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presentation  
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Neighbourhoods  
CURA

**FREEHOLD TOWNHOMES From \$389,990 CA**

There goes the



Neighbourhood



**Gentrification and the Displacement Question**

# Outline

1. The rise and fall of displacement as a research question
2. Understanding displacement
3. The methodological problem
4. Addressing an enduring dilemma

# 1. The rise and fall of displacement as a research question

“Larger Victorian houses, downgraded in an earlier or recent period – which were used as lodging houses or were otherwise in multiple occupation – have been upgraded once again.....Once this process of ‘gentrification’ starts in a district **it goes on rapidly until all or most of the original working-class occupiers are displaced and the whole social character of the district is changed**” (Ruth Glass, 1964, p.xviii).

# Early publications

- Laska and Spain (1980) Back to the City: Issues in Neighborhood Renovation (6 chapters on displacement)
- Schill and Nathan (1983) Revitalizing America's Cities: Neighborhood Reinvestment and Displacement
- Palen and London (1984) Gentrification, Displacement and Neighbourhood Revitalization
- Smith and Williams (1986) Gentrification of the City

# Since the early 1990s – displacement gets evicted from gentrification research

## Why?

- Attention was elsewhere
- Theoretical/ideological squabbles
- Methodological problems - “Measuring the invisible”

## 2. Understanding displacement

Peter Marcuse, 1986:

- ***Direct last-resident displacement*** (through rent increases or physical means)
- ***Direct chain displacement*** (prior households occupying same unit also displaced)
- ***Exclusionary displacement*** (households unable to access property because it has been gentrified)
- ***Displacement pressure*** (when a household moves because a neighbourhood becomes less and less liveable under gentrification)

**Replacement** = “where working class homeowners take advantage of the rise of property values to retire, sell out and move to the suburbs or beyond.....A process of slow replacement of a group which is contracting by one which is expanding.” (Hamnett, 2003)

### 3. The methodological problem:

*“It is difficult to find people who have been displaced, particularly if those people are poor... By definition, displaced residents have disappeared from the very places where researchers or census-takers look for them.”*

Kathe Newman and Elvin Wyly (2005) “The right to stay put, revisited: gentrification and resistance to displacement in New York City”, Urban Studies, forthcoming.

- Freeman and Braconi study of displacement in New York City (JAPA, Winter 2004)
- Examined triennial New York City Housing and Vacancy Survey (questions pertaining to demographic characteristics, employment, housing conditions and **mobility**)
- Found that between 1996-1999, lower-income and lesser-educated households were 19% **less** likely to move (in 7 gentrifying neighbourhoods studied) than those elsewhere, and concluded that displacement was therefore limited.
- They suggested that such households stay put because they appreciate the improvements taking place in these neighbourhoods
- The national media have picked up on these findings and used them to say that gentrification is essentially a good thing, *despite the fact that Freeman and Braconi cautioned that gentrification still robs a city of its affordable housing stock, and restricts housing opportunities of the poor* (Marcuse's exclusionary displacement)

- Their study is quantitative, and therefore cannot comment on traumatic individual experiences of displacement
- It omits a crucial question: are people not moving because there are no feasible alternatives available to them in a tight/tightening housing market (i.e. that so much of the city has gentrified that people are trapped?)

So, what might we learn if we *mix methods*?

“The difficulties of directly quantifying the amount of displacement and replacement and other ‘noise’ in the data are hard to overcome. It may be that **further research at a finer spatial scale using a more qualitative approach could usefully supplement this work.**”

Rowland Atkinson (2000) “Measuring Gentrification and Displacement in Greater London”, Urban Studies 37 (1) p.163

*In a huge literature over three decades old, there are almost no qualitative accounts of displacement.*

## 4. Addressing an enduring dilemma

- How do we get low-income communities beyond the impossible non-choices of either unliveable disinvestment and decay, or reinvestment and displacement?

“In the long run, the only defense against gentrification is the ‘decommodification’ of housing.... Decent housing and decent neighbourhoods ought to be a right, not a privilege. That of course is unlikely to be achieved through a series of reforms; rather, it will take a political restructuring even more dramatic than the social and geographical restructuring we now see.”

Smith and Williams, 1986, p.222.

Short of a revolution, resist!

Brooklyn's Fifth Avenue Committee and the 108-square block **Displacement Free Zone**



- delegation of local clergy sends the landlord a letter asking him/her to reconsider the rent increase/eviction
- if this fails, local legal services take the case through the courts, making it more expensive for landlord to proceed
- if this fails, the DFZ team hold the landlord publicly accountable for his/her actions. Activities = picketing in front of the landlord's home, boycotting the landlord's business, or generating substantial media attention about the unfairness of the eviction

**40% drop in evictions since 1999**

**Purpose: to make 'profiteering' landlords think twice about raising rents to unfair levels, and to protect the ethnic diversity of the neighbourhood**



## Some local context:

**“The specific impact of gentrification on Toronto tenants is to exacerbate the tightness of the rental market by causing the withdrawal of generally cheap accommodation from this market. The fate of displaced tenants is a matter for particular concern, as they are forced into more expensive housing.... Especially among poor rooming-house residents, gentrification can occasion homelessness by contributing to the disappearance of much of this type of accommodation.”**

Pierre Filion (1991) “The gentrification-social structure dialectic: a Toronto case-study”, International Journal of Urban and Regional Research 15 (4) p.563.