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Gentrification in Sunset Park

When one thinks of Sunset Park, one thinks of the beautiful brownstones, the amazing diversity of food and the community, the people. An area made up of mostly Latinos and Asians, a place where the N, D and R lines run through. However, Sunset Park is slowly but surely becoming one of New York's many gentrified neighborhoods. Gentrification, as I'm sure many of you have heard of, is when wealthy individuals create new developments in a neighborhood, attracting new people and displacing its original members while also increasing the cost to live there. In other words, the wealthy begin to "fix" an area, in this case a neighborhood. The reason I am here speaking on this controversy is because of its effects, and the issues as a result. With gentrification come consequences, such as displacement of members, increased housing cost.

Before I continue with the gentrification of my neighborhood, I want to give some background on it. Sunset Park is in the Southwest part of Brooklyn, close to Greenwood Cemetery. Sunset Park got its name after the actual park located in the neighborhood which has a playground, a pool, a gym, a big field, sport fields, and some more. If you were to go there when the sun sets,

you would understand the name. It's a nice view, and if you wait some more, until it's dark out, you see the big towers in Manhattan from there, sitting on the grass.

The few times I have gone to the park, I see kids getting off soccer practice, people playing basketball as well as older men playing volleyball while listening to music, everyone having a good time. The park begins on 5th Ave and extends to about 7th Ave while also being about 3-4 blocks wide. If you continue past the park on 5th Ave, you begin to see what makes Sunset Park Sunset Park. You begin to notice many people speaking Spanish, you see fruit stands, little food stands on the corners, some food trucks, as well as stressful traffic depending on the day. There is a lot of congestion there as a result of the cars that double park on the street. Since the B63 line passes by 5th Ave, if it cannot get through, you're waiting behind him for as long as it takes for him to continue which causes a long line behind. There are many stores and restaurants on 5th Ave which means there needs to be unloading of goods, but there isn't much room which causes the traffic. When you go down to 4th Ave, you see apartments, stores, restaurants. If you go to 3rd Ave, you see the Gowanus Expressway above you and you see stores, the biggest one probably being Costco which is always crowded. However, there is also something important and huge on 3rd Ave as well, Industry City. Industry City consists of a couple of huge buildings which contain many things ranging from restaurants, stores, offices, shipping centers, etc. In the recent years, Industry City became alive, it was renovated, and it looks amazing. They host events such as small concerts and in the summer they host a live band with a DJ that performs songs in Spanish and people dance and have a good time. These are the good things about Industry City, however it's not all great for some folks living in Sunset Park.

With the renovation of Industry City, new businesses formed as a result and now many new people come to the area either as a worker or a customer. The prices of rent increased in the nearby area as a result of Industry city. According to Eduardo Cuevas, “Nearly 32% of residents spend more than half their income on rent in the community district encompassing Sunset Park, slightly higher than Brooklyn and New York City overall...” (Cuevas, 2021). Many folks here already spend plenty of their salaries on the rent, so gentrification only adds more stress to their already stressful lives. To add insult to injury, Covid is making it worse as rent is going to be increasing now that things are normal again and even more people are coming. Now that this area has become a small place that new people flock to, developers of course want to make new properties, for those people to live close to it. The increase in rent may be good for residents who own homes though, as they could increase the rent they charge their tenants. However the attention and people that new projects bring to Sunset Park is taking away what makes this area great. Sometimes when I’m nearby, I see many people leaving Industry city, walking up to 4th Ave and walking into the 36 Street Subway Station. Ultimately, these new buildings aren’t for the people who already live in Sunset, let’s be real. It’s for the ones who are wealthy who want to move in. Since this recent boom of Industry, I have seen the wealth difference with my own eyes. As a result, it is not uncommon for me to see the occasional Bentley, brand new Mercedes along with brand new BMWs, porches, etc on my block. You wouldn’t see things like this two years ago, things are changing fast in my neighborhood.

However not every new building is necessarily bad, in Sunset, there is a new project underway, a new building replacing a Dunkin Donuts right by the 25th Street Station. Though most of it is going to be normal apartments, some of them are going to be for the community, i.e. affordable

housing and will not be expensive (Richling, 2021). The idea here is for residents who live here, who cannot afford housing, to move in. Even though at the end of the day it may do more harm and good, it's a step in the right direction for our community here. I asked a member of my community what they think a solution to the gentrification in Sunset Park can be, they responded with, "a potential solution would be to incorporate the Sunset Park community in these new projects. For example, during the creation/development of Industry City, many Sunset Park residents worked and formed part of the staff. This gave the people job opportunities." I agree with her reply as she makes a good point and idea. She suggests that these new developments include or have the residents in mind when creating them. This will allow for the community to be involved, which means it won't just be for the new folks coming to the neighborhood. Overall, we as a community need to stick together and have to get involved in these new projects, we cannot let them build projects in our neighborhood while ignoring it's current residents.

Bibliography

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