

# **Heritage or Renewal: The Impacts of Gentrification**

*Matthew Menschner*

*Kensington Creative and Performing Arts High School*

## **Abstract**

The implications of rapidly changing neighborhoods are far-reaching and include economic, social, political, and generational shifts that often displace the existing members of the community. I think it is important for my students to be able to take a more active role in the development of their neighborhood, and I think this unit will help them to do so.

Journalist, author, and activist Jane Jacob's main criticism of "rationalist" urban planning was that it ignored the complexities of diverse communities. Given that Philadelphia is referred to as a "city of neighborhoods," this unit seeks to examine how relevant Jacob's and others' criticisms are regarding the City of Brotherly Love. Many neighborhoods in Philadelphia are experiencing a resurgence in popularity, but with disputed consequences; the wide-scale renovations and gentrification of areas such as Fishtown, Fairmount, Graduate Hospital and others have spurred much criticism from community members and residents who have spent their lives in these neighborhoods. Gentrification is often presented as the collective efforts of different individuals moving into an area and changing the literal and metaphorical landscape; however, it is more complicated than that. Gentrification is a purposeful series of events, shifting the purpose of many neighborhoods of the modern city from spaces that house the poor and middle class to profit-driven revenue streams for the wealthy. While this unit, and its activities are being taught in a Philadelphia public school, it is applicable to any U.S. city and could reach students in a variety of school settings.

## **Rationale**

I work at a small neighborhood high school in Kensington, Philadelphia. The school population is comprised of 70% Latino students, 25% African American students and 5% listed as "other." Many students at the school are not from the immediate area. The disparity between the high quality of facilities in the school neighborhood versus the impoverished neighborhoods where students actually live is staggering. This unit seeks to understand exactly what causes neighborhoods that are geographically similar and in close proximity to one another to be so radically different. Many students lament that their city is an inhibitor and therefore a place to escape. They live in the present tense. They do not understand the history and development of "the city" as a cultural hub, a place of opportunity, nor do they understand the historical significance of a city like Philadelphia. The primary focus of this unit will be an examination of the history and development of "the city," especially in recent decades with widespread

gentrification occurring in some metropolitan neighborhoods, but not others. The readings and activities in this unit will help students to understand processes like redlining, neoliberalism, gentrification, urbanization, and urban renewal--key developments that have made the city what it is today. In addition to a rich body of texts, students will also consider and analyze visual art and media, maps, and numerous digital resources, both individually and collectively.

My school is located on the borderline between Fishtown and Kensington. The school itself is in the middle of gentrified Fishtown, however, the neighborhood from which it draws its student population is located to the northeast, in Kensington. There is a stark contrast between the prim and polished Fishtown and the neighborhoods that my students come from. I believe that a curriculum unit based on key urban topics will help both me and my students to understand how the neighborhoods of Philadelphia, and ours, in particular, have come to take shape over the years.

### **Content Objectives**

There is considerable debate among scholars regarding what gave rise to the first cities. The most commonly accepted theory is that following the Neolithic revolution agriculture allowed for more dense human populations, supporting the foundation and development of cities. As populations and empires grew, political power was consolidated and commerce flourished. Many early cities were places of large-scale commerce and trade, political capitals, or religious centers. Fast forward several thousand years to the modern city and one finds many if not all of these elements present--but on a much larger scale. In the 20th century, urban planning became professionalized and professional urban planners designed cities in consultation with administrators.

Gentrification is a process of neighborhood change. This change almost always includes economic change in a historically disinvested neighborhood. Marked by an increase in real estate investment, residents with higher incomes begin to move in, and large demographic change takes over. In addition to the income-level, these demographic changes often include increased levels of education and a change in the racial make-up of residents. The historic conditions of a given city or neighborhood often make communities susceptible to gentrification. City investment and disinvestment patterns are occurring today as a result of these conditions. "High rents, displacement, small business being replaced by large chains--these are all signs of gentrification. The central cause is that we've turned cities into capital-producing machines, and city governments have become addicted to this capital to function" (Moskowitz, 2017, p. xii). Gentrification seriously impacts the communities that are living in these areas and can have far reaching effects.

MIT urban studies professor Phillip Clay defined the stages of gentrification in his 1979 book *Urban Renewal*. In the first phase, a few “pioneering” gentrifiers move into a neighborhood. The middle class follows in the second phase. In phase three, the new residents displace the original tenants and contribute to stage four--usurpation of the neighborhood by banks, real estate developers, corporations, and the wealthy. By this time, the phase one pioneers--usually artists and bohemians--have long since moved on to another part of the city (Staley, 2018). Moskowitz (2017) argues that a fifth phase should be added, one where neighborhoods cease being a place to live a normal life. The cycle of gentrification is complete when a neighborhood becomes more friendly to moneyed interests than the citizens that live there (p. 6).

