrification studies is David Ley, a geographer at the University of British Columbia, whose most influential work has studied gentrification in Canadian cities. A key work by Ley is *The New Middle Class and the Remaking of the Central City* (Ley 1996). This “pool of gentrifiers” may be seen to be a “new middle class,” an educated meritocratic elite comprising Robert Reich’s “symbolic analysts” and Richard Florida’s “creative class.” Some commentators, such as Joel Kotkin, like to point out that for all the soaring property values in some central cities, the middle classes continue to opt for suburbia, especially when children are part of the picture (Kotkin 2013). Thus, those who opt for city living, whether with or without children, do so for “lifestyle” reasons. Nowhere is this better explained as it relates to the brownstone renovation movement of the 1950s and 1960s than by the historian Suleiman Osman in *The Invention of Brownstone Brooklyn*. The young, educated middle-class protagonists of Osman’s book sought to live more “authentically,” in historically dense, racially and ethnically diverse communities, in which their own sweat equity in the rehabilitation of their old houses gave them something of the sense of living in a handmade world. Osman examines the contradictions of this movement, as, inevitably, the interests of the young newcomers and those of the other residents collided, as for example when rooming houses, which had been an important housing safety

valve for a vulnerable portion of the urban population, were renovated back into single-family homes (Osman 2011). Osman does not use the word *habitus*, made famous by the enormously influential French philosopher and social theorist Pierre Bourdieu after he borrowed it from the art historian Erwin Panofsky's book *Gothic Architecture and Scholasticism*. The term refers to the constellation of mental and physical habits, tastes, values, and social practices that form the shared basis of a given group in society (Bourdieu 1977). In describing brownstoners' quest for authenticity and reflexive recoil from suburbia and its perceived values, Osman is describing their *habitus*. An example of an important gentrification study that makes explicit, named use of *habitus* is David Ley's essay "Artists, Aestheticization and the Field of Gentrification" (Ley 2003) and Tim Butler and Garry Robson's *London Calling: The Middle Classes and the Remaking of Inner London* (Butler 2003). The *habitus* is at the heart of group identity, class formation, and social reproduction. For many gentrifiers, living in the central city is felt as, in David Ley's words, "a credential, a mark of distinction in the constitution of an identity separate from the constellation of place and identity shaped by the suburbs" (Ley 1996, p. 211).

Tom Slater's "pseudo-intellectuals" do tend to take rather a more benign view of things, not in that they do not feel that gentrification operates with diminishing returns, but that they do not accept such ideas as the view of the revanchist city that is taken as gospel by many academics. Edward Glaeser, Glimp Professor of Economics at Harvard, is one among many who has written that central city housing in the most productive cities around the world needs, rather urgently, to be made more affordable to a broader swath of the public (Glaeser 2011). It is a matter of national economic importance: A productive city of four million people will be an even more productive city with an extra million. But that extra million won't be productive until it joins the other four million. Thus, as the *Economist* magazine pointed out in 2015, the loss to GDP is staggering:

High housing prices force workers towards cheaper but less productive places. According to one study, employment in the Bay Area around San Francisco would be about five times larger than it is but for tight limits on construction. Tot up these costs in lost earnings and unrealised human potential, and the figures become dizzying. Lifting all the barriers to urban growth in America could raise the country's GDP by between 6.5% and 13.5%, or by about \$1 trillion-2 tril-

lion. It is difficult to think of many other policies that would yield anything like that (Space and the City 2015, p. 11).

