Civic Engagement and Gentrification Issues in Metropolitan Baltimore

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Abstract

Since the fall of 2006 a number of Towson University students concentrating in the discipline of anthropology have been part of a civic engagement and service-learning project focusing on an historic African American community in Baltimore. While the focus of the research project concentrates on the processes of gentrification, individual student outputs center on a variety of topics that detail the history of the community and the contemporary efforts of residents toward urban sustainability.

One of the inherent goals of a metropolitan university is to engage the plethora of issues that are abundant in the urban milieu that surround these institutions. Towson University, as Maryland's metropolitan university, is focused on this mission, and faculty have initiated a number of service learning and civic engagement projects that provide students with opportunities to not only hone applied research skills, but also to place them in real-life situations with community collaborators working toward mutual goals.

The Towson Metropolitan Ethnography Project is a multi-year research project that focuses on the historical and contemporary trends that affect a number of communities in the greater Baltimore region. Over the past two years, one specific project involved anthropology students from Towson University working in collaboration with faculty exploring the processes of gentrification affecting Baltimore's oldest historic African American community. In order to present a comprehensive overview of the community of Sharp Leadenhall and the various socioeconomic issues at play, a number of different research topics have been undertaken. This includes an analysis of gentrification processes in Baltimore historically, contemporary racial tensions between new 'gentrifiers' and established residents in the community, historical and contemporary feminist activism around housing issues in the Sharp Leadenhall community, the history of Baltimore's homesteading movement, and a spatial analysis of the community and cultural fear as a notion that governs the perception of gentrification. The following collaborative essay details the different perspectives brought to bear thus far by the principal author, student colleagues, and our community collaborators as we employ civic engagement toward meaningful change (Meisel 2007).

The History of Gentrification and Displacement in Sharp Leadenhall

"We know, I know, that things have to change, and I'm all for a new economy, but my belief is that you can't put historical in if you're takin' it out." This quote, from a recently displaced long time resident of the neighborhood of the Sharp Leadenhall area of Baltimore, is emblematic of the current tensions black residents are experiencing as their historic community deals with the processes of gentrification. The city of Baltimore has experienced rapid housing development in its urban core in recent years. While beneficial in many respects, this expansion has also signaled a number of problems for established urban residents (Sieber 1991). Gentrification is a tumultuous process whereby urban neighborhoods and housing are restored and refurbished, usually in conjunction with changing demographics and an influx of new residents. Much of this development is the acquisition, or clearing, of dilapidated housing stock for rehabilitation with the goal of increasing market value. Gentrification, in this sense is primarily seen as a class-based movement and perceived as a means of reducing social problems that plague urban areas while increasing real estate prices and boosting local tax revenues.

Alternatively, many see gentrification as a process of displacement for primarily black community residents such as established renters and older homeowners who historically define certain urban neighborhoods and are unable to afford new housing prices or taxes introduced through this trend (Williams 1988). Thus, gentrification disrupts and dissolves communities and is often perceived as racial in nature due to the demographic makeup of most areas confronting its effects (Gregory 1993). Once change is described as gentrification, it initiates a number of conceptual dilemmas and debates for politicians, planners, developers, established residents, new residents, and other stakeholders (Hartigan 1999). Gentrification is having a significant impact on the neighborhood and residents of Sharp Leadenhall. This historic black community has been pressured for more than half a century by social, political, and economic forces that have reduced its size and population (Reddy 2007). As is the case with many other cities in the United States, Baltimore has not only systematically denied African American neighborhoods of capital, but has in addition removed any authority residents may have once had to define their own communities as places of residence (Maskovsky 2006). In response to this, a number of grass roots community organizations and activists in Sharp Leadenhall have worked toward keeping their community intact in the face of change historically and contemporaneously by demonstrating that Sharp Leadenhall is a viable social space conceived by its residents as a place called home.

The Negation of Place through Gentrification in Sharp Leadenhall

When Europeans came to North America and eventually expanded west, they referred to themselves as 'settlers,' 'colonists,' and 'pioneers.' These words suggest that the

continent was previously uninhabited, or at least marginalizes those living there as being unimportant, non-people. This gave justification for claiming the land as vacant and assisted in the rationalization of not only a number of atrocities, but also the forced removal of indigenous people from their ancestral land. A similar process has been underway in urban environments, as gentrifiers 'reclaim' neighborhoods using identical rhetoric. In order for the process of gentrification to occur, an image of 'non-place' or empty space needs to be inscribed on a neighborhood. Often this includes marking the neighborhood with a host of socioeconomic issues such as being drug-ridden and infested with criminals in addition to the reinforcement of a culture of poverty within the urban space (Goode 1994).