There is debate among scholars regarding the causes of gentrification. Some suggest that it is caused by social and cultural factors such as family structure, rapid job growth, lack of housing, traffic congestion, and public-sector policies (Kennedy, 2001). Other organizations such as the Urban Displacement Project, have cited historic conditions such as redlining, white flight, urban renewal initiatives, and the subprime mortgage and ensuing foreclosure crisis as major facilitators of gentrification. Jane Jacobs was critical of modern urban planning in her 1961 book *The Death and Life of Great American Cities*. In describing the concept of a city neighborhood, she noted the harmful nature of the idea and its execution, “...on the whole we Americans are poor at handling city neighborhoods, as can be seen by the long accumulation of failures...” (p. 112). Jacobs was supportive of small doses of internal gentrification--what she called unslumming--but drew the line when they began to erode the diversity of a given area.

### Redlining and White Flight

Beginning in the 1930s, the federal government set standards that labeled certain neighborhoods as “risky” and thus unfit for investment. The banks acted on these standards by conducting what came to be known as redlining, or marking certain areas and neighborhoods on maps in red, denoting high risk. The vast majority of these neighborhoods were inhabited primarily by people of color, the redlining severely limited their ability to receive approval for loans that would allow them to buy or repair homes in their neighborhood.

In *The Color of Law*, Richard Rothstein (2017) lays out the argument for how redlining continually shaped the demographics of many city neighborhoods. The federal government began separating residential areas by race beginning in 1877, following the suppression of Reconstruction. Despite the Supreme Court’s banning of racial segregation by zoning ordinances in 1917, the government began to recommend ways that cities could circumvent the ruling. In the 1920s, the Harding administration promoted zoning ordinances that differentiated between single-family and multifamily districts. There was a concurrent propaganda campaign to persuade white middle-class families to move out of apartments and into single-family homes. During the 1930s the Roosevelt administration created maps of every metropolitan area, dividing

up zones based on estimates of foreclosure risk--the estimates were based partly on the race of the zone's occupants. "The Race of families was often the reason for a low-grade classification. The neighborhood where I grew up in Central Berkeley was red due to the "infiltration of Orientals and Negros." (Madriga, 2014) The administration would insure white homeowner's mortgages if they lived in all-white neighborhoods. Following World War II the federal government spurred the suburbanization of metropolitan areas by guaranteeing bank loans to builders who mass-produced the all-white subdivisions that created further inequities across U.S. communities. (p. 74-75)

In 1987, Kenneth Jackson argued in *Crabgrass Frontier: The Suburbanization of the United States* that the concept of citizenship, local pride, and collective identity has all but eroded among communities in cities. While 19th-century communities were racked with problems such as crime, class rigidity, social unrest, racial prejudice, epidemics, alcohol abuse, and fires, they "...possessed significant sense of local pride and spirit..." (p. 272). This sense of unity came from competition with other cities for resources and the construction of transportation such as canals, railroads, factories, and state institutions. Jackson goes on to say that suburbanization once implied a relationship with the city, but now alienation and anonymity are closer to reality. It is fair to assume then, that redlining and white flight have had serious consequences for urban communities across the United States.

## Urban Renewal

After being left behind in decaying central city neighborhoods--unable to get loans to improve their property, and unable to get mortgages to buy into the suburbs, all thanks to redlining-- low-income households and communities of color had to endure the effects of the national highway system expansion and urban renewal programs. These programs resulted in mass clearances of homes, businesses, and neighborhood institutions such as churches and community centers. But now city planners did their best to hide the nation's poorest. Mindy Fullilove describes the phenomenon aptly in her book *Root Shock: How Tearing Up City Neighborhoods Hurts America, And What We Can Do About It*. "Urban renewal was designed to segment the city so that barriers of highways and monumental buildings protected the rich from the sight of the poor, and enclosed the wealthy center away from the poor margin." She cites New York as the best example of this, given that tourists find beauty on forty-second street, while poor communities in the Bronx are dying prematurely, with rates of AIDS, violence, and incarceration some of the highest in the nation (p. 197).

Philadelphia was also a leader in the urban renewal movement, reserving more grant funding than any other city in the country besides New York. Private developers would designate areas as "blighted" and acquire the land. After clearing it, private developers would then redevelop the properties. While initially done for new housing, the Housing Act of 1954 allowed for

redevelopment for shopping, industry, and offices. The act also provided additional funding to support housing rehabilitation and site clearance. Philadelphia actively embraced urban renewal, and selected six large areas in the city for redevelopment in 1952. Where Philadelphia's approach to urban renewal differed, however, was its emphasis on a pedestrian-oriented approach that also prioritized neighborhood conservation.

