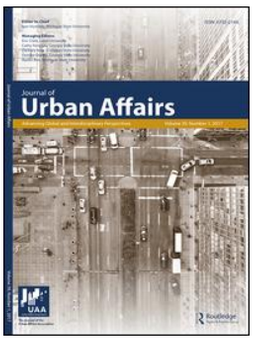

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Gentefication in the barrio: Displacement and urban change in Southern California

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ABSTRACT

Located at the edge of downtown San Diego, Barrio Logan is a neighborhood undergoing rapid gentrification. With a host of new breweries, galleries and cafés, this traditionally working-class, Mexican American community is being rebranded as the latest hotspot for cutting-edge arts and "authentic" local culture. Some support this change as *gentefication*. The word *gentefication* is a play on *la gente* ("the people" in Spanish) and suggests grassroots, Latino-led redevelopment of the community. In this paper, we draw from interviews with local residents, artists, business owners, and developers to explore the contradictions inherent in the gentrification of Barrio Logan. We argue that while *gentefication* signifies an attempt to rewrite urban space in a more culturally inclusive manner, it remains a discursive tool that leads to ongoing displacement of the racialized poor.

Introduction

> We've always been here! The industries polluted and we remained, the freeways divided us and we remained. Now everything in the Barrio is looking nice, and they're pricing us out. Either way, we'll continue to live! We will figure it out. But this is not justice. (Ronaldo,[1] interview, August 2015)

Like many of Barrio Logan's longtime residents, Ronaldo and his family are struggling with the rapid pace of change in their working-class, Mexican American neighborhood. Struggle is not new to Barrio Logan; the neighborhood has a long history of resistance in the face of injustice. Within the U.S., Barrio Logan is best known for Chicano Park, a National Historic Landmark that hosts the nation's largest collection of outdoor murals. Painted on the massive concrete pillars of the Coronado Bridge, the park's colorful murals depict social, political, and environmental struggles, which are representative of long-standing uneven development in Barrio Logan and the U.S./Mexico border region[2] (Griswold del Castillo, 2007). Yet, the community's residents now face a new struggle: rapid gentrification under the guise of Chicano cultural representation. Located adjacent to downtown and between the San Diego Harbor and Navy shipyards, Barrio Logan has witnessed a flourish of attention from developers in recent years. This arguably began with the opening of Petco Park in 2004, a Major League Baseball stadium built on the southeastern edge of downtown for the San Diego Padres. This part of downtown has become rebranded as "East Village" and has experienced rapid redevelopment. Given East Village's proximity to Barrio Logan, real estate speculation is spreading into this historically working-class neighborhood. New cafés, breweries and galleries are repositioning Barrio Logan as a "hotspot for cutting-edge art and authentic local culture" (San Diego Tourism Authority, 2017).

Many long-term residents vehemently oppose this urban change. For instance, in 2017 a fierce debate emerged surrounding a Kickstarter campaign led by a self-described "barefoot bohemian" and White

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travel blogger. In her slick promotional fundraising video, featuring glamorous shots of Chicano Park and artists such as Frida Kahlo, she said that she had traveled the world looking for the perfect place to open a "modern *frutería*" (Spanish for fruit vendor) and found it in San Diego's "vibrant, up-and-coming neighborhood." With her frutería, she hoped to bring a "healthy option to the barrio" in the form of Mexican-inspired fruit drinks. Yet, her campaign spurred an intense backlash, with accusations of cultural appropriation and gentrification. While she replied on social media that her approach was not "appropriation or gentrification, it's APPRECIATION," others disagreed (Zaragoza, 2017). In the words of Brent Beltran, the vice chair of the Barrio Logan Community Planning Group, "For someone to come in out of nowhere and present herself in such a way as to be a savior was at best clueless and at worst completely disrespectful to an entire community and culture that has fought and struggled to survive in the face of great odds" (Zaragoza, 2017). Even worse, she was seemingly ignorant to the reality that over 80% of the barrio's residents are renters (San Diego Association of Governments [SANDAG], 2010), as she defended her "appreciation" of Barrio Logan as a great financial boon to the neighborhood's property owners. For most long-term residents, her business would trigger more harm than good through rising rental prices and displacement.