According to Neil Smith, "gentrification is the process…by which poor and working-class neighborhoods in the inner city are refurbished via an influx of private capital and middle-class homebuyers and renters—neighborhoods that had previously experienced disinvestment and a middle-class exodus. The poorest working-class neighborhoods are getting a remake; capital and the gentry are coming home, and for some in their wake it is not entirely a pretty site" (Smith 1996, 32). After World War II, returning soldiers needed places to live. The GI Bill made this possible by providing cheap loans for purchasing houses. Unfortunately, African Americans were largely excluded because of racism in real estate practices emboldened by the practice of redlining (Sacks 1994). The Federal Housing Administration made suggestions in policy to keep neighborhoods racially homogenized in order to preserve real estate value, and realtors enacted this via redlining. Marking which neighborhoods were white (green on maps), non-white (red), or mixed, banks would only give loans to people in white or mostly white areas. Thus, "Segregation kept [African Americans] out of the suburbs, and redlining made sure they could not buy or repair their homes in the neighborhoods where they were allowed to live" (Sacks 1994, 96). Homes fell into disrepair in inner-city neighborhoods, and most whites along with some middle-class blacks left for the suburbs. Those economically disadvantaged whites that were left behind in this process became racialized alongside minority communities unable to or prevented from having suburban residence (Hartigan 1999). This phenomenon had a number of consequences for the social identity of urban locales and their residents.

As the inner-city emptied in the post World War II era, property values dropped dramatically. The suburbs filled up, and spaces formed where residences, jobs, and shopping locations gathered together. Simultaneously, businesses and developers started to return to the city in search of cheaper rent and lured by public subsidies (Harvey 2002). Middle-management and other mid-level employees of these businesses needed a place to live. Gentrification represents "the movement of [these] young, affluent professionals into the central city in search of affordable housing in close proximity to employment opportunities" (Brown-Saracino 2004, 137). As these people, and the money of the developers building and renovating their living quarters, move into a neighborhood, "local actors and forces" are marginalized and obscured (Hartigan 1999, 168). The local actors are also often displaced from their long-time homes due to "an escalation in the value of housing stock and in the cost of rents" (Hartigan 1999, 173). There is "a shift in the class composition of an area," and a

subsequent "clash with 'the poor' over how a zone should be used socially" (Hartigan 1999, 173). Gentrifiers come with an idea of the future of a neighborhood, aesthetically and socially. "Typically, real estate agents and gentrifiers seek to strip urban space from its 'historical association with the poor immigrants' who once lived in the central city," and also value spaces that are "separate from low-income black communities" (Brown-Saracino 2004, 138). One of the historical processes that enabled gentrification was the urban homesteading movement in many cities throughout the United States. A re-imagination of the urban space was integral to the history of homesteading in Baltimore and served as one of the primary mechanisms for gentrification in urban neighborhoods.

Urban Homesteading in Baltimore

Urban Homesteading is a familiar element in the narrative of Baltimore's Renaissance yesterday and today. The city's Homesteading Program, the second in the nation (Hayward and Belfoure 1999), allowed the purchase of city-owned vacant houses for a dollar apiece. In exchange, successful applicants were required to bring these "dollar houses" up to code and live in them for a period of eighteen months. Eventually, over six hundred houses were homesteaded throughout Baltimore's central city (Chandler 1988). Rebuilt neighborhoods contradicted images of the urban decay borne of suburbanization, deindustrialization, and disinvestment (Durr 2003).

It did not take long for Baltimore politicians to grasp the promise of the program and extend it to other neighborhoods. Baltimore's stock of vacant houses had grown into the thousands. Some were tax defaults while others had been bought up for projects that were now stalled, whether through lack of federal funding or the skittishness of private capital. The program fit with political exigencies as well. With deindustrialization and large racial shifts taking place in neighborhoods across Baltimore (Smith 1999), the working class and white ethnic political bases were losing their relevance. A significant goal of the expanded program was to bolster the tax rolls and create a more broadly conceived, white middle class constituency in the heart of the city (Chandler 1988).