Jane Jacobs was a critic of urban renewal, due to its destruction of neighborhoods and buildings still considered essential to an area, as well as the vague criteria used to define "slums" and "blight." A powerful example of Philadelphians' resistance to urban renewal was exemplified in the protest against the Crosstown Expressway, which would have obliterated a primarily African American neighborhood and divided Center City from South Philadelphia. The coalition protesting the highway eventually won out, stopping the planning in 1974. Many of the counterculture movements during the urban renewal period advocated for grassroots, bottom-up approaches that sought social and economic revitalization. Ultimately, Philadelphia's urban renewal grants ceased, following the Housing and Community Development Act of 1974. The act supported community development grants with more focus on local applications (Ammon, 2016). Despite this, vestiges of postwar urban renewal still endured, setting the state for widespread disinvestment in the decades that followed.

## Disinvestment

Housing speculation often thrives in rapidly changing housing markets, and phenomena such as redlining and urban renewal projects have done much to shift the markets. Kennedy and Leonard (2001) argue that there are lucrative opportunities for real estate developers in what have been deemed "high risk" neighborhoods. In rapidly changing markets, properties turn over quickly, low income residents are hesitant to pull out equity in their houses, or where residents may not understand the value of their homes in a rapidly changing market (p. 11). What has given rise to this type of market surge is often white flight, facilitated by redlining, and urban renewal projects in other areas of the city over a period of years, sometimes decades. When neighborhoods and communities that have been ignored for years while other parts of the city have been revitalized, they become targets for new revitalization projects. These areas are highly desirable for new residents looking for affordable urban housing options.

Smith (1999) argues in *Welcome Home* that supply and speculative gains are exacerbated when property owners and real estate agents intentionally disinvest in inner city housing markets until a "rent gap" is created. When the gap between the value of property before and after renovation is particularly large, capital moves back into the neighborhood and gentrification speed increases. Government at all levels facilitates these effects through various zoning, financing, and fiscal policies. At the same time, there is an element of personal choice present as well. People make many decisions during the home buying process, such as location, budget,

assessment of the conditions of the house and neighborhood, among others. While the nature of a free market economy allows for exchanges in the housing market based on supply and demand, shaped by prospective buyers' budget and personal choice, widespread disinvestment has shaped the housing market in the decades following the postwar period. It is a logical conclusion then, that gentrification in certain neighborhoods, predominantly low-income, have been primed for gentrification due to patterns of disinvestment and government policy.

### Subprime Lending and Foreclosures

The foreclosure crisis was a period of heightened property seizures in the housing market between 2007 and 2010. This was just one element of the larger financial crisis and Great Recession that developed during this period. Factors such as widespread, imprudent extensions of mortgage credit, intricate plans of mortgage debt securitization, and rapid increases in the number of foreclosures all contributed to the crisis. The industry was largely unprepared to process all of these factors simultaneously. Seeking quick profits, mortgage companies processing large numbers of loans did not adequately review the qualifying information, sometimes leading to banks foreclosing the wrong property and miscalculating home values and leading eager home buyers into undertaking mortgages that they could not sustain or pay off.

The foreclosure crisis of 2007-2010 also contributed to making urban areas more vulnerable to gentrification. In particular, low-income communities of color were hit especially hard, leaving neighborhoods ripe for investors who were looking to flip properties. From 2007-2019, 2.5 million foreclosures were completed. These foreclosures disproportionately affected black and latinx homeowners, with around 8% losing their homes compared to 4.5% of white homeowners (Bocian, Li, and Ernst, 2010, pp. 2-3). Chan et al. (2013) confirmed these findings.

...census tract level neighborhood characteristics are important predictors of default behavior, even after controlling for an extensive set of controls for loan and borrower characteristics. First, default rates increase with the rate of foreclosure notices and the number of lender-owned properties (REOs) in the tract. Second, default rates on home purchase mortgages are higher in census tracts with larger shares of black residents, regardless of the borrower's own race (p. 100).

The foreclosure crisis was yet another factor that primed many urban neighborhoods for subsequent revitalization projects.

### Revitalization

Communities that have been affected by a combination of redlining, white flight, urban renewal, disinvestment, subprime lending and the ensuing foreclosure crisis are more primed for gentrification than those that have not. Many in search of homes--renters especially--are looking for affordable options. City neighborhoods in gentrifying areas can offer affordability, along with other amenities and close proximity to community centers, shopping, dining, and more. Jobs, restaurants, art spaces, and commercial spaces are increasingly relocating to city centers, making living in close proximity more attractive. Some cities are amplifying these pull factors by investing in infrastructure and public transit.