And it is all because homes in the most productive central cities have become so prohibitively expensive. Gentrification scholars following Neil Smith would say that that is the handiwork of "capital and its institutional agents." Others, however, would say that a combination of well-meaning legislation—including but not limited to rent regulation and restrictive zoning—and rent-seeking behavior (including NIMBYism in its many forms) has made it all but impossible for the market to keep up with demand. Glaeser says we need to add more housing, any kind of housing, and we should reduce barriers to building tall residential buildings. (Glaeser himself grew up, happily, in an Upper East Side high-rise.) The liberal blogger Matthew Yglesias, the economics writer Ryan Avent, and the liberal economist and columnist Paul Krugman are among those who promote this idea (Yglesias 2012; Avent 2011; Krugman 2016). Richard Florida, whose *Rise of the Creative Class* may be the most widely read book on cities to be published in the 21st century, argues that economic dynamism does not attract the creative class; the creative class attracts economic dynamism (Florida 2002). Thus, cities should focus their development efforts on attracting the creative class. Indeed, this is not only what cities should be doing, it is what successful cities have already, and sometimes inchoately, been doing. Florida stresses the lifestyle attractors of the creative class. This class seeks to live in places that embody their values. They want vibrant street life, bike lanes, historic architecture, places for outdoor exercise, cafés and restaurants, farmers' markets, a strong local music scene, and "diversity," which in the Florida version does not mean economic diversity of the kind that might be found in New York in the 1950s, but cosmopolitanism, multiculturalism and, especially, a welcoming atmosphere for gays and women. In other words, Florida offers a vision of the *habitus* of gentrification. And he suggests that if cities enact policies to provide for these things—if they build bike lanes, alter their zoning codes to allow old factories to be converted to apartments, build waterfront greenways, ban discrimination against gays, and fund the arts—then economic success will follow, as the right kind of young, educated, talented workers will be drawn to those cities. Florida may appeal to policymakers across the U.S. and Canada, but he is also harshly criticized from both the left and the right. From the right, he is pilloried for his view that cities should priori-

tize lifestyle accommodations over old-fashioned tax policy (Malanga 2004). From the left, Florida gets raked over the coals for his seeming neglect of the working class and of the most vulnerable members of society for whom bike lanes and laws encouraging outdoor cafés are hardly the public policies that address their needs (Slater 2014).

In the June 6, 2016, issue of the *American Conservative*, that magazine's national editor, the polymathic writer Benjamin Schwarz (who is not so much a conservative as a heterodox admirer of the Marxists Eric Hobsbawm and E.P. Thompson), in an essay titled "Cities without Children," discussed the concept of the Vibrant Urban Neighborhood, or VUN, as championed by Florida and as it has emerged as the template of the gentrified neighborhood. Schwarz writes,

The VUN—with its standard-issue bike shops and vintage clothiers, its "authentic" live-work spaces and dive bars, its predictable purveyors of vinyl records and locally sourced foodstuffs, its *de rigueur* venues for generically hip "live music," its uniform throngs of overwhelmingly unmarried and childless active or aspiring knowledge workers ritualistically intoning the shibboleth of "diversity"—has metastasized from those erstwhile white-hot centers of hipness—Williamsburg, the Mission, Wicker Park, Silverlake—converting Bell Town and Bushwick, Echo Park, Seward, and the Pearl District, transforming D.C.'s H Street Corridor, LA's Highland Park, and dozens of other districts (Schwarz 2016).

It is hard to find commentary on contemporary gentrification without a litany of the lifestyle accouterments of the so-called creative class. This reminds us of how strongly gentrification is an aesthetic—and, much more than that, a habitus. As such, we can see it as very much a consumption-side phenomenon. Schwarz smartly writes of how promoters, like Florida, of the VUN pay lip service to Jane Jacobs. (Florida, it should be noted, knew his fellow Torontonian Jane Jacobs and is an attentive student of her work.) But, Schwarz notes, "contemporary celebrants of 'vibrant' cities would find the urban neighborhood life of Jacobs' time—even in New York, by far the country's most sophisticated, chaotic, and lively city—largely bereft of what has come to be understood as vibrancy." Indeed, the West Village, and other neighborhoods, described by Jacobs in *The Death and Life of Great American Cities* in 1961 bears no resemblance to the gentrified neighborhoods of today. Not that gentrifi-