Yet, this more conservative goal raised the question, whom exactly should the program serve? And—a sensitive issue for a city with Baltimore's legacy of closed housing, covenants, and block busting—who would be living with whom (Massey and Denton 1998; Williams 2005)? Complex anxieties about the racial identity of homesteaders emerged as Housing and Community Development (HCD) took on the task of repopulating entire neighborhoods. When HCD faced questions about the lottery mechanism for selecting homesteaders, they responded uneasily that it was possible that the lottery could create an all-white neighborhood or an all-black one, though the odds were slim. These anxieties about race pointed to a fundamental tension in the homesteading program's utopian ideals of racial harmony.

The homesteading metaphor itself further worked to undercut these ideals. Taking its name from the Homesteading Act of 1862, the program employed frontier imagery to

communicate a sense of optimism, historicity, and fun: HCD's program newsletter was entitled "The Settler." This homesteading, like that of the nineteenth century, conceptualized space as empty, unpopulated, malleable. Jacques Kelly wrote: "In the past year urban homesteading has proven to be a cure for Baltimore's vast wasteland of vacant, fallow houses" (Kelly 1982). Theorist Neil Smith has argued that "contemporary urban frontier imagery implicitly treats the present inner-city population as a natural element of their physical surroundings, and that virtually invisible" (Smith 1996, 86). Hence a *Baltimore Magazine* encomium to homesteading veers off into a veiled allegory of class and racial contaminations: "Where the homesteaders of the West had Indians and potato bugs to contend with, urban homesteaders may well have vandals and rats." Still, the Homesteading program's discourse of individual initiative ("sweat equity") seemed designed to avoid confronting these issues directly: If a homesteader became uncomfortable in a new urban neighborhood, the wisdom of the homesteader could be questioned, rather than the viability of the program or of the city itself.

At its inception, Baltimore's Urban Homesteading drew inspiration from ideals of racial harmony within a post-1968 Riot Baltimore. But a contentious racial landscape, the politically strategic choice to target the middle class, the troubled state of urban neighborhoods, and the "pioneer" discourse of homesteading itself rendered this idealism chimerical. The legacy of this contentious racial landscape still lingers in contemporary Sharp Leadenhall where newly arrived gentrifiers consistently encounter a social landscape that simultaneously confirms racial perceptions and works against an idealization of the neighborhood imagined in the 'homesteading' mode of "returning to" or "venturing to" live in the urban space. The confrontations of newly arrived residents with the members of the community reveals a number of nuances for urban relations, particularly as new residents are often blamed for the displacement of long time residents of Sharp Leadenhall.

Dynamics of Displacement in Sharp Leadenhall

Before Sharp Leadenhall was reduced in size to its current boundaries of a four by five block area in South Baltimore, it encompassed several communities now considered independent including the posh adjacent neighborhoods of Federal Hill and Otterbein. Often labeled as 'yuppies,' residents of Federal Hill are often surprised of the existence of a lower-income, predominantly black historic neighborhood just a few blocks away. The racial and class dynamics that have taken place in the downtown area of Baltimore, and the culture clash that occurs when disparate groups have to share their city, are common features of a community undergoing gentrification. Sharon Zukin has mentioned in her discussions of gentrification that middle- and upper-class homebuyers and gentrifiers usually expect the existence of pre-gentrification residents, and the existence of crime within those neighborhoods to be as prevalent as "background noise" (Zukin 1987, 133); as something that they won't have to encounter because of the comfort levels that have been built for them to enter into such communities in the newly developed 'postmodern' Baltimore.

Baltimore, a 'postmodern city' as paraphrased by Setha Low (1996), is a repackaged, new commodity designed to meet the expectations and needs of tourists (Low 1996, 395). The image of downtown Baltimore today, with high-rise office buildings for banks and other financial institutions, deeply contrasts with its image of decaying warehouses and piers from over fifty years ago. In Timothy Sieber's discussion of waterfront revitalization, he presents a holistic cultural model to explain the developments that take place. This includes the influx of elite newcomers, and their ways of understanding, shaping, and changing a city. While their entrance into the city as migrant professionals produces a sense of optimism, the poor and working class simultaneously experience marginalization, a decline in living standards, and, oftentimes, displacement through division (Sieber 1991).

In the 'divided city' there is a distinct division between abandoned, neglected, residential areas inhabited by blacks, and the amenities, also known as "white cultural playgrounds" that are colonized and populated by whites through gentrification (Low 1996, 389). Blacks are deprived of both cultural capital (and there is an unequal distribution of material resources) and urban services. As Low states, "…hidden barriers of race and class [are] encoded in metaphors of uptown and downtown, upscale and ghetto, and particularly in the United States, black and white" (Low 1996, 388). This concept most closely parallels what is taking place between Sharp Leadenhall and its surrounding gentrified communities as new amenities come in and older community services that are bound to the displaced residents are pushed out.

