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# IS GENTRIFICATION A DIRTY WORD?

There are few words in a New Yorker's vocabulary that are as emotionally loaded as "gentrification."

To one person, it means improved housing. To another, it means unaffordable housing. It means safer streets and new retail businesses to some. To others, it means the homogenization of a formerly diverse neighborhood. It's the result of one family's drive for home ownership. It's the perceived threat of higher rental costs for another family.

In simple terms, gentrification is the upgrading of housing and retail businesses in a neighborhood with an influx of private investment. This process and its consequences, however, are rarely simple.

## Neighborhoods and lives blossom.

Examples of gentrification are as varied and distinctive as New York itself and reflect the city's enduring vitality. That vitality is expressed in terms of change...for neighborhoods and people. We see immigrants from Asia transforming the Flushing community in Queens with their industriousness, while recent arrivals from Russia are bringing new flavor to the Brighton Beach area of Brooklyn. Over a decade ago, painters, sculptors and fledgling dance companies looking for loft space turned SoHo, then a manufacturing "ghost town" on Lower Manhattan's northern border, into a world-renowned artistic center. Today a new generation of artists is creating a similar colony in Greenpoint, Brooklyn. Elsewhere, middle class pioneers have bought brownstones in dilapidated areas and enlivened their districts—such as the portion of Columbus Avenue north of Lincoln Center for the Performing Arts—with energy and style.

Different neighborhoods throughout the city have undergone similar changes at different times: Park Slope, Chelsea and the Upper West Side, for example. In each case, neighborhoods that were under-populated and had become shabby and/or dangerous were turned into desirable addresses by families and merchants willing to risk their savings and futures there.

## Who has to make room for gentrification?

The greatest fears inspired by gentrification, of course, are that low-income residents and low-margin retailers will be displaced by more affluent residents and more profitable businesses.

The Department of City Planning's study of gentrified neighborhoods in Park Slope and on the Upper West Side concluded that some displacement occurs following a community's decline as well as after its rehabilitation. The study also found, however, that residential rent regulations gave apartment dwellers substantial protection against displacement. In addition, the study pointed out that the mix of retail stores and service establishments has remained the same in both areas since 1970.

In this regard, it should also be noted that tenants of residential rental buildings that are converted to cooperative ownership remain protected by non-eviction plans if they decide they don't want to buy their units. A survey conducted by the Real Estate Board of New York found that 85 percent of such tenants thought the conversion process had been a fair one.

## A role for public policy.

We believe that whatever displacement gentrification causes, though, must be dealt with with public policies that promote low- and moderate-income housing construction and rehabilitation, and in zoning revisions that permit retail uses in less expensive, side street locations.

We also believe that New York's best hope lies with families, businesses and lending institutions willing to commit themselves for the long haul to neighborhoods that need them.

That's gentrification.



The Real Estate Board  
of New York, Inc.



# INTRODUCTION

my "inspiration", originally, for putting together this collection of articles on gentrification was the almost frenzied campaign, which has manifested itself more than ever in the last two years, to "revitalize" the lower garden district and uptown magazine street in new orleans. within the last 2 1/2 years i've seen the corner where i've lived on (magazine and 8th) change from a sleepy street with a Goodwill thrift store and a couple antique stores to having a large, busy coffee shop, a string of college bars and several new, "hip" boutiques with overpriced artifacts. the newest neighbor on my block is The Orphanage, a building of such grossly overpriced "luxury condominiums" (the cheapest being a \$700 one room to the most expensive being a \$1200 two room) that it will surely be the death of what was once a quiet, cheap neighborhood. landlords are talking about raising surrounding rents to "compete". in the "Lower Garden District Strategic Renaissance Plan"'s literature there is never one mention of what will happen to the hundreds of people who will be left homeless with the demolition of the St. Thomas Projects; and have they really put much thought into that aspect of the "Renaissance"? all the official propaganda is filled with glowing projections of the "New" St. Thomas will be a "mixed-income community" but how mixed is questionable. there has been much encouragement for light industry, utilizing the "historic" aspects of the neighborhood to encourage tourism, and wooing homeowners and those with enough capital to buy houses and become landlords to take advantage of the situation. but little, if any, attention, is paid to how all this will affect the lives of those families that will be remaining in what is left of the St. Thomas Projects and those who are not privileged enough to be able to afford to buy a home and, thus, must take the brunt of price increases in renting.

