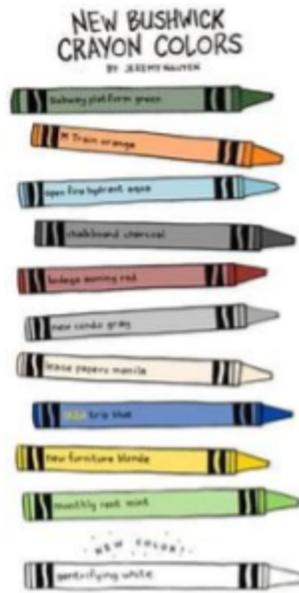


**Yash Parikh**

### **The Power Found Within Gentrification**

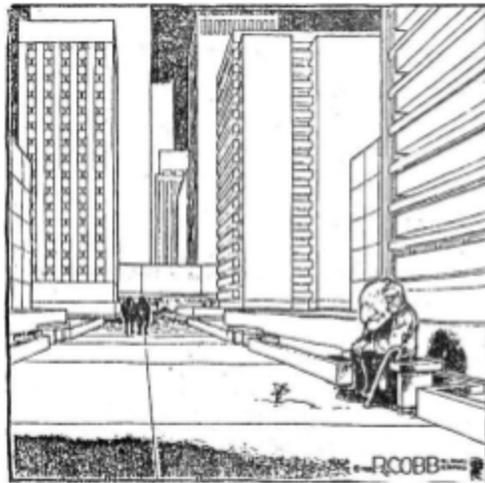
Urbanization within the United States of America grew exponentially within the country from the latter 18th century to earlier 19th century. The urbanized locations that had been created were unprecedented, bringing with them constant change and renewal. In many of these locations, the inevitable change led to a common image- one dominated by the affluent people of an area. This gentrification has been present throughout the annals of American history—with strong commonalities linking otherwise random events. At the time of Reconstruction, the images conjured up are of inclusive communities created by a government that was working for the people—however, the natural progression of these communities would often have undertones that connote discrimination against large groups of people. Visual depictions of gentrification have long attempted to depict scenes in a divided manner, a gentrified society juxtaposed directly with an entirely different non-gentrified society. Oftentimes, the intention is to show two entirely different societies, one from before and one from after. Despite their intentions, these visual representations end up capturing the reality of gentrification; the change is simply an external change in a society that is divisive.



Source: Jeremy Nguyen, *New Bushwick Crayon Colors*, Bushwick Daily, no date

The external change does not end with the buildings and the appearance of the city. The issue of gentrification is a pervasive issue that affects society on all of the levels. Jeremy Nyugen is attempting to highlight the pervasive nature of gentrification. Even colors that normally would appear to be other colors are now named after the affluent luxuries that, in a normal society, not everyone would have access too. The colors have been renamed to represent different elements of the city. Despite this renaming into abstract concepts, the concepts remain grounded with the city of New Bushwick. The white color is also depicted on the bottom, captioned with a label that says “new color”. Through this change, and the vertical layout of the crayons, Nyugen is able to show how the white is accompanied by these other qualities of the new city. The white appears to be an important afterthought, gentrification created this concept through the division of society first. Alongside of this, the colors are not replaced, and just the labels are modified,

which represents the new connotations for material objects upon the affluent entrance into a society. The change is a outward difference, the colors remain the same as they might appear in a set of crayons, they are simply presented in a different light, one that glorifies even the ordinary and attaches to them new characteristics that divide the population. The Fourteenth Amendment promised to hold all citizens in an equal light, but the societal constructs of color and its connotations defeated the purpose of this. Thus, the white population is regarded as a new attraction despite the fact that legally they were supposed to all have been held in the same light. This cartoon shows the difference between laws and abstract concepts brought into attention by society, and the inherent differences due to the inability of the law, and especially the Fourteenth Amendment in particular, to create a grassroots movement.