cation was not taking place in the West Village in the 1950s, for it surely was. In what had been a largely working-class neighborhood hard by the working waterfront of the West Side piers, where longshoremen, when they got off work, went to the corner tavern for a shot and a beer, steadily crept the "knowledge workers," such as Jane and Robert Jacobs. She was a journalist and editor, he an architect. Soon after they were married, the Jacobses decided they did not want to follow the generational blueprint and move out of the city to raise their family. As they looked around for a neighborhood they liked and a house they could afford, they found 555 Hudson Street, a 16-foot-wide, three-story house with a first-floor storefront. They bought it for \$7,000, in cash, in 1947 (Flint 2009, p. 14). Many newcomers, like the Jacobses, had "discovered" the neighborhood after being priced out of the blocks nearer Washington Square, to the east. The newcomers liked the crooked streets and quaint houses of this far western edge of Greenwich Village. But one person's "quaint" is another person's "substandard," and the area was marked for "urban renewal," or the government-financed rebuilding in which old houses and tenements would be replaced by modern housing. Jane Jacobs famously, and successfully, led the fight to prevent this from happening to her neighborhood. They had bought a fixer-upper, and fixed it up. Some academic scholars of gentrification view Jane Jacobs as an apologist of gentrification. In 2007, in an essay on the exhibition *Robert Moses and the Modern City*, Neil Smith wrote:

Where today's Moses revisionists and the Jacobs defenders meet, is in the politics of gentrification. They are for it, just by radically different means....As for Jane Jacobs, she has become the patron saint of a petit bourgeois gentrification whose self-righteousness fortifies itself precisely in its opposition to the big capitalist gentrification of Moses and the master builders. Even if it is largely supplanted around the world by a wholesale remaking of urban space along class lines, block-by-block gentrification persists today and carries the imprimatur of Jacobs' 'fix-up-the-neighborhood' ethos (Smith 2007).

When, in an illuminating interview with Jane Jacobs in 2001 the writer James Howard Kunstler asked her how she felt her old West Village neighborhood had fared since she wrote about it forty years earlier in *The Death and Life of Great American Cities*, Jacobs said,

Oh, it has done very well. If other city neighborhoods had done as well there would not be trouble in cities. There are too few neighborhoods right now, so that the supply doesn't nearly meet the demand. So they are just gentrifying in the most ridiculous way. They are crowding out everybody except people with exorbitant amounts of money. Which is a symptom that demand for such a neighborhood has far outstripped the supply (Kunstler 2001).

In *The Death and Life of Great American Cities*, Jacobs wrote of “unslumming”:

The key link in a perpetual slum is that too many people move out of it too fast--and in the meantime dream of getting out. This is the link that has to be broken if any other efforts at overcoming slums or slum life are to be of the least avail. This is the link that actually was broken and has stayed broken in places like the North End [of Boston], or the Back-of-the-Yards in Chicago, or North Beach in San Francisco, or the unslummed former slum in which I live (Jacobs 1961, p. 271).

As for “unslumming,” according to the Consumer Price Index, the \$7,000 the Jacobses paid for their house in 1947 is the equivalent of \$74,000 in 2015. In 2015, 47 years after the Jacobses moved out of the house, 555 Hudson Street sold for \$3.3 million. The neighborhood that New York City had designated as a slum in the 1950s was, half a century later, the most expensive neighborhood in Manhattan. Even in the 1950s, there were those who saw that the neighborhood's fate was to become more and more expensive. The journalist Anthony Flint, in his book on the struggle between Jacobs and Moses, wrote of James Kirk, a sixty-year resident of the Village and former president of the Greenwich Village Association, who opposed Jacobs' vision of neighborhood preservation:

For the past ten years, dock workers, truckmen, longshoremen and people like that who lived in the Village near their pier work have had to move away because of evictions,” he told reporters in October 1961. “Their buildings were torn down to make way for new luxury apartment buildings, or they were converted into smaller apartments which are too expensive and not large enough for their families (Flint 2009, p. 120).

Kirk did not see Jacobs' “unslumming,” in which neighborhood residents stay put, but rather something more like gentrification, and the fear of displacement. This shows, I think, the fine line between unslumming and gentrification. As Jacobs told James Howard Kunstler, there may be too few potentially unslummable neighborhoods, with the result that unslumming hypertrophies into gentrification.