more than a year ago i attended a "community" meeting about the Renaissance Plan directly across the street from St. Thomas. it was hard knowing that the meeting even existed-i went and counted how many posted signs announcing it were posted and in the entire Lower Garden District only counted eight. the "community" represented at this meeting, hosted by several city council members, was predominately local business owners. most of the time was taken up with landlords & prospectors telling the city council how many more properties they would buy if the Plan went their way. there were few, if any, people representing families living in St. Thomas or low income apartment renters. the Lower Garden District has some of the largest disparities of wealth in the city. the river side of magazine street, including the Irish channel, is predominately lower income black families, and also includes the St. Thomas Projects. across the street is the Garden District, host to some of the wealthiest families and largest mansions in the city. Magazine street is the dividing line. the "Renaissance Plan" is an obvious attempt to rid their cash cow of the repercussions of a capitalist, class & race based society, which is sometimes violently maintained. instead of creating real and lasting solutions to the crime, violence and cynicism of poverty, which would mean entirely reorganizing our society and the way we relate to one another, they move the "problem" to another part of the city. in this specific case, the evicted residents of St. Thomas will probably be moved to other projects in the city, areas which have been designated as "black" areas with a predominately African-American population, away from areas which are mostly white, not because of legalized segregation but because of economic segregation.

this magazine compiled + edited by me SKOT



in november of 1997 Crescent Wrench Books & Infoshop opened up its new location in the Lower Garden District, on St. Mary street, just off of Magazine. it is a collectively-run, non-profit bookstore and community center. i am a collective member. our prescne in the neighborhood, just two blocks from St. Thomas, does have an impact on the area. one of the precursors to gentrification begins with independent young white adults moving into mostly lower income areas in order to take advantage of the cheap rents. this includes artists who take over cheap storefronts and warehouses, creating a creative climate which then brings in higher income consumers. this is where wealthier developers and entrepreneurs take notice, and advantage, of this new business climate and, whether the resident artists & musicians acknowledge this, develop the area. unfortunately, most of the development is aimed at a higher income class of people and not the lower income local residents. more businesses offering more overpriced, unrealistic services move in, along with higher income residents, raising rents and forcing out the previous residents. in the Lower Garden District Magazine Street is the battle ground for much of this conflict. more and more services along magazine street are being aimed at higher income people: antique stores, gourmet restaurants, college bars. there are few services on this street, where most of the commerce in the area happens, that serves the low income residents, and predominately African-American, residents of St. Thomas and the Irish Channel. there are few, if ANY businesses located on this street which are owned by African-Americans, and many do not even employ neighborhood African-Americans. Crescent Wrench Books' part in this system of gentrification can go one of two ways: we can be silent about this issue and let it go on unchallenged and, thus, be part of the process, or, try and raise awareness to the issue and some challenge and opposition. we serve a largely white and youthful population but this does not have to be the only people we serve. as members of the community and as people trying to play an active role in our community, we should serve and represent those around us, both blacks and whites, of all classes. i think that by fostering a community of common desires instead of the alienating and divisive goals of gentrification projects such as the Lower Garden District Renaissance Plan, we can combat the fears that they play upon (crime, violence, racial and class divisions) to make gentrification more palatable to those who hold the power and privilege in this society, as it is currently based.

the information and examples of gentrification and fights people have put up to challenge and stop it across the world contained in here is an attempt to both educate and activate people. The "Renaissance Plan" is nothing new. it is being carried out every day in urban areas throughout the nation. but it DOESN'T have to be that way. people can join together and choose to create their own fates instead of letting corporations & govts force it upon them..... -SKOT-