As noted by Anderson and Sternberg (2013, p. 457), ethnic consumption and the commodification of Mexican culture is often a key part of gentrification in Latino neighborhoods. These formerly stigmatized neighborhoods become recodified as exotic and "up-and-coming" for White, middle-class residents. Yet, gentrification is complicated in Barrio Logan. While demographic data reveals a gradual whitening of the neighborhood, some of this new redevelopment is Latino-led (Wilkens, 2015). For instance, new businesses along Logan Avenue include Border X Brewing, the Chicanista Boutique, La Bodega Gallery, Salud Tacos, and Barrio Dog, all of which are Latino-owned. For this reason, many prefer to use the term *gentefication*[3] to describe the ongoing changes in Barrio Logan. *Gentefication* alters the word gentrification to appeal to *la gente* ("the people" in Spanish) and suggests grassroots, Latino-led urban redevelopment (Ahrens, 2015).

In this article, we explore the contradictions inherent in the gentrification of Barrio Logan. We argue that while *gentefication* signifies an attempt to rewrite urban space in a more culturally inclusive manner, it remains a discursive tool that leads to ongoing displacement of the racialized poor. Drawing from interviews with artists, new residents, long-term residents and developers, we suggest that the excitement over Barrio Logan as the latest hotspot for "cutting-edge art and authentic local culture" detracts attention from the impacts of gentrification on long-term, working class, Latino residents. By exploring the agency and lived experiences of Barrio Logan's residents, we contextualize so-called *gentefication* with voices that are often ignored. We begin with an overview of our research methods, followed by a literature review that contextualizes gentrification and *gentefication* in Barrio Logan. We then draw from our data to provide in-depth analysis on the impacts of gentrification and displacement in the neighborhood.

Research methods

This research builds upon Emanuel Delgado's longstanding connections to Chicano Park and Barrio Logan. Given Chicano Park's cultural significance, Delgado and his family practiced and performed Aztec/Mexica dancing ceremonies in Barrio Logan since he was child. In Delgado's youth, his parents immersed themselves into a network of Mexica dancers that are connected throughout Southern and Central California and Central Mexico. As an adult, he moved to San Diego and regularly attended Barrio Logan cultural and arts events, community meetings, and participated in Chicano Park sweat lodges. He thus brings an insider/outsider perspective to this research.[4] The second author, Kate Swanson, has been researching and teaching about cities, particularly in Latin America and the U.S./Mexico border region, for 2 decades.

This article stems from a larger mixed methods research project in Barrio Logan during 2015–2016, which included geospatial and temporal analysis of U.S. Census data, participant observations, and semi-structured interviews. For this paper, we draw primarily from 21 interviews

with residents, artists, business owners, developers, community organizations, a city council member and a city planner. To recruit participants, Delgado tapped into established networks and attended local community meetings, including the Chicano Park Steering Committee, the Union del Barrio, the Environmental Health Coalition, the Barrio Arts Association, and he attended Aztec dancing practices in Chicano Park. Interviews were conducted in English or Spanish, depending on which language interviewees were most comfortable with. All interviews were digitally recorded and transcribed in English or Spanish.

While many interviewees were recruited from community meetings, we also used a random door-to-door recruitment strategy. While we were initially skeptical about the success of this approach, Barrio Logan residents were very open and interested in talking about changes in their neighborhood. As per our IRB protocol, with the exception of public figures, all participants' identities are anonymized and all were given the option of selecting a pseudonym. Interviews with residents provided on-the-ground perspectives regarding ongoing changes in the neighborhood, while interviews with developers and business owners helped elucidate perspectives on rent gaps, house flipping, and development in Barrio Logan. Interviews with artists—both old and new—were especially insightful in terms of understanding what is being hailed as an "arts renaissance" in Barrio Logan (St John & Cabrera, 2016).

We complemented our interviews with extensive participant observations and field notes compiled from several community meetings and barrio events. To explore the changing esthetics of gentrification, Delgado also observed, noted and photographed ongoing developments in the community. We also drew from media analysis of urban change in Barrio Logan. To analyze our data, we grouped information by thematic categories, assigned codes and searched for commonalities. We then created a concept map to draw connections and uncover themes in our work (Cope, 2016). As a qualitative case study, the results of this research are limited. However, given the similarities between Barrio Logan and other Latino communities in the United States, we believe this research has broader implications for gentrification debates in American cities.