During gentrification, many black businesses and services are taken out of the community. With this control over the production of 'blackness' comes the loss of close community ties and historical significance. Longtime residents feel that there is no reason to fight for historical preservation if gentrifiers continue to displace them. Extending this notion, Wacquant's 'hyperghetto' is defined as, "a racially and socioeconomically segregated section of the inner city characterized by the 'depacification' of everyday life, 'desertification' of organizations and institutions, social 'dedifferentiation,' and 'informalization' of the economy" (Low 1996, 390). These characteristics are 'resorted' to by community residents when processes of displacement remove traditional community businesses. Black-dominated poor and working-class neighborhoods within the inner city ultimately experience the destruction of peace in their daily activities, are deserted from the basic needs that are commonly provided by community services, and deal with the loss of specialized social characteristics, and engagement in the informal economy (i.e., drug distributors, street vendors, etc.) (Wacquant 1993, 371).

These characteristics closely parallel with the perceived characteristics of Sharp-Leadenhall. It would be accurate to say that residents of Sharp Leadenhall are symbolically banned from the social amenities that stimulate Federal Hill. For example, many of the trendy bars and cocktail lounges throughout Federal Hill, as well as the stadiums nearby, all of which are generally frequented by the yuppie sub-culture, are socially and economically unfit and unattainable by working-class residents from Sharp Leadenhall. There is a subtle message conveyed: *no blacks allowed.* Similar to this

scenario, Sharon Zukin describes New York City's conversion from urban public spaces to privatized spaces with symbolic features that only accept a certain class of people. Class spaces are invented for the satisfaction of middle-class city residents in order to meet the needs of their comfort, entertainment, and consumption patterns and tastes. This "sexy" quality of culture is typical within gentrifying neighborhoods. While particular amenities are supposed to be public spaces for any and everyone, they are implicitly exclusive for people of wealth and affluence to enjoy (Zukin 1995).

Residents of Sharp Leadenhall are also deserted by the spaces that provide their basic necessities such as dry cleaning services and grocery stores. This concern was expressed by one informant during an interview that was conducted in her home, prior to her displacement from one rental property in Sharp Leadenhall to another. Right after she emphasized the fact that residents are exhausted from trying to adjust to change, and experiencing very little success in doing so, she goes on to mention some of the reasons why they might be exhausted.

The fact is, is down here, an' around here, people are gettin' tired, just sick and tired of bein' sick and tired. You tellin' us one thing...look...we don't have no stores here, we don't have nothin' to, that we can grab to, you know, like the elderly people that go to the market, you gotta catch a light rail, or you gotta pay a hack to go, we have nothin' in here! No cleaners, you gotta go over there on Light Street, you know?" (Informant #1, personal communication).

Community activism and historical preservation is a tricky concept to be discussed in relation to gentrification. In, Governing the *"New Hometowns,"* Jeff Maskovsky discusses gentrification in a Philadelphia neighborhood and how such spaces within the inner city transition from spaces of dependency to spaces of investment. The disparate groups that are associated with gentrification serve different interests and have different consumption patterns. One conflict that pre-gentrification residents have to face is whether or not to share the interest of historic preservation with gentrifiers (Zukin 1987, 133) and "with their differing visions of neighborhood life and redevelopment, unite behind the same project" (Maskovsky 2006, 75). Some pre-gentrification residents try to resist development improvements, as it may lead to their displacement, while others feel the need to join gentrifiers in their efforts to preserve the historic value of the neighborhood.

This scenario is present amongst the members of Sharp Leadenhall's Planning Committee, a nonprofit group with historic roots to housing issues in the community. Though they are fighting to preserve the historic value of their neighborhood—as it is the oldest black community in Baltimore—many African American residents in the community are worried that their participation in the development plans will ultimately lead to their displacement from the community. The ability to mobilize everyone—black and white, poor and wealthy—as active participants in urban governance, relies heavily on a multicultural approach that promotes the "management of racial difference and inequality" (Maskovsky 2006, 81). Informant #1 has pointed out the significance of such integrated mobilization:

I really would like to see the community as a whole with everybody workin' together. If you really looked at it, there was only four people [at the community meeting] out of the whole community...you only see four people in a community meeting, then that should tell you somethin'. What is goin' on that only four people are showin' up?...People have gotten to the point where they're scared. Then you've got the homeowners...I saw them participate in one time, I don't think they were for us...we're all in this together...the homeowners need us, just as much as we need them, because with that, the unity will come (Informant #1, personal communication).