Source: Ron Cobb, *Untitled*,  
Republished by The  
Guardian, 1981

Alongside of this, gentrification isolates certain groups that are unable to fend for themselves as others escape gentrification. Ron Cobb recognizes this in his artwork from 1981, he does this through showing the man sitting in the foreground, near the discolored sidewalk,

while others move closer and closer to the industrialized part of the image. The entire location has been gentrified, and the image shows how gentrification divides portions of the population based on affluence, and not necessarily just race. However, the buildings depicted in both the foreground and the background are visually similar.. The author had created this to show the effects of gentrification on the city. Notably, the man is staring at the flower that remains from the past, prior to the concrete. This symbol harkens to the world before the gentrification, and it shows that the man is stuck in the past and seemingly cannot escape this. His advanced age is also indicative of the fact that he has been stuck in the past and is unable to change anything. Thus, the effects of gentrification had forced him out, while in the background the same tall buildings stand and the two dark figures continue forward into the city that had only undergone a physical makeover.



Source: Unknown Artist, *Untitled*, Duke University, 1921

Locations across the world reflect this physical change, pictured here in Greenwich Village, NYC. Two rich white men can be seen attempting to sell a newly refurbished property to a potential buyer. This can be seen by the presence of Pepe, who was an architect of the time. Vincent Pepe was a real estate promoter in Greenwich Village in 1921 (Gray). The artist also chooses to include a painter, denoted with his shriveled posture, walking out of the gated community. Although this image shows the painter leaving the gated community, the vendors have their importance shown through their upper-class garb. In this piece, the artist is attempting to show the relationship between the social status of an individual and their placement in the new gentrified society. The architect and the designer stand looking for suitors to buy their house, and despite the studio is up for sale, the painter is dejected and is seen leaving the community. This image shows the divisive nature of gentrification on the minority, which is furthered by the fact

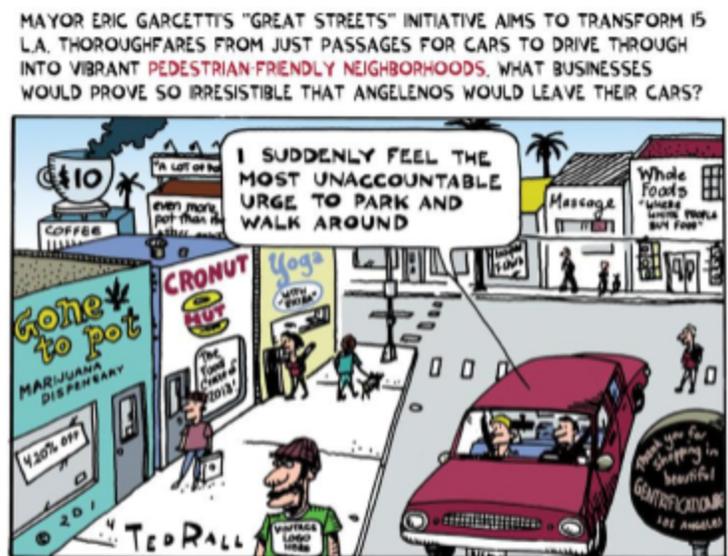
that there are three rich white men and only one painter. The men, both historically and through their depiction, share in common the society and the place where they lived, the painter out of place in this new location but still where he belongs in a vibrant Greenwich village where many artists live. The man, old in age, travels alongside the paintbrush and his profession. In doing so, the man is attempting to leave a familiar place simply due to its outward change, the men are selling a studio that could be the painter's former studio, and he exits through a new gate that signifies his exit from a familiar land. The building is still referred to as a studio, which is uncharacteristic of the time when real estate had high value, and thus the change is only outward. Nonetheless, this outward change is powerful enough to force the painter to separate himself from his workplace.



