

On My Block

Gentrification in Brooklyn

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Sheepshead Bay, Crown Heights, & Park Slope



Brooklyn, New York

Brooklyn has become the most populated borough in New York City due to the influx of people moving in. Many parts of Brooklyn today are becoming gentrified to the point where they have become unrecognizable. Gentrification is the process of renovating and improving a house or district so that it conforms to the taste of the middle class. Gentrification is able to take place in our neighborhoods because of rezoning. Rezoning is the action or process of assigning land or

property to a different category of restrictions on use and development which allows developers to build higher buildings, more offices, and townhouses. Developers are able to come into low income neighborhoods, purchase a building or lot, and build these expensive residential buildings for their benefit of a profit. Being that we live in a capitalist society wanting to make a profit is always the main concern of developers, but they are do so at the expense of low-income residents, in low-income neighborhoods. These residents are directly being affected by gentrification because they are forced to pay high rents or unwilling have to leave their neighborhoods to make room for residents who are willing to pay the high price tags.

There are many neighborhoods that have been gentrified or are currently undergoing gentrification. The three neighborhoods that we will be talking about are Sheepshead Bay, Crown Heights, and Park Slope. Sheepshead Bay has been gentrified for a while now and went through a beneficial change for the people as it is now a better place to live in. Crown Heights is currently going through gentrification for the better of the community, but there really is no other way to make the community better without an increase in prices. Once money becomes involved, that is when an issues arise because not a lot of people need that kind of benefit if it involves raising prices. Last but not least, Park Slope is a neighborhood that has had one of the most dramatic changes due to gentrification. It has gone from a diverse neighborhood, to now a majority of caucasians who have brought along with them expensive supermarkets, Starbucks, and high rent prices.

Minhaj (Sheepshead Bay)



When I first moved to Sheepshead Bay I was about 4 years old. As of what I remember, Sheepshead Bay was a very diverse area to live in. There was a variety of different types of people that live there from Caucasians, to African Americans, and Hispanics. On the other hand

there weren't that many Indian people. My family was one of the first to move there. It felt a bit uncomfortable in the beginning but we ended up actually fitting in. It felt uncomfortable because being one of only Indian and Muslim people there others use to first look at us like we didn't belong there. It seemed like they thought we were going to start problems. At the time when we moved I felt as if the neighborhood was slowly changing, now that I'm older I realized this was my neighborhood at the beginning stage of gentrification. There were many houses being built and renovated. When we first got settled in, there was a lot of work going on and I remember not being able to sleep because of all the noise from the banging.

There were a lot of people moving in after a while because of the apartment buildings being fixed and sold. A lot of the residents in my neighborhood rents were being raised around this time. This wasn't beneficial for the people that have been there for a while. After a while there was a huge increase of Russian and Chinese people starting to move in. I feel that it was a bit unfair for the people that couldn't afford the rent there, however there was a decrease in my neighborhoods crime rates around that time according to my mom.

There were many problems in Sheepshead Bay back then as there was in many neighborhoods in Brooklyn, but when it comes to cost of living Sheepshead Bay is not as bad in comparison to other neighborhoods.

One positive aspect of gentrification in Sheepshead Bay is that now it's less crowded and the rents are much cheaper than other places such as Astoria even though they both have undergone gentrification. According to "Streeteasy" the median price for a one bedroom condo in Sheepshead Bay it is \$489,500, while in Astoria it is \$620,000 and in Park Slope it is \$699,000. Therefore, I feel that as if Sheepshead Bay has changed dramatically for the better because seeing Sheepshead Bay now and comparing it to how it was when I first moved there has brought a lot of benefits to the community. I'm happy to see my neighborhood reach the level it is at today.

Karina (Crown Heights)

When I moved to Crown Heights I was surrounded by a huge Caribbean population. I missed being in Grenada, but I was reminded of home when I saw all of the Caribbean restaurants and Caribbean hang out spots. As the years have gone by I've seen a lot of places where I use to buy food close down and be replaced



by more urban stores like bike shops and organic markets. I will admit that yes some gentrified spots have benefited my community because it forces us to eat healthier and add some physical activities to our lives. However, we all know that being healthier comes at a price and my community consists of mainly middle income individuals who can't afford to shop at these stores on a daily basis. From the year 2014-2019 I have seen a drastic change when I walk down the street. Before there were 99 cent stores and cheap clothing boutiques, but now I see too many "Space available for lease," because owners can't afford the absurd rents. Landlords are purposely raising rents to push these business owners out and allow businesses like pet spas, and cigars bars to take over therefore gentrifying our neighborhood. My neighborhood which is predominantly black has also become gentrified because of the increase of higher paid-individuals finding residents to live in my neighborhood. Landlords are putting middle income residents out to make space for higher paying residents who can pay prices like \$2,700 for a one bedroom apartment, barely making a dent in their pockets.

From first hand experience, my family and I recently moved into a new apartment because my mom couldn't afford to pay the rent at our old apartment. It was just too much. And looking for an apartment in the Brooklyn area for an affordable price is near to impossible. We searched for a really long time and went to a lot of open houses and at almost every open house there was as much caucasian individual as there was african Americans and I'm talking about areas in Brooklyn like Brownsville, Crown Height, Flatbush Ave, East Flatbush, etc. History has shown that in these neighborhoods in Brooklyn you will find a higher African American, middle income population. Even though research has shown that when there is an influx of white people into a neighborhood crime rates have gone down, but it simultaneously takes away our black culture. These people are coming in and displacing individuals who have lived in these places for 30+ years who aren't leaving because they want to but because they don't have no other choice.