The History of Housing Activism in Sharp Leadenhall

The dilemmas and activism over housing and displacement in contemporary Sharp Leadenhall is undergirded by a strong history of feminist-centered activism in the community. The current shrunken boundaries of this neighborhood are a visible reminder of the community's struggles and the external forces that many residents have fought against for decades. In the eighteenth and nineteenth century, railroad construction and unrestricted zoning led to the displacement of hundreds of families and disinvestment in South Baltimore. As a result of these processes, significant portions of once thriving communities became neglected. Even though Sharp Leadenhall survived these initial challenges, the community was fated to face more. By 1956, the National Interstate Highway System had been visualized as forty-two thousand miles of paved roadways that would reshape the country.

In 1967, the City of Baltimore created a condemnation line literally through the center of Sharp Leadenhall for proposed interstate highway construction. The racial scenario that surrounded this development is similar to others throughout the northeastern United States where black communities are labeled as socially aberrant to justify processes of urban renewal (Smith 1996). At the time of this ordinance in 1967, thirty-five hundred residents lived in Sharp Leadenhall. As the city continued to buy up housing in anticipation of the highway, Sharp Leadenhall's residents, who were primarily economically-disadvantaged African Americans, had little choice but to accept the prices they were given and relocate. As a result of the condemnation line, a large number of inhabited row houses were purchased and torn down, displacing approximately three thousand residents.

Although the effects of highway planning and development can initially appear coincidental, scholars argue that the racial consequences of interstate development were conscious and purposeful. As historian Raymond Mohl writes, "In retrospect, it now seems apparent that public officials and policy makers, especially at the state and local level, used expressway construction to destroy low-income and especially black neighborhoods in an effort to reshape the physical and racial landscapes of the postwar American city" (Mohl 2002:1). At the same time highway development was creating quick access points to America's postwar suburbs and shopping malls, it was also displacing tens of thousands of inner city families.

Sharp Leadenhall's experience with displacement was not unique; by the 1960's more than thirty-seven thousand urban housing units were being destroyed annually, while urban renewal projects were simultaneously destroying an equal number. In a 1944 document known as the Moses plan, proposed highway construction along the Franklin-Mulberry corridor in Baltimore was set to displace nineteen thousand residents from the central city, mostly from disadvantaged neighborhoods. When confronted about this aspect of the proposal, Robert Moses, author of the report, replied by saying, "the more of them that are wiped out the healthier Baltimore will be in the long run." The developers of other proposed highway plans echoed similar sentiments.

Such discussions added to the racial climate in Baltimore then and now. While this aspect of Baltimore's history is rarely discussed, its consequences are far from forgotten. Unlike many other American cities, highway developers felt the brunt of discontentment from both city officials and citizens in Baltimore. Ten years after the 1956 highway legislation had been passed, no new development had occurred toward any of Baltimore's interstate plans. Several neighborhood groups developed to protest the proposed displacement of residents, 90percent of which were to be from poor, African American communities. One neighborhood group, named the Relocation Action Movement, summarized the social consequences of the highway construction by noting, "For too long, the history of Urban Renewal and Highway Clearance has been marked by repeated removal of black citizens. We have been asked to make sacrifice after sacrifice in the name of progress, and when that progress has been achieved we find it marked White Only." Baltimore's most successful activist group was known as MAD, the Movement Against Destruction, which was a biracial coalition of thirty-five neighborhood organizations founded in 1968. Among the members of MAD was Sharp Leadenhall's own savior, Mrs. Mildred Moon.

Mildred Rae Moon was born in July 1923 in Norfolk, Virginia. After visiting family members in South Baltimore, Mildred herself moved to Sharp Leadenhall in 1941. In this area of South Baltimore, Mrs. Mildred Moon came to be known as nothing short of a patron saint. Years after her 1992 death, community members still remember her as "the mayor of these parts." The compliments following her name only begin to describe the years of hard organizing that came to define Mrs. Moon's life in Sharp Leadenhall. Mrs. Moon was not immune to the effects of the highway displacement. In a newspaper article Mrs. Moon recalled her own story saying, "I can remember the day just like it happened yesterday, a man came to my door and said, 'Good evening. I'm from the city. We're going to take your house.' " Mrs. Moon's home in Sharp Leadenhall was bought and destroyed. In 1981, a new Harborwalk town house built in the same location was worth $95,000, a price that has undoubtedly skyrocketed with the popularity of the new surrounding neighborhoods.