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# INTRODUCTION PART II, 1

A YEAR AFTER I'D FIRST PRINTED THE FIRST 150 COPIES OF THIS BOOKLET (1997) THE GENTRIFICATION OF UP-TOWN NEW ORLEANS HAS CONTINUED. 3 YEARS AGO THERE WAS A SALVATION ARMY SHELTER FOR THE HOMELESS ON THE 3000 BLOCK OF MAGAZINE ST. IT HAS SINCE BEEN CLOSED, REMODELED WITH A C.C.'S COFFEE SHOP, AN AEROBICS STUDIO, AND A CLOTHING BOUTIQUE, AND RENAMED "SALVATION STUDIOS". AS THE PLANNED LAND GRABS IN THE LOWER GARDEN DISTRICT + IRISH CHANNEL CONTINUE, CENTRAL CITY, THE NEIGHBORHOOD ON THE LAKE SIDE OF THE GARDEN DISTRICT, HAS BEEN ADDED TO THE LIST. LOCAL BANKERS, 1st + NBC, ARE BUYING UP MUCH OF THE REAL ESTATE + ORETHA CASTLE HALEY BLVD., ONE OF C.C.'S MAIN STREETS IS SEEING A NEW POLICE STATION, WITH NEW CONDOS RIGHT ACROSS THE STREET, INTRODUCED. NEW ORLEANS IS GOING THRU SOME "GOOD TIMES" RIGHT NOW IN OUR BOOM + BUST ECONOMIC SYSTEM BUT THE ONES PROFITING FROM IT THE MOST ARE THE PROPERTY OWNERS, THE LAND LORDS, STOREOWNERS + WEALTHY. THE VICTIMS ARE, MORE OFTEN, THE POOR, THE RENTERS, AFRICAN-AMERICANS + THE POWERLESS.

I WANTED TO MAKE A SECOND EDITION OF THIS BECAUSE I'VE COLLECTED + HEARD OF SEVERAL OTHER DEVISONS + EVIL PLANS OF GENTRIFICATION + ATTEMPTS TO HALT IT SINCE THEN. THE RESPONSE TO THE 'ZINE HAS BEEN COMPLETELY POSITIVE + INSPIRING. MANY PEOPLE HAVE TOLD ME THEY'D SEEN GENTRIFICATION IN THE WORKS BUT DIDN'T KNOW IT WAS A CONSCIOUS EFFORT TO DISPLACE COMMUNITIES OF POOR AND, PRIMARILY, PEOPLE OF COLOR, UNTIL THEY'D READ THE 'ZINE. 3RD EDITION? I DON'T THINK SO, HOWEVER, THIS ISSUE NEEDS A PUBLIC + PRINT FORUM WHERE IT CAN BE DISCUSSED + COMBATED. IN ALL SERIOUSNESS, IT WILL TAKE A REVOLUTION TO STOP IT. - SKOT!



## REBUILDING DRUG CITY

A gigantic arc of drugs and destitution is forming in the South Bronx along the east side of the Major Deegan, the west side of the Bruckner, and on both sides of the Cross Bronx between the two other expressways. The arc is bisected along College Avenue by a similar strip connecting it to the base of the Bronx. Here is where New York City is building the largest concentration of homeless housing and shelters in the nation. Like a narrow ribbon, about seven miles long and six blocks wide, it will contain six large new shelters, half of the rebuilt apartments for the homeless, and some of the most dangerous, drug-infested, and segregated neighborhoods in the city.

In New York City one can judge the strength of a community by the number of homeless people being resettled within its boundaries. Neighborhoods with political clout and active local community organizations, able to plan how abandoned buildings and empty lots will be used, have vetoed an overwhelming influx of residents and shelters and hotels. Newcomers are selected and placed in locally managed buildings, so that rooted, stable working and welfare families remain dominant. By contrast, weak communities have gotten more homeless people than they can handle, large concentrations of destitute young families and many more on the way, repopulating neighborhoods that are extreme in their isolation, drug infestation, poverty, and despair. In these sections of the city, ghettos, starker than any New York has seen in the last generation, are being rebuilt at great public expense.

Since the 1950s, when U.S. social scientists began ranking cities according to residential segregation, Chicago has led all others. In 1989, sociologist Douglas Massey found the new pattern of segregation in U.S. cities to be "deeper and at more levels," justifying the neologism "hypersegregation." In Massey's new index, New York City ranks thirteenth, giving the impression that it is relatively integrated.