The Jacobses' neighborhood in the 1950s was still largely working-class, but increasingly home to artists and writers, young professionals, gays, and so on. But the quotidian life of the neighborhood was hardly hip or glamorous. And, as Schwarz notes, the New Yorker of today who spouts Jacobsian wisdom, if whisked back in time to Hudson Street of the late 1950s, might find that it lacks much, indeed most, of what “vibrancy” connotes in the 21st-century city. I say that Jane Jacobs described her neighborhood in a transitional period. By the time her book was published, the deindustrialization of New York had set in. There are those—Neil Smith, or Robert Fitch, the author of *The Assassination of New York*<sup>5</sup>—who believe the deindustrialization was a deliberate policy carried out in the interests of those who stood to benefit from a “higher and better” use of the land. It is hard to argue with this, especially if you have ever seen the *Regional Plan* of 1929. But, as the *Regional Plan* failed to foretell, New York would have deindustrialized anyway. In any event, deindustrialize the West Village did. The docks shut down, the factories closed or relocated, and so on. And more and more of the “creative class” moved in. The American industrial city of the 1950s is gone, and it is not returning. As a result, some industrial cities, such as Detroit, have suffered horribly. Some industrial cities, such as Pittsburgh, have more or less successfully reinvented themselves as post-industrial cities. And some industrial cities, such as New York and Chicago, had more diversified economies and deeper resources and stronger global connections than other cities and were able to move forward from the decline of their industrial bases. The transitional period was of course wrenching. The disinvestment, abandonment, crime, and debasement of the public realm from the 1960s to the 1990s were even more significant than gentrification in displacing the poor, shutting down mom-and-pop stores, and so on.

Finally, in order to grasp the kind of problem gentrification is, we must understand that not all gentrification is the same. When Benjamin Schwarz pillories the VUNs and says they exist for young people without children, he seems to be engaging in a straw-man polemic. Park Slope, Brooklyn, is a VUN, a place of beautiful historic architecture, sky-high

property values, walkable leafy streets and a 585-acre park acknowledged as one of the world masterpieces of landscape architecture, of more bars, cafés, and restaurants than a person could sample in a lifetime, of what has to be one of the highest wine store-per-capita rates in the country, of excellent public transportation, of lots of attractive, energetic young people on the streets, and so on—and yet the neighborhood is defined by its families and children. Amy Sohn’s novel about the neighborhood is called *Motherland*, and the humorist John Hodgman, who lives in Park Slope, says “I live in a utopian commune ruled by children.” Schwarz does not mention Park Slope in his article, but he does mention Williamsburg, also in Brooklyn, and a VUN that, if not as child-centric as Park Slope, nonetheless is a place of more and more children. Of course, one could carp about how children have become another lifestyle accessory, about the absurdly expensive children’s clothing stores and the status competition among parents, about helicopter parenting and all the kids wearing helmets and knee guards while riding their Razor scooters—but those are not the things Schwarz has chosen to ridicule. The point is, we do all tend to get a bit carried away by clichés. In this sense, an overemphasis on lifestyle or habitus may lead us astray, by leading to too great generalization.<sup>6</sup>

On the other hand, it is important to see that taste and habitus are indeed drivers of gentrification. Economists who suggest that urban housing shortages are really shortages of housing for the well-to-do, which forces the well-to-do to seek what housing it can, thus placing upward price pressure on old houses and marginal neighborhoods, may to some extent miss the point. Many of these well-to-do *prefer* old houses and marginal neighborhoods. The “brownstoners” of the 1950s and 1960s did not move to Cobble Hill or Park Slope—or Hudson Street—because of a dearth of luxury high-rises. And so it is today. The reappraisal of the virtues of city living that took place in the 1950s and 1960s, and of which Jane Jacobs was a part, led to the “valorization” (to use a term favored by many academics who write about gentrification) of brownstones and lofts. And so I believe we have to make distinctions, such as one between those who rent apartments in the glossy glass high-rises designed by Costas Kondylis at the far western end of 42nd Street, and those drawn to the leafy Victorian streets of Cobble Hill. The two, by the way, cost about the same. And both count as “gentrification.”

That is why we have to make a distinction between gentrification from the 1950s to the 1980s, and gentrification since the 1980s. The original gentrifiers, the “brownston-

ers” and loft lovers, had numerous housing options. They could have followed the majority of their generational cohort into suburbia, or they could have rented apartments in the moderately priced and generally well-managed white-brick high-rises of the Upper East Side or around Gramercy Park. But a small, hardy band set out for Brooklyn, seeking adventure and authenticity. L.J. Davis’s 1971 novel *A Meaningful Life*, about a trade magazine editor who lives with his wife in a perfectly nice Upper West Side apartment and then decides to buy and renovate a brownstone in Clinton Hill, Brooklyn, turns the quest into a kind of absurdist farce—except that anyone who went through the same process, of ridding a brownstone of its rooming-house tenants, of realizing the needed repairs and restorations were far beyond one’s capabilities, of feeling profoundly alienated in a hostile neighborhood, may well read it as a social document. The first wave of academic gentrification studies, not to mention the very term “gentrification,” refers primarily to that.