In *Gentrification and the Rent Gap*, Neil Smith identified an important element of gentrification in real estate speculation. Investors flip properties for large profits, facilitating high-end development, and landlords continually seek higher-paying tenants (1987, p. 462). By developing and flipping properties in historically poor neighborhoods, property values increase and bring in wealthier residents over time. In 2017, Zuk et al. conducted a meta-analysis of the existing literature on public investment and gentrification. More specifically, they examined the extent to which investments in public infrastructure and public transit played a role. Their findings were as follows:

Despite the US context of growing income segregation, residential and commercial gentrification is occurring in lower-income neighborhoods, transforming the meaning of the neighborhood. Although researchers experience severe data and analytic challenges in measuring the extent of displacement, most studies agree that gentrification at a minimum leads to exclusionary displacement and may push out some renters as well, while others manage to stay. Although early research on neighborhood change tended to underemphasize the role of the state, more recent work has identified an impact of public investment in the form of fixed-rail transit (2017, p. 10).

While the literature on this topic is still somewhat limited, there is certainly a connection between public investments and gentrifying neighborhoods.

Another factor that shapes neighborhood change is the shift in land usage for things like restaurants and storefronts. Land previously used for industrial purposes such as factories, production, shipping and warehousing, may be converted into metropolitan areas for shopping, leisure, and dining. These factors naturally attract a population of residents looking for such amenities, who are often willing to pay a premium for convenience and proximity. This sometimes results in pressure on existing neighborhood staples, such as locally-owned small businesses and other enterprises.

Chapple et al. (2017) found that as central cities in California experienced continued revitalization, many residents identified commercial gentrification as a concern. They defined commercial gentrification as the “intrusion of new businesses that force out a favorite food shop or longstanding retail store because of higher rents.” It can also refer to an influx of cafes, trendy retail boutiques and gourmet restaurants. Commercial gentrification can affect economic prospects and even survival, as it may lead to displacement and business closures (p. 3).

### Impacts of Gentrification

Gentrification can breathe new life into a block, neighborhood, or city. It can revitalize historically underutilized, underdeveloped, and disinvested areas, bringing in new capital, new residents, and new opportunities. It is not all positive though, as gentrification can sometimes displace residents, many of whom lived most or all of their lives in that community. Long-term residents who are displaced are unable to reap the benefits of new developments in housing, food access, or transit infrastructure if they are pushed out of the communities they live in. Even if residents are able to maintain their place in the community, changes brought by gentrification can also result in cultural displacement. When longtime residents are surrounded by a changing neighborhood, there can be a loss of belonging, or feelings of otherness.

The process and results of gentrification show that change can be both positive and negative. It is important to respect the heritage and history of neighborhoods as they are revitalized and developed. When gentrification pushes out longtime residents and businesses, or destroys feelings of belonging, attempts must be made to repair the damage done. The question of heritage or renewal is an important one--one that deserves to incorporate elements of both in the development process. Given that many gentrified neighborhoods are often a result of disinvestment and disenfranchisement, the need for striking a balance between heritage and renewal becomes that much more critical.

### **Standards**

The Core Curriculum of the School District of Philadelphia is aligned to the Pennsylvania Department of Education Academic Standards for History. These standards support instruction and development of content knowledge related to Historical Analysis and Skills Development, United States History and World History. The goal of this unit is to encompass these topics and more as we explore the history of cities and their development over time. We want to use the neighborhood of our school itself as part of our curriculum.

Academic

**8.1.U.A.** Evaluate patterns of continuity and change over time, applying context of events

**8.1.U.B.** Evaluate the interpretation of historical events and sources, considering the use of fact versus opinion, multiple perspectives, and cause and effect relationships.

**8.1.U.C.** Analyze, synthesize and integrate historical data, creating a product that supports and appropriately illustrates inferences and conclusions drawn from research.

**8.3.U.A.** Compare the role groups and individuals played in the social, political, cultural, and economic development of the U.S.