Mrs. Moon turned her experiences into passionate activism. Although she was active in a number of community issues, she was especially concerned with the state of housing after the highway condemnation. This historical activism is best understood through the notion of "centerwomen" as described by anthropologist Karen Sacks. In Sack's work, centerwomen are contrasted with spokesmen, to describe the gendered methods

employed by women in their mobilization and politicization of everyday social ties and networks (Sacks 1988). This concept draws attention to the power women develop through their everyday relationships and spheres of influence. Centerwomen can, and often do, appropriate stereotyped behaviors and create new meanings by inverting their superficial purpose to develop civil power. This concept is highlighted in a *Baltimore Magazine* article, which discusses women organizers attracting the mayor's attention with punch bowls full of whiskey sours and freshly baked brownies. Though these actions are described as superficial, they created significant ties with city officials that benefited organizers and their communities.

Mrs. Moon was most significantly known for quiet persistence. She was able to move from her church community to City Hall with confidence and power. Former Baltimore Mayor and Maryland Governor William Donald Schaefer remembers that Mrs. Moon would consistently tell him that the highway was going to be moved, to which he would respond that it was impossible, for the plans had already been set in motion. During a later interview he fondly admitted that she had somehow won. As a direct result of her organizing, the proposed path for interstate 95 was rerouted. Without Mrs. Moon's efforts, not only would Sharp Leadenhall have ceased to exist, but many of the city's downtown tourist attractions, located along the water of the Inner Harbor, would have been impossible to construct in the shadows of a massive interstate.

As others have noted, the contestation of gentrification and displacement is more than a struggle for physical space; it is also the symbolic struggle for the power to determine the urban future. From the railroad development of the 1850s to the highway demolitions of the 1960s and the current effects of gentrification, residents of Sharp Leadenhall have fought for an urban future that does not erase their memories. Mrs. Moon struggled to preserve the fabric of her community and today others, such as Mrs. Betty-Bland Thomas who is the current president of the Sharp Leadenhall Planning Committee, are still fighting for this history to be told. While Sharp Leadenhall has been faced with the task of physically rebuilding from the demolitions, the community has also had to face larger questions that simultaneously exist within our city and those that are being addressed today by urban residents during the sub-prime mortgage debacle, such as how does a community go about healing from historical events and current waves of displacement?

Housing is only one of a number of topics that has been addressed by the fluid continuation of female activism in Sharp Leadenhall. Activism is not innately gendered because it is conducted by a woman. However, the centerwomen of Sharp Leadenhall have developed gendered activism through their utilization of female social networks and appropriation of gendered concepts. The power they have developed has quite literally moved highways. Today, even though the fight to move the highway has been won, many issues that were present in the climate of the 1960s still remain as community challenges. In a newspaper article, Mrs. Moon is quoted as saying, "If you don't protect your community nobody will." And while it sounds cliché to bring up the idea that one person has the power to create change, it is an important idea to consider when discussing the effects of homesteading, gentrification, and the concomitant social perceptions that come with these processes.

Conclusion

As shown in the example of Sharp Leadenhall, many of the racialized components related to the highway development were brought to light and addressed by community activists, but today remarkably similar sentiments are echoed in the name of urban revitalization and gentrification projects. And while Mrs. Moon is no longer here to stress those connections, luckily others have followed after her. Thus, one of the messages to take away from Baltimore's first African American community is the power that a single individual can develop and the ways in which that power can serve to create a critical memory of a city's history, to create accountability, and to create a sustainable urban future that recognizes those who have fought the hardest for it.

It is these historical processes and their current manifestations that civic engagement strategies in metropolitan universities are able to gauge by placing faculty and students in communities where these phenomena occur. The question then becomes what can be done about it? Community activism, partnerships, and the mobilization of disparate social groups are essential to dealing with processes of displacement as the immediate effects are felt by those who are forced from their communities, and the historical legacy of this process lingers in newly defined places despite efforts to redefine them. Gentrification is a market force that cannot be overthrown, and no one person is to blame. The racial and class dilemmas that accompany gentrification and their revanchist effects need to be closely observed in both their material and virtual capacities in order to understand the impact on minority communities. As the Towson Metropolitan Ethnography Project enters its third year, gentrification and a host of other socioeconomic issues that precede it and follow in its wake are being explored by Towson University students and faculty working with Sharp Leadenhall community collaborators—with the goal of creating meaningful change.

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