Gentrification is often viewed, even by the people being displaced, as the natural order of economic development. Yet, as Curran (2018) notes, gentrification is an iterative process and a constantly evolving struggle between developers and community members. Barrio Logan is perhaps an example of "actually existing gentrification" (Curran, 2018) where there are complex nuances and widely varying perspectives on ongoing urban change. In what follows, we explore the perspectives of key players involved in Barrio Logan's gentrification in order to share a range of views on the neighborhood's rapid change.

Gentrification and gentefication

In the United States, the pressures of gentrification are often most acute in racialized neighborhoods located at the edge of redeveloping districts (Mele, 2013; Villa, 2000). As we know, race is a social construction; yet, it operates in everyday realities to have profound impacts on urban poverty and marginalization (Wilson, 2009). In this paper, we follow Wilson's (2009, p. 142) racial economy approach to consider how "race shapes the logic, structuring and practices of political economies." In other words, we understand gentrification to not only include class-based population change, but also race-based population change, with uneven impacts on the racialized poor. This corresponds to Phillips, Flores, and Henderson (2014, p. 8) definition of gentrification as "as a profit-driven racial and class reconfiguration of urban, working-class and communities of color that have suffered from a history of disinvestment and abandonment." Within geography and urban studies, research on gentrification has explored a vast array of topics in cities around the world (Lees, Slater, & Wyly, 2010). Yet, to date, there has been limited research focused on gentrification in Mexican American neighborhoods (Anderson and Sternberg, 2013; Curran, 2018; Langegger, 2013; Wilson & Grammenos, 2005), particularly instances where said gentrification is Latino-led (Ahrens, 2015; Dávila, 2004).

Neighborhoods like Barrio Logan in San Diego, as well as Boyle Heights in Los Angeles, the Mission District in San Francisco, and Pilsen in Chicago, are examples of centrally located, historically working-class, Mexican American neighborhoods that have been facing intense development pressures in recent years as real estate prices escalate to astonishing levels. Race has had a profound effect of the geography of these cities through discriminatory labor markets, post-industrial White flight, and racialized residential segregation (Mele, 2013; Wilson, 2009). Institutionalized racism through redlining and discriminatory racial covenants, in particular, created a dramatically unequal racial and economic geography that persists to this day (Pulido, 2000).

Redlining was one of the strongest tools used to create the landscape of the modern American city. In the 1930s, the federally sponsored Homeowners' Loan Corporation created maps of cities across the U.S. that designated four levels of residential security. Real-estate agencies and banks used these maps to deny maintenance, development, or construction loans in areas that were designated as unworthy of investment. In practice, these so-called high-risk neighborhoods—or fourth grade districts—were most often populated by low income residents and people of color. Racially restrictive covenants also prevented people of color from residing in more well-to-do White neighborhoods until the federal Fair Housing Policy of 1968. Barrio Logan was deeply affected by these policies. Located adjacent to downtown, it was designated as both an Industrial/Commercial zone and a fourth-grade red zone, which effectively barred residents from securing affordable financing to renovate their properties or move away. More importantly, it codified a pattern of racial and economic segregation for years to come.

In the 2010 Census, there were 4,890 residents in Barrio Logan, 84% of whom were non-White (SANDAG, 2010). Yet, between the 2000 and 2010 Census, the percentage of Hispanic residents in the neighborhood dropped from 86% in 2000 to 72% in 2010. Meanwhile the White population grew from 6% to 16%. During the same period, the median annual income rose 30% (Wilkens, 2015). Home ownership rates are low in Barrio Logan, at only 18%; this may be because the median annual household income is only $26,761 (SANDAG, 2010). City wide, the median single-family housing price is above $540,000 and many San Diegans are scrambling for places to invest. Barrio Logan remains one of the last remaining centrally located neighborhoods where single-family homes can still be purchased for a median price of $375,000 (Trulia, 2017).