**8.3.U.C.** Evaluate how continuity and change have impacted the United States. • Belief systems and Religions • Commerce and industry • Technology • Politics and government • Physical and human Geography • Social organizations

PA Core

**CC.8.6.9-10.A.** Write arguments focused on discipline-specific content.

- Introduce precise claim(s), distinguish the claim(s) from alternate or opposing claims, and create an organization that establishes clear relationships among the claim(s), counterclaims, reasons, and evidence.
- Develop claim(s) and counterclaims fairly, supplying data and evidence for each while pointing out the strengths and limitations of both claim(s) and counterclaims in a discipline-appropriate form and in a manner that anticipates the audience's knowledge level and concerns.
- Use words, phrases, and clauses to link the major sections of the text, create cohesion, and clarify the relationships between claim(s) and reasons, between reasons and evidence, and between claim(s) and counterclaims.
- Establish and maintain a formal style and objective tone while attending to the norms and conventions of the discipline in which they are writing.
- Provide a concluding statement or section that follows from or supports the argument presented.

**CC.8.6.9-10.C.** Produce clear and coherent writing in which the development, organization, and style are appropriate to task, purpose, and audience.

**CC.8.6.9-10.D.** Develop and strengthen writing as needed by planning, revising, editing, rewriting, or trying a new approach, focusing on addressing what is most significant for a specific purpose and audience.

**CC.8.6.9-10.E.** Use technology, including the Internet, to produce, publish, and update individual or shared writing products, taking advantage of technology's capacity to link to other information and to display information flexibly and dynamically.

**CC.8.6.9-10.F.** Conduct short as well as more sustained research projects to answer a question (including a self-generated question) or solve a problem; narrow or broaden the inquiry when

appropriate; synthesize multiple sources on the subject, demonstrating understanding of the subject under investigation.

**CC.8.6.9-10.G.** Gather relevant information from multiple authoritative print and digital sources, using advanced searches effectively; assess the usefulness of each source in answering the research question; integrate information into the text selectively to maintain the flow of ideas, avoiding plagiarism and following a standard format for citation.

**CC.8.6.9-10.H.** Draw evidence from informational texts to support analysis, reflection, and research.

**CC.8.6.9-10.I.** Write routinely over extended time frames (time for reflection and revision) and shorter time frames (a single sitting or a day or two) for a range of discipline-specific tasks, purposes, and audiences.

## **Strategies**

This unit will require students to develop and make use of critical observation, reading, and thinking skills as we examine a wide range of maps, images, videos, primary/secondary sources, and more in an effort to gain a new understanding of the histories of cities, both near and far, as well as an understanding of how cities and neighborhoods change, for better or worse. Students will participate in individual close readings, collaborative close readings, source analysis activities, and will act as participants and later facilitators of neighborhood walking tours.

### *Neighborhood Walking Tours*

In order to bring the unit content to life, a number of walking tours will take place. Beginning in the neighborhood surrounding the school community, students and teachers will visit a number of preplanned locations, noting observations and wonderings along the way. The teacher prepares a list of destinations to visit throughout the walking tour, leaving ample time for dialogue at each location and potential detours. The teacher may also bring photographs and other source materials that show previous uses and conditions of each location, city block, or facility. Following the neighborhood walking tour, students should submit a brief written reflection that makes connections to unit content and ideas.

### *Student Short Film*

As one of the culminating activities for the unit, students will select a neighborhood, city block, or location/building/facility and create a short film of approximately 10-12 minutes. The film should show the current state of the area, interwoven with narration about the history, continuity, and change of the area over time.

### *Source and Data Analysis*

Students will analyze primary and secondary source data in order to better understand continuity and change in cities over time. Sources will include city and neighborhood maps from a variety of periods in history, census information, median income data, and documents denoting local, state, and federal housing policies. Students will analyze these sources within the context of each lesson, both in a supplementary capacity as well as an inquiry-based approach that requires them to question and draw their own conclusions. These analysis activities will take place in individual, small-group, and whole-class formats.

### *Gallery Walk/Stations*

In addition to the source analysis activities that will occur throughout the course of this unit, gallery walks and station activities inside the classroom will also be utilized. A traditional gallery walk activity consists of about 6 stations posted around the room. These stations can either be posted on the walls or set up at different desks or tables depending on the classroom layout. Students will be divided into groups, and each group will begin at a different station. Once the activity begins, students will have a fixed amount of time at each station, typically 5-7 minutes depending upon the class size. At these stations, the teacher can post primary/secondary sources, text, images, etc. Students can complete the gallery walk with a companion analysis tool such as a worksheet or graphic organizer, or they can conduct a graffiti-style gallery walk, in which students write and/or draw their analyses and commentary on a piece of chart paper or poster board surrounding the source.

### **Classroom Activities**

#### *Lesson One: Mapping Inequality*

Objectives: Students will be able to define and critically examine redlining and white flight. Students will engage with primary and secondary sources in order to develop understanding of two important components in the history of gentrification. This lesson will provide a foundation of content that will be built upon throughout the unit.

