

Contributing to Gentrification

Dave is a recent college graduate who has just started working his first career-track job in the city. His commute from the suburbs to work is over an hour, and he wants to live in the city to be close to work and to enjoy an active night life with his friends who live in the city. Rent in most places in the city is too expensive, but there is an up-and-coming urban neighborhood that he can afford. Historically, this had been a relatively impoverished neighborhood with a high crime rate which made it undesirable to young professionals like Dave. But now it's undergoing gentrification.¹ New coffee shops, bars, restaurants, and independent clothing boutiques have moved into the neighborhood, and these have attracted people willing to pay higher rents to move in. As these new, wealthier residents have moved into the neighborhood, along with the higher-end businesses that serve them, rents have increased; now, many residents and businesses that have been part of the community for decades can no longer afford to stay. Dave dislikes how gentrification can disrupt established communities, but he knows that he would also very much enjoy a shorter commute and a fun and vibrant yet affordable life in the city.² "Would it be wrong of me to move into this neighborhood and thus contribute to the problems of gentrification and displacement?" Dave wonders. Dave feels dejected wondering about the right thing to do. Torn by the issue, he posts his dilemma on social media to gather the opinions of his friends.

In response to Dave's social media post, Angelie replies, "I love living in the neighborhood. Thanks for pricing me out..." Jonas replies, "Haha, you're a gentrifier!" Greg replies, "You've got it all wrong. It's a myth that gentrification causes widespread displacement. Even though some residents do move out, many long-term residents actually want to stay and see their neighborhoods improve. Also, some gentrified areas become more diverse rather than less."³ Kristina replies, "If you're not going to move in, other people will. So, it might as well be you. At least you have a conscience and can address the problems of displacement and poverty in other ways." Clearly, gentrification is a complex phenomenon with many dimensions – moral, social, and political. Dave's informal poll has only made him more confused and troubled.

STUDY QUESTIONS

- (1) Assuming that gentrification does directly cause displacement, should Dave feel guilty if he chooses to move into this neighborhood? Why or why not?
- (2) Does anyone have a right to live in a particular neighborhood? Why or why not?
- (3) Overall, is gentrification positive or negative? Explain.

¹ <http://www.pbs.org/pov/flagwars/what-is-gentrification/>

² <https://www.theatlantic.com/politics/archive/2015/09/this-is-what-happens-after-a-neighborhood-gets-gentrified/432813/>

³ https://www.washingtonpost.com/opinions/five-myths-about-gentrification/2016/06/03/b6c80e56-1ba5-11e6-8c7b-6931e66333e7_story.html?utm_term=.ea16721c7e70