In Chicago, the present form of segregation was crystallized by the siting of public housing and expressways in the 1950s and 1960s. Poor, black residents live in confined communities that are often physically separated from white neighborhoods by highways and railroad tracks. The longest ghetto "wall," the six-lane Dan Ryan Expressway, was shifted several blocks during the planning stages to separate the huge black ghetto on the South

Side from ethnic blue-collar neighborhoods to the west. Public housing in Chicago was built almost solely in black neighborhoods. When the courts forced the city to construct new projects outside the ghettos, Chicago chose to stop building altogether. The high towers of the Chicago Housing Authority (CHA) complexes, with more than 180,000 legal and illegal residents, not only house but also concentrate the poorest families in the city.

In New York City, until a decade ago, public policies have aimed at a greater mix. Segregation remained steady during the 1970s but is now increasing. A 1987 *New York Times* poll found more than 60 percent of the city's blacks reside in all-black or mostly black neighborhoods, and that 72 percent of whites live in all-white or mostly white areas. These figures minimize the extent of the separation, however, because it is difficult to place New York's large and diverse Latino population into clear racial categories.

New York's ghettos, occupying huge areas of the city, are by far the most populated in the nation. In Brooklyn, for example, there is a hyper-segregated area of more than 450,000 nonwhite residents that includes much of Williamsburg, Bushwick, Bedford-Stuyvesant, Ocean Hill-Brownsville, and East New York. It is an urban section comparable in its poverty, appearance, and size to the west-side ghetto of Chicago but considerably more populated.

The same is true of the area comprising Harlem and the South Bronx. For a length of about five miles, one finds only poor, minority communities barely interrupted by a small Italian enclave along Arthur Avenue in the South Bronx. This section of the city is home to approximately 600,000 minority residents concentrated in a much smaller area than the less populated black communities on Chicago's South Side.

### Shaping the Ghettos

Just as the layout of expressways and the location of public housing transformed Chicago three decades ago, today in New York City three powerful, mutually reinforcing factors are adding to racial and economic segregation: the changing composition, increasing number, and growing poverty of the residents of New York City Housing Authority (NYCHA) projects; the ravages of crack; and the repopulation of the poorest, institutionally weakest, and most drug-ridden urban areas with some of the city's most vulnerable families, many of them formerly homeless.

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squatters and gentrification there is an argument that has enjoyed some lasting popularity that rather than alleviating homelessness and fighting property developers squating communities actually add to the process of gentrification in poorer communities. the reasoning behind this is something like this: squatters move into run down areas, take over disused property and in doing so create a white middle class enclave within depressed inner city areas. the squatters attract and create hip businesses such as cafe's, galleries and the like and demonstrate that it is possible to live in the neighbourhood. soon after other young middle class types such as artists and students move in in search of cheap rents. in doing so they form a vanguard for other more wealthy folks to follow on who are attracted by the "cosmopolitan" feel the squatters and others have created. the original low income residents are pushed out of the areas they have lived in for decades.

whilst this argument has some validity when applied to certain situations it is also so full of holes that i am surprised it has persisted for so long. firstly we should recognise that the process of gentrification is a little more complicated than the way it is outlined above. gentrification occurs for numerous reasons- sometimes hip young things help make an area attractive for investors by moving into houses already vacated by people who have moved "up" and on to the suburbs (eg. fitzroy, australia). sometimes they help push people out in the way described above by making the area hip. sometimes crime and social problems force the majority of residents out and after the houses have laid idle developers buy them up to follow a long term plan for redevelopment (eg. south central, l.a.). sometimes the developers are merely following international trends and choose to buy up inner city properties on speculation. sometimes an outside event such as the olympics can mean an area's values rapidly increase and owners evict tenants and remove "undesirables" with the aid of the police (eg barcelona and atlanta). sometimes wider geopolitical and national events can lead to an area attracting special business investment after being left alone for decades (eg. kreuzberg, berlin after the fall of the wall). sometimes gentrification can be part of a long term government strategy to disperse and neutralise communities it believes pose a threat (eg. lower east side new york, watts). sometimes gentrification spills over from neighbouring areas that have already been transformed (eg. redfern, sydney). sometimes gentrification can be the product of local government trying to increase its wealth and prestige through programs attracting gentrification takes place due to a mixture of these factors and always in the context of wider geopolitical changes (eg deliberate urban decay leading to corporate profits) that restrict squatters or other residents have much control over.