Materials and Resources:

- Interactive Redlining Map: <https://dsl.richmond.edu/panorama/redlining/#loc=6/49.261/-116.301>
- *The Color of Law, Chapter 4: Own Your Own Home*. Accessible online at <https://erenow.net/modern/color-of-law-forgotten-history/5.php>

Step One: Explain that the purpose of this lesson is to familiarize students with redlining, the process by which the federal government and banks deemed certain neighborhoods as “risky” and thus unfit for investment. This introductory lesson is important because it sets the foundation for much of what follows in the unit. This lesson will span multiple class periods, as the reading activity and discussion will likely take a full class, and the map activity will take 1-2 class periods.

Step Two: Ask students to write a reflection about where they live. The reflection can include the physical space, conditions, location, the neighborhood, and any other information they choose to include. Begin a discussion by asking students if they have ever thought about why they live where they do. Ask them to consider what factors shape neighborhoods, including the physical conditions, local businesses, and public amenities like parks. If not addressed in student comments, explained that decades of policies on behalf of private entities and the government have shaped neighborhood conditions.

Step Three: Distribute copies of *The Color of Law*. Chapter 4 is divided into six sections. Depending on the size of the class, divide students into three or six groups, assigning one or two sections of the chapter based on the number of groups. Each group is responsible for analyzing their assigned sections and writing a brief summary.

Step Four: After providing sufficient time for each group to read their passages and write their summaries, reconvene for a class-wide discussion. Each group should share their summary as well as their thoughts and feelings about what they read. Encourage each group to make personal connections or predictions about what they think happened in the decades that followed. Close this portion of the activity by asking students to write a final reflection summarizing the discussion and the chapter in its entirety.

Step Five: Provide students with the link for the interactive redlining maps. Now that students have an understanding of the key elements of redlining, they are equipped to begin working with the primary source materials. Explain that students, individually or in their reading groups, will each select a redlining map for analysis.

Step Six: After students have selected their map for analysis, explain that they will be responsible for analyzing the city map for the following:

- Areas by grade and their percentages (Best, Still Desirable, Definitely Declining, Hazardous)
- Total population
- A description of one “Best” area in the city and one “Hazardous” area in the city, accessed by clicking on the shaded portion of the interactive map

Step Seven: Provide students time to analyze the maps. At the conclusion of the analysis activity, provide space for students to share some of their findings. As students share, encourage the rest of the class to share what they notice and wonder about the findings. Students should make connections to *The Color of Law* reading activity as well.

Step Eight: As a closing activity, students should write a response to the following questions:

- What were the immediate effects of redlining?
- What do you think the long term effects are?
- Who benefits from redlining? Who does not?

Students should submit their responses before the end of class.

### *Lesson Two: Urban Renewal*

Objectives: Students will learn about urban renewal programs. Some neighborhoods were made more susceptible to urban renewal due to factors such as redlining and white flight, however, many neighborhoods were improved significantly by public works projects and increased investment in renewal programs.

Materials and Resources:

- *60 Years of Urban Change*. Institute for Quality Communities, University of Oklahoma. <http://iqc.ou.edu/urbanchange/>
- “Urban Renewal.” *The Encyclopedia of Greater Philadelphia*. <https://philadelphiaencyclopedia.org/archive/urban-renewal/>
- *There Goes the Neighborhood, Season 1*. [Audio Podcast] <https://www.wnycstudios.org/podcasts/neighborhood/season-one>

Step One: Begin by connecting the lesson to the previous days’ activities. Explain to students that for many low-income neighborhoods and communities of color, the expansion of the highway system and public improvement programs furthered racial divides across cities in the U.S. There were also cases where the neighborhoods that were racially segregated due to redlining later became targets for urban renewal programs.

Step Two: As a warm up activity, have students describe what their ideal neighborhood would look like. Likely answers include an area that is clean, accessible, updated, in close proximity to local businesses, shopping centers, parks, accessible by public transportation, etc. Explain to

students that some neighborhoods have been part of urban renewal initiatives to build the types of community staples that they described in their responses.

Step Three: Provide students with the link to *60 Years of Urban Change*. Read the introduction together as a class and pause to take any questions. Explain to students that this website shows what 60 years of urban renewal looks like in many major cities across the country. Provide ample time for students to explore the website. Have students note the similarities and differences between the photos as they investigate.

Step Four: Once students have completed their analyses provide space for them to share out their observations and questions. Highlight the fact that urban renewal and change definitely improve communities, but not for all residents, and that not all neighborhoods are targeted for renewal. Explain that the beneficiaries of urban renewal often enjoy access to updated public facilities and public transportation, as well as a subsequent influx of new residents and capital.