But that initial wave, or those initial waves, at least in New York, Boston, and San Francisco, took place in cities that were not beset by crippling shortages of housing. New York City in the 1970s *lost* nearly a million in population. One of the city’s greatest problems, as in Detroit today, was housing abandonment. And, according to Neil Smith’s rent-gap theory, disinvestment and abandonment were necessary conditions for the flourishing of gentrification. Today, most of that low-hanging fruit has been plucked, and new waves of gentrification, or hyper-gentrification, appear to be occurring.

V.

I believe there have been four distinct phases of gentrification in New York since the early 20th century. There are commonalities and differences, and these I think can be seen to advantage in the following schematic format.

1920s: severe housing shortage, rent control, movement of the very rich to marginal neighborhoods (Sutton Place, East End Avenue, far West Village), personal emancipation, beginning of an immigration hiatus, *Regional Plan of New York and Its Environs*.

1950s-1970s: deindustrialization, movement of “brownstoners” to marginal neighborhoods with high rates of disinvestment, abandonment, and deteriora-

tion; rent control, ascendancy of the historic preservation movement.

1980s: end of the fiscal crisis, historic boom on Wall Street, repositioning of New York as a global capital, ferocious gentrification and increase in property values up to the stock market crash of 1987.

1990s-today: gingerly uptick following the 1987-1992 fall of the property market and abrupt halt of gentrification, historic reductions in crime, “revanchist” policies, renovation of Bryant Park, makeover of Times Square, and since 2000 galloping escalation of housing prices, housing shortages (though not as severe as the 1920s), heavy foreign and corporate investment in real estate throughout an unprecedentedly broad swath of the city (from 57th Street to East New York), strong immigration (near to but not equaling that of the early 20th century), a more diverse and global population than ever before, transformation of the formerly industrial waterfronts to recreational uses (High Line, Brooklyn Bridge Park, Hudson River Park).

Gentrification is many-sided. We may ease some of the burdens it places on the city by building more housing. But we must remember that gentrification has occurred in times both of housing surplus and of housing shortage. But, as Jane Jacobs suggests, it is not just that demand for housing has outstripped the supply, it is also that demand for certain kinds of housing, and of certain kinds of neighborhoods, has outstripped the supply.

Finally, the history of gentrification tells us that it is not a continual or irreversible process, although it usually requires a major economic slowdown to halt the process. There were in New York major housing-market resets after the 1929 and 1987 crashes, but only market hiccups after 9/11 and the financial implosion of 2008. And if New York should prove resilient through future crises, then perhaps *The Onion* may prove the most prescient of all commentators: “Report: Nation’s Gentrified Neighborhoods Threatened by Aristocratization” (Report... 2008).

## NOTES

1. According to the *Governing* report, “Researchers define gentrification differently. For this report, an initial test determined a tract was eligible to gentrify if its median household income and median home value were both in the bottom 40th percentile of all tracts within a metro area at the beginning of the decade. To assess gentrification, growth rates were computed for eligible tracts’ inflation-adjusted median home values and percentage of adults with bachelors’ [sic] degrees. Gentrified tracts recorded increases in the top third percentile for both measures when compared to all others in a metro area.” It is worth noting that there is no standard quantitative methodology for defining gentrification.
2. According to the British real-estate web site rightmove.co.uk, the average price of a house in Wapping in 2016 is £648,179 (or \$834,855).
3. When Fleetwood wrote, in 1979, one million of the city’s 7.5 million residents were foreign born, or thirteen percent. In 2013, in a city with a million more residents, more than thirty-seven percent were foreign born.
4. The price data come from the streeteasy.com web site, <http://bit.ly/2c0eJpn>, accessed September 4, 2016.
5. Robert Fitch, *The Assassination of New York* (London and New York: Verso, 1993).
6. The French philosopher Michel de Certeau suggested this very thing in his critique of Pierre Bourdieu.

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