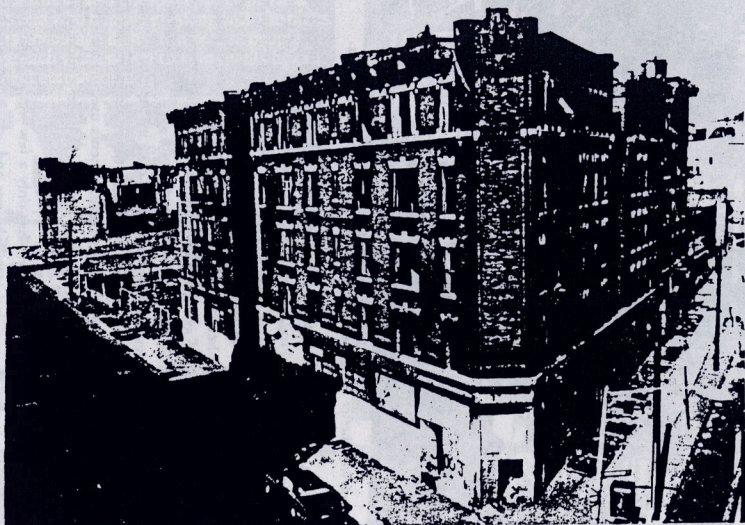
in all of the situations outlined above the presence of squatters can encourage or deter gentrification. it all depends on the particular situation and the

type of squatters living in the area and what they are doing. the argument that squatting equals gentrification presupposes that all squatters are young white middle class punks and artists with lots of disposable income (the perfect fodder for hip capitalists). whilst this may be a popular media image of squatters it is certainly not the whole picture: squatters are primarily low to no income folks of diverse age, ethnicity and gender who are taking what they can to survive. others who are squatting for primarily ideological reasons (and who may nominally fit the cliché) are unlikely to attract the kind of businesses that bring investor interest. people who are using squatting primarily to advance their career through setting up art studios, galleries, cafes and other hip businesses in tandem with others may indeed do so. infoshops and punk venues do not tend to attract yuppies and large numbers of wealthy folks, political hip cafe's do.

other than the fact that squatters are a diverse bunch with differing economic status and market favourability they may also deter or encourage gentrification by their very presence. squatters in areas such as redfern, hachney and braxton have deterred investment as most property investors do not want to have to deal with evicting them and most middle class home buyers do not want to live next door to them or risk having their nest egg occupied by them. the presence of open squat centers and support services can encourage this by helping homeless and other people to take back empty properties as well where squatters and others have resisted evictions and gone on the offensive against developers and government they have certainly made their area a less attractive investment and helped slow the physical removal of low income residents. in these cases local and central government have put considerable effort into removing the squatters and in creating extra incentives for investors to move in. squatters can also aid in slowing or halting gentrification and destruction by taking over properties that are about to become major developments. the case of the pebble squat in sydney in the 1970s and aboriginal occupiers of the path brewery site in the 1990s show how by squatting properties the overall destruction of the riverside and heritage sites for tourism was significantly disrupted. similarly by lowering the amount of readily available property squatters stand in the way of "progress". one more squatter is one less yuppie. in other cases squatters have linked up or led the struggle to improve areas whilst fighting for low income housing (eg. lower east side, new york) and against encroaching development. squatters often generate and protect low income housing through forcing the authorities to negotiate to allow them to stay or create low rent tenancies (eg. housing coop movement in the uk). similarly by providing defending or fighting for facilities and services for low income people squatters can also help prevent the flood of people out of depressed areas. the presence of squatters therefore in itself largely deters investment and the presence of squatters who are willing to fight their evictions and work with other locals does so to an even greater degree.

therefore whether squatters encourage or deter gentrification depends on the specific situation and on who the squatters are and what their aims are. those who identify and fight along side the community or whom are so fucked up as to be totally undesirable



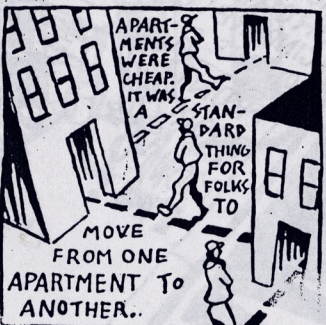
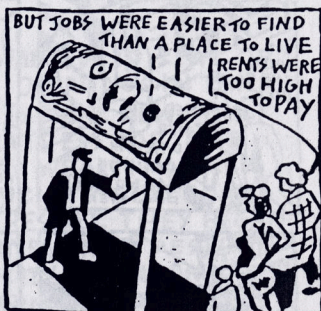


Northwest corner of Westchester Avenue and Kelly Street, South Bronx, May 1983.