Source: Bill Bramhall,  
*Untitled*, NY Daily News,  
February 26th, 2014

Even recently, gentrification can be seen in locations such as NYC. The artist uses Spike Lee as a vessel to capture the effects of gentrification. Spike Lee is a Brooklyn native, having moved there not long after being born in Atlanta, Georgia ("Spike Lee"). Through Spike Lee, the cartoonist here is attempting to show the character's concern with the community and

the generalization that the gentrification has created. The author shows Spike Lee being frustrated, and the people are portrayed as going through the motions of their everyday life despite suffering, which once again shows how gentrification is ever present and divisive despite a superficial change. In that sense, the hat itself is representing gentrification, and the use of a hat is very particular, it ensures that the people that are shown are shown in their entirety, they are simply given a tag of Brooklyn. Likewise, the latte shop is a constant in the image, and it has not changed physically, the comments were about the effects of the people. The coffee shop represents the stability of the community despite gentrification, and it further explains the divisive nature of gentrification with simple changes to a society. Spike Lee himself is holding a cup of coffee, which connects him to the building around him, despite the newfound Brooklyn hat that shows the gentrification that even he is experiencing despite his wealth.



Source: Ted Rall, *Untitled*, LA Times, 2014

Many parallels exist between the gentrifications in locations across the country. In Los Angeles, despite the gentrification being created by other affluent members of society, and seemingly without connection to the affluent members of New York, a similar conclusion is reached. With this cartoon, the cartoonist, Ted Rall, is attempting to hint at the inability of gentrification to appeal to all people. It attempts to ridicule the legislation of the new Mayor, who claims that areas such as these would be more interesting and would attract more tourism domestically, with the other affluent people. Instead, it shows that a completely gentrified society would still not apply to the common LA resident. The phrase “I suddenly feel the most unaccountable urge to park and walk around” displays the irony in the situation. The white man had already seen the society and the latest trends do not appeal to him, such as the Cronut Hut, supposedly a fad in this new Los Angeles. The man’s sarcasm allows Ted Rall to capture the essence of the society and to demonstrate that the society is no different as it once was, despite legislation being passed. Much like the Fourteenth Amendment states, the legislation passed should not impede on the rights of the people—and in this case, the man is exercising his right to remain in the car and not exit the car. Even political gentrification plays a role in this scenario, much as the Confederates were barred from participating in the US government after the fourteenth amendment, the decision was made by a committee that is mostly white and is not representative of the entire population. Thus gentrification even affects the very reason this political cartoon was created—it is heavily involved with the legislation that is being ridiculed.



Source: Dave Simonds, *Untitled*, *The Economist*, February 9th, 2015

Dave Simonds is trying to depict the overall drastic change in the lifestyle of a gentrified society by showing a flipped, almost mirror image in which the person on the right is an idealized version of the person on the left. By showing two separated blocks, the artist is able to juxtapose the two societies through as many small items as possible, in order to show the pervasive nature of the differences. The men are juxtaposed through the use of color and their respective renderings, as well as through the use of symbols such as craft beer. Nonetheless, the two different versions of the city are drawn together through the mirror image that is created on either side, both feature men moving towards the center carrying with them artifacts from their world. The world around them, however, is made from the same materials—the buildings appear similar in shape, but not condition, and the two men are both enveloped by a city that looks eerily similar to the rest of the image. In the middle ground of the image, a man stands on a ladder putting up a board that reads “Craft Beer”. This sign is a material possession that is simply placed on top of the preexisting building, and thus the outward appearance change. This slight

change from the poor, underdeveloped norm is enough to separate the two men and divide the two buildings due to the status connoted with their appearance.

Throughout American history, gentrification had begun to emerge throughout all locations, no matter how different. Each of these locations is single-handedly unique, and despite the belief that gentrification may be similar regardless of location, the society that it is impacting is often not changed substantially. The only change is often external, and gentrification does not impact the core of a society. Nonetheless, the physical impact that it does have is powerful enough to be divisive and isolationist toward minorities and similar groups. Gentrification brings with it power: the power to divide a society simply through external changes.

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