Step Five: Distribute copies of “Urban Renewal.” Read the article as a class and ask for general thoughts and takeaways from the reading. Check in with students by asking if their feelings on urban renewal have changed in the wake of learning about who gets what in neighborhood revitalization efforts.

Step Six: Following the reading activity, provide students with access to season 1 of *There Goes the Neighborhood*. Students may choose one of the nine episodes to listen to, or they can be assigned one. Students should record notes as they listen to each episode.

Step Seven: After students have listened to their respective podcast episodes, have them create an argumentative piece either for or against urban renewal. Using evidence from the three resources used in this lesson, students will write a persuasive piece either in support or opposition of urban renewal projects.

Step Eight: Ask a few students on each side of the argument to share their thoughts, facilitating a class discussion. Allow other students to ask questions and comment on each student’s position. Encourage the use of evidence in support or refutation of their arguments.

### *Lesson Three: Student Short Film Project*

Objectives: Students will facilitate a virtual walking tour of a neighborhood, city block, or historic site. The main purpose of this culminating activity is to weave together the knowledge gained from this unit with students’ understanding of their selected neighborhood, block, or site. The project will be recorded, narrated, and played for the class as a presentation.

## Materials and Resources:

- Recording device such as a camcorder or cell phone with video and audio recording capabilities
- A map of the city
- Any print materials that the student is able to acquire, such as a visitors guide, pamphlet, or a written article

Step One: Explain to students that the final project for the unit will be a virtual walking tour. Students will record themselves walking through a neighborhood, city block, or historic site. Each student will narrate their video, discussing the physical surroundings, as well as noting change over time. Students are expected to research their site prior to beginning their video recording.

Step Two: Provide time in class for students to select a site for their project. A predetermined list of sample sites may be provided if students are having difficulty with selection. Once students have selected their sites, provide time in class to begin preliminary research. Examples of suitable resources include articles written about the site, archival information, photographs, video clips, information from official websites, local and state government websites and materials, and others. The research portion of the project could take 2-3 class periods.

Step Three: After providing adequate time in class for students to research walking tour sites, explain to students that their virtual walking tour should be around 10-12 minutes, including the narration. Students should first introduce themselves and offer a brief introduction about why they chose their site. The walking tour should then begin, and the student should identify their site, and describe the changing neighborhood characteristics over time. If possible, students may choose to interview a resident during the tour, getting their perspective on the neighborhood and how it may have changed.

Step Four: Students should arrive to class on the due date with a finished video to present. Students will take turns presenting their video to the class, including any materials that they gathered during their research. Following the presentation, students should speak for 2-3 minutes about how the concepts learned in this unit helped to guide their project and understanding of the site they studied. Each project should conclude with questions and comments from the rest of the class.

## Bibliography

Ammon, F. (2016) "Urban Renewal." *The Encyclopedia of Greater Philadelphia*. Rutgers University, <https://philadelphiaencyclopedia.org/archive/urban-renewal/>

This article details various urban renewal campaigns in Philadelphia and their proponents and opponents. A useful resource not only for informing the content objectives, but also very easily adapted for classroom use.

Capps, K. and Rabinowitz, K. (2018) *How the Fair Housing Act Failed Black Homeowners*. Bloomberg CityLab.

This article details how mortgage approval rates and home values for black Americans still look the same as they did during redlining, despite passage of landmark fair housing laws.

Chan, S., Gedal, M., Been, V. and Haughwout, A. (2013) “The Role of Neighborhood Characteristics in Mortgage Default Risk: Evidence from New York City.” *Journal of Housing Economics*, 22(2).

This article provides evidence that neighborhood characteristics such as race and socioeconomic status can be linked to higher rates of mortgage default and foreclosure. Black and Latinx homeowners in particular experience default and foreclosure at a higher rate than any other demographic group.

Chapple, K., Loukaitou-Sedaris, A., Gonzalez, S., Kadin, D. and Poirier, J. (2017). “Transit-Oriented Development & Commercial Gentrification: Exploring the Linkages.” *UC Berkeley Center for Community Innovation*.

Chapple et al. conduct a meta-analysis of the existing research of public transit improvement projects and their impacts on gentrifying neighborhoods.

Clay, P. (1979) *Neighborhood Renewal: Middle-Class Resettlement and Incumbent Upgrading in American Neighborhoods*. Lexington: Lexington Books.

Clay describes a formula for gentrification, one that is still accurate today. His work would be well-suited in establishing the major themes and processes of study for this unit.

Fullilove, M. (2016). *Root Shock: How Tearing Up City Neighborhoods Hurts America, And What We Can Do About It*. NYU Press.