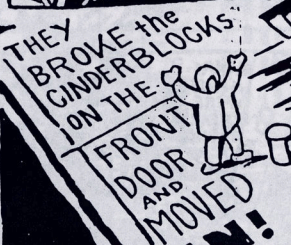


Northwest corner of Westchester Avenue and Kelly Street, South Bronx, October 1987.





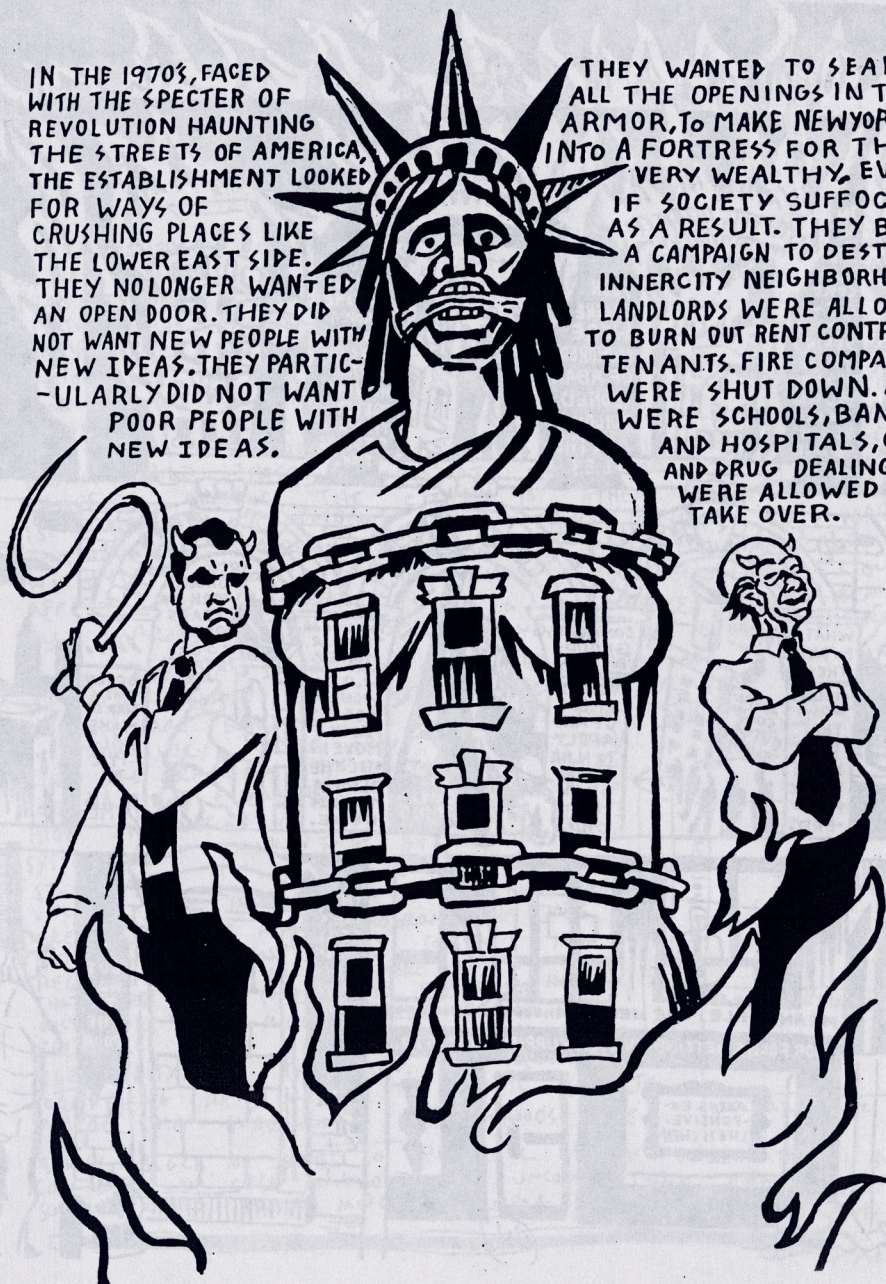




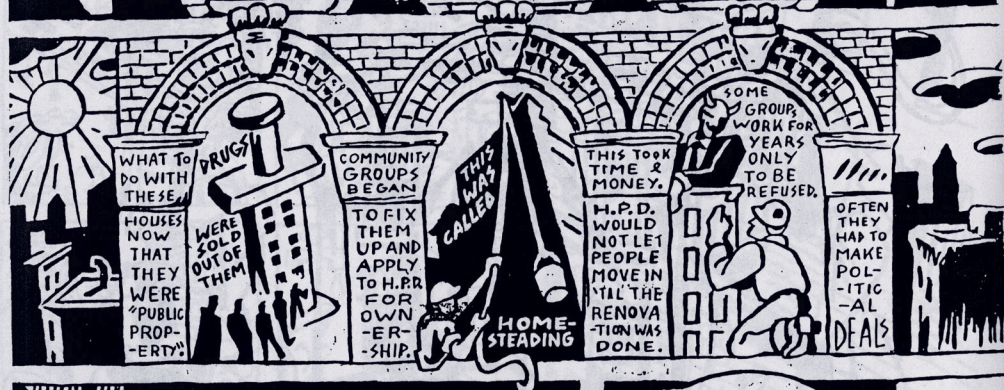
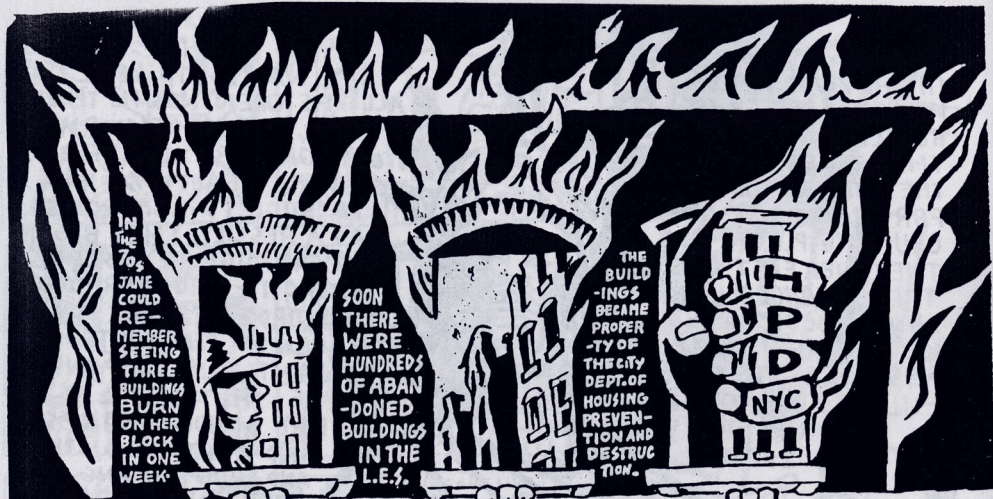


IN THE 1970S, FACED  
WITH THE SPECTER OF  
REVOLUTION HAUNTING  
THE STREETS OF AMERICA,  
THE ESTABLISHMENT LOOKED  
FOR WAYS OF  
CRUSHING PLACES LIKE  
THE LOWER EAST SIDE.  
THEY NO LONGER WANTED  
AN OPEN DOOR. THEY DID  
NOT WANT NEW PEOPLE WITH  
NEW IDEAS. THEY PARTIC-  
-ULARLY DID NOT WANT  
POOR PEOPLE WITH  
NEW IDEAS.