There is nothing wrong with cultural diffusion but when it's taking away one's culture and replacing it with another it's not okay. These people who have lived in their neighborhood for a long time deserve the respect to have an alternative to keep their homes, the home that they raised their kids in and now their grandkids. In a few years Brooklyn as we know it will be no more. We as a community need to take steps to preserve our neighborhoods and its culture. According to The Atlantic "gentrifying neighborhoods were generally more diverse when it came to income, race, and education as opposed to non-gentrifying neighborhoods." Yes, We want to promote diversity and equality but not at the expense of displacing middle-income individuals who make have lived in these neighborhood for years and who can only afford to pay affordable rent prices.

Amani (Park Slope)



I've lived in Park Slope all 18 years of my life, my whole family from my mother down to my grandmother have also lived in Park Slope for most of their lives as well, moving from house to house within the neighborhood. Park Slope was once upon a time a neighborhood filled with empty lots, burned down buildings, and minorities. Today, that Park Slope seems like it *never* existed. It's now filled with organic supermarkets that are overpriced, a ton of dogs, Starbucks,

gyms and expensive small stores that are empty nearly every time I pass one. Now don't get me wrong, seeing the neighborhood transform aesthetically is great, crime rates have even gone down, and the neighborhood looks prettier of course, but we've sacrificed what made Park Slope, Park Slope! The diversity is gone, most of the original people have left, our small family owned businesses are almost all gone, the bodegas are becoming expensive, and rent prices have rose tremendously. But this change did not happen overnight, it has been in the works for several years yet the effects of gentrification are apparent now more than ever and need to be addressed.

Many people tend to think that with gentrification comes diversity, but statistics do not agree with that. According to "Statistical Atlas" Park Slope is filled with 69.2% whites, 12.9% hispanics, 5.5% blacks, and 7.4% Asian. I think it's clear here that we do not have much diversity number wise, but instead we have a majority versus a minority. In almost any given situation the majority party always wins, which is why Park Slope has changed to benefit the whites who are of a higher income class. Working/middle class families like my own struggle monthly to keep up with the ever increasing rent.

Looking for an affordable apartment in Park Slope is nearly impossible. Scrolling through Zillow, the cheapest priced apartment I found was \$1,700 and that was only for a one bedroom apartment. About two buildings down the street from mine, an 8 family rented apartment building has been completely knocked down to make room for the more lavish condominiums to be built in the next coming months that will most likely be priced in the millions. When these developers come into an almost fully gentrified neighborhood like Park

Slope, they tend to forget about the people who already lived there that can not afford these rent hikes.

Mayor Bill de Blasio has made plans within the recent years to bring more mixed income developments throughout the boroughs. According to Julie Satow, writer of “Living in the Mix” there are plans in the making “whereby developers are required to include a certain number of lower-priced housing units within a market-rate project when building in neighborhoods that have been rezoned to allow for more density.” This use to be a voluntary action, but will now be required of developers to do as they build. These plans will slowly be put into place throughout the next 10 years, but I believe we still more of an implementation to make a push for low/middle class families to have more opportunities in their own neighborhoods.

Finding the Balance

These are just three of the many neighborhoods within Brooklyn that have experienced gentrification or are currently in the process of being gentrified, but there truly is no one real reason why people come to live in Brooklyn and gentrify it. Gentrification has hit Brooklyn with full force bringing along its pros and cons, but we have to find more ways to incorporate all families in gentrified neighborhoods no matter their income.

The Fifth Avenue Committee is located in South Brooklyn, Park Slope. Their goal is to allow “advances [in] economics and social justice by building vibrant, diverse communities where residents have genuine opportunities to achieve their goals, as well as the power to shape the community’s future.” Committees like this tend to go unrecognized because they’re so small and are not properly advertised to the public. These committees tend to give apartments on a lottery basis where families have to wait until a computer “spits out their name” for an affordable apartment within these newer construction of condominiums through an affordable housing generating sites like NYC Housing Connect or NYC Mitchell-Lama Connect. It’s nearly impossible to get an apartment through lottery because the guidelines are so strict and thousands of people apply. (Amani) My mother has been looking for an affordable apartment though these sites for nearly 4 years and is still waiting to be called for an apartment even with the help of the Fifth Avenue Committee.

One solution that we think can help the residents of gentrified neighborhoods to withstand their ground and continue living in their neighborhoods is to develop laws that directly affect landlords, holding them to stricter rules. For examples when landlords mistreat tenants with the hopes that they will move out of their apartments in order to raise rent for new residents, these landlords should face repercussions. There should even be a law that says “if landlords want residents to leave they themselves have to find their residents affordable housing.” These

are only suggestions that may help slow down the rise or better the effects of gentrification in our neighborhoods, but there needs be more permanent solutions to keeps our blocks intact. We want to promote economic equality and mixed income neighborhoods, not destroy them.

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