Fullilove examines patterns of disinvestment in three U.S. cities. This book is helpful in understanding the elements of disinvestment, as well as the consequences of it.

Jacobs, J. (2011). *The Death and Life of Great American Cities*. New York: Modern Library.

Jane Jacobs classic treatise on how to make cities vibrant places to live and work. Much of her commentary is still relevant today.

Jackson, K. (1987). *Crabgrass Frontier: The Suburbanization of the United States*. Oxford University Press. Retrieved from <https://ebookcentral-proquest-com.proxy.library.upenn.edu>

Jackson's work explains the phenomenon of white flight. It was particularly helpful in establishing the historical narrative of redlining and the ensuing white flight that left many neighborhoods racially segregated.

Kennedy, M. & Leonard, P. (2001) *Dealing with Neighborhood Change: A Primer on Gentrification and Policy Choices*. The Brookings Institution Center on Urban and Metropolitan Policy.

Kennedy and Leonard's work details the connection between public policy and neighborhood revitalization projects.

Madriga, A. (2014). "The Racist Housing Policy that Made Your Neighborhood," *The Atlantic*.

Madriga's article for *The Atlantic* details how neighborhood demographics and conditions were shaped by racist housing policies.

Moskowitz, P. (2017). *How to Kill a City: Gentrification, Inequality, and the Fight for the Neighborhood*. New York: Nation Books.

A resident of New York City, Moskowitz details his experience living in the city and the change he has witnessed over time.

Rothstein, R. (2017). *The Color of Law: a Forgotten History of How Our Government Segregated America*. New York; London: Liveright Publishing Corporation.

A key resource on redlining, Rothstein's main argument is that housing segregation is largely a matter of public policy, not decisions made by private entities.

Smith, M. (1999) "Welcome Home," *SF Weekly*, 18(28).

Smith argues that when property owners and real estate agents intentionally disinvest in inner city housing markets until a "rent gap" is created. He then describes how the rent gap affects development efforts and real estate profiteering.

Smith, N. (1987) “Gentrification and the Rent Gap.” *Annals of the Association of American Geographers*, 77(3).

Smith argues that by developing and flipping properties in historically poor neighborhoods, property values increase and bring in wealthier residents over time.

Smith, N. (1996) *The New Urban Frontier: Gentrification and the Revanchist City*. London: Routledge.

Smith explores gentrification and how cities in the U.S. and Europe have changed over time.

Staley, W. (2018) “When ‘Gentrification’ Isn’t About Housing,” *New York Times*, <https://www.nytimes.com/2018/01/23/magazine/when-gentrification-isnt-about-housing.html>.

Staley’s argument supports Philip Clay’s formula for gentrification, and is helpful in understanding how the process plays out.

Zuk, M., Bierbaum, A., Chapple, K., Gorska, K. and Loukaitou-Sideris, A. (2017). “Gentrification, Displacement, and the Role of Public Investment.” *Journal of Planning Literature*.

Zuk et al. review the role of government policy in gentrification and displacement. Particular attention is placed on physical and cultural displacement.

## Reading List

Ammon, F. (2016) “Urban Renewal.” *The Encyclopedia of Greater Philadelphia*. Rutgers University, <https://philadelphiaencyclopedia.org/archive/urban-renewal/>

This article details various urban renewal campaigns in Philadelphia and their proponents and opponents. A useful resource not only for informing the content objectives for the second sample lesson.

KCRW, The Nation, and WNYC Studios (2016). *There Goes the Neighborhood, Season 1*. [Audio Podcast]. Accessed at <https://www.wnycstudios.org/podcasts/neighborhood/season-one>.

Season 1 of the podcast examines various renewal projects in New York City, with many firsthand accounts by those affected. A great resource for to bolster student understanding of the pros and cons of gentrification.

*Mapping Inequality: Redlining in New Deal America*. University of Richmond Digital Scholarship Lab. <https://dsl.richmond.edu/panorama/redlining/#loc=6/49.261/-116.301>

A comprehensive digital resource that allows students to explore U.S. cities affected by redlining. Many of the links provide primary source documents and auxiliary resources for further investigation.

Rothstein, R. (2017). *The Color of Law: a Forgotten History of How Our Government Segregated America*. New York; London: Liveright Publishing Corporation.

Chapter 4, *Own Your Own Home*, is used as part of the jigsaw reading activity on redlining and white flight.

“60 Years of Urban Change.” Institute for Quality Communities, University of Oklahoma. <http://iqc.ou.edu/urbanchange/>

A fantastic classroom resource that provides photographs of changing cities for students to manipulate. There are many auxiliary resources for further reading and subsequent activities.