THEY WANTED TO SEAL UP  
ALL THE OPENINGS IN THEIR  
ARMOR, TO MAKE NEW YORK  
INTO A FORTRESS FOR THE  
VERY WEALTHY, EVEN  
IF SOCIETY SUFFOCATED  
AS A RESULT. THEY BEGAN  
A CAMPAIGN TO DESTROY  
INNERCITY NEIGHBORHOODS.  
LANDLORDS WERE ALLOWED  
TO BURN OUT RENT CONTROLLED  
TENANTS. FIRE COMPANIES  
WERE SHUT DOWN. AS  
WERE SCHOOLS, BANKS  
AND HOSPITALS, CRIME  
AND DRUG DEALING  
WERE ALLOWED TO  
TAKE OVER.









# gentrification

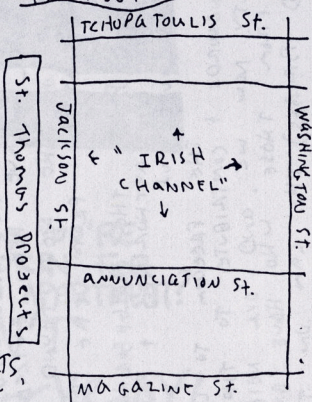
## in the irish channel

OFF 1008 549-1154

IN A SUPPOSED ATTEMPT TO "FIGHT CRIME" + BLIGHT THE CITY OF NEW ORLEANS IS TEARING DOWN THE ST. THOMAS HOUSING PROJECTS, ONE OF THE LARGEST IN THE CITY. PROPERTY OWNERS IN THE IRISH CHANNEL + GARDEN DISTRICT, THE AREAS CLOSEST TO THE PROJECTS ARE GLEEFUL IN A SPECIAL "REAL ESTATE" SECTION OF THE TIMES - PICAYUNE PROPERTY OWNERS + SPECULATORS, SOME OWNING AS MANY AS FOUR HOUSES ON ONE STREET, SIGHTED THE REAL REASON FOR THE DEMOLITION - THEY COULD NOW FIX + RENT OR SELL THEIR PROPERTIES AT A BIGGER PROFIT WHILE THOSE UNFORTUNATE ENOUGH OR TOO POOR ARE SHUFFLED AROUND THE CITY TO OTHER HOUSING PROJECTS, IS MERELY A COINCIDENCE THAT THIS DECISION WAS MADE ENTIRELY BY SURROUNDING BUSINESSES + HOME OWNERS AND NOT WITHOUT EVEN CONSULTING THOSE THE DEMOLITION WOULD AFFECT THE MOST? AND IS IT A COINCIDENCE THAT ALMOST ALL SURROUNDING BUSINESSES, INCLUDING THE EVEN PRESENT +

USELESS ANTIQUE SHOPS, ARE OWNED BY WHITES, AND ALMOST NONE ARE BLACK OWNED? I AM NOT ARGUING WHETHER THE PROJECTS ARE "GOOD" OR "BAD". IT'S OBVIOUS THAT BY THEIR VERY NATURE THEY ARE EVIL - THEY STRIP ITS RESIDENTS OF A RIGHT TO SELF-DETERMINATION + LAKEHOUSE THEM IN ORDER TO HIDE THE VICTIMS OF AN INHERENTLY UNJUST SYSTEM. SOME THINK THAT BY TEARING DOWN ST. THOMAS IT WILL SOLVE THE CRIME + VIOLENCE ITS POVERTY GENERATES. BUT WHERE ARE THE DRUG REHAB PROGRAMS, THE JOBS, + PROGRAMS TO ASSIST PEOPLE TO MOVE INTO REGULAR HOUSING? (I DON'T MAKE ANY ILLUSIONS THAT THESE ARE SOLUTIONS TO CAPITALISM HOWEVER, ONLY MORE BAND-AIDS...) THERE AREN'T IN A SCENARIO THAT'S BEING PLAYED OUT ACROSS EVERY CITY IN THE U.S. THE RESIDENTS ARE BEING RELOCATED TO OTHER PROJECTS, WHERE THE SURROUNDING NEIGHBORHOODS ARE

MISSISSIPPI RIVER



MAJLY BLACK. NO DOUBT SO THE REAL ESTATE SPECULATORS + BUSINESSES CAN RAKE IN CASH WITHOUT THE UNCOMFORTABLE REMINDER OF THE SOCIAL COSTS THEIR MIDDLE + UPPER CLASS STATUS CREATES, IN

CONTINUED