Not all residents oppose the gentrification of Barrio Logan. Some support the ongoing changes in Barrio Logan as an example of *gentefication*. *Gentefication* is a clever portmanteau that puts the "gente"—or the people—in gentrification. The origins of the term remain unclear, but most attribute its first media use to a Latino bar owner in Boyle Heights, Los Angeles (Herbst, 2014). *Gentefication* challenges the dominant production of urban space to suggest resistance against White-led gentrification; it suggests culturally-sensitive, Latino-led urban redevelopment. In recent years, the term has gained popularity in Latino neighborhoods and in the media (Arrellano, 2018; Delgadillo, 2016; Medina, 2013) and is often used as a justification for urban change in Mexican American neighborhoods. Yet, despite its growing popularity, *gentefication* as a concept has yet to gain attention in academic scholarship. There are a few exceptions. For instance, scholars Escalante (2017) and Ahrens (2015) explore *gentefication* in Boyle Heights, Los Angeles. Both are wary of a celebratory embrace of Latino-led *gentefication* in Boyle Heights since class-based displacement is often ignored.

While recognizing that *gentefication* could offer a way to counter the hegemonic production of space in cities, particularly for racialized populations, we would also like to add caution here. Rhetoric and language are powerful tools used to reshape controversial debates, and gentrification is no exception (Langegger, 2016; Wilson & Grammenos, 2005). For instance, while the term gentrification emerged as a critique of working-class displacement, it is now often framed as politically neutral and positive urban change. As noted by Bourdieu (1993), language is an instrument of action and power. The neutralization of language helps reshape the symbolic value and meaning of discourse, which helps powerful actors pursue particular interests. In gentrifying Latino neighborhoods, *gentefication* is often embraced by business and community leaders, partly because it is in their economic interests to do so. Yet, even though *gentefication* is celebrated as *gente*-led, grassroots urban development, we suggest that

this rhetorical portmanteau also works to smooth over gentrification as racially neutral, while deep class divisions remain. By retooling gentrification as a bottom-up process that preserves cultural integrity, the process becomes perceived as less threatening. The focus on "gente," rather than "gentry" masks underlying power inequalities in neighborhoods, particularly those pertaining to class. However, despite a presumed shared *Latinidad*, Latino neighborhoods are in no way politically or economically homogenous; rather, there are multiple overlapping and competing interests and class identities (Huante & Miranda, 2019). These competing interests are acutely visible through gentrification.

Barrio Logan, San Diego is an important case study for this research. Owing to Chicano Park, this neighborhood has become a cultural epicenter for Chicanismo and a symbol of resistance against historical and ongoing oppression of Latinos in the United States (Griswold del Castillo, 2007). Chicano Park was founded in 1970 through successful community collective action to resist municipal encroachment onto a cherished public space. The park's vibrant murals take inspiration from the Mexican muralist movement to feature prominent heroes and revolutionaries, as well ancient Mayan and Aztec symbolism, and aim to chronicle the history of the community's struggles (Figure 1). Yet, some fear that this iconic public art space is at risk of being commodified for Barrio Logan's so-called arts renaissance. Long term residents critique the new arts scene as largely depoliticized as compared to the impactful murals emblazoned on the concrete pillars of Chicano Park. They argue that there has always been an arts scene in Barrio Logan, one which is freely and publicly available, and serves to remind residents of their historical struggles. They critique how their rich history is being appropriated to fuel a so-called arts revival, accompanied by for-profit galleries and arts boutiques.

Commodification of Barrio Logan

According to the founders of Barrio Logan's new Chicanista Boutique, change in Barrio Logan is inevitable. Chicana entrepreneur Lizzie Rodriguez states:

> I tell my neighbors that live off of 33rd Street with me that change is coming … but we have to be active participants in the community. The businesses have to be active participants so we can direct the change in the manner that we want it to go. … We are Latina women, so when people get worried about gentrification, I call

Figure 1. Murals of Chicano Park (Credit: Kate Swanson).

> it *gentefication*. In Spanish, the word *gente* is people, so we are the people, Latin people, coming in a Latin area to maintain the culture. (Morlan, 2016)

With new cafés, breweries, taco shops, boutiques and galleries, many are excited by the changes in the neighborhood. The owner of Por Vida, a new coffee shop, gallery and retail space states, "It's boiling here right now. You can feel the movement. You can feel the change coming on. It's exciting" (Morlan, 2015). However, a long-term resident and director of a youth outreach program in Barrio Logan expressed her frustration at the steady stream of outsiders who think they know what's best for the community: "We're not interested in people who want to gentrify us, hippify us. If people come to enjoy what we have here, that's great. If they're coming in to take us out, we'll fight them" (Wilkens, 2015).

Newcomers are often attracted to Barrio Logan's diverse and seemingly "authentic" culture. For instance, Martin, a Latino artist and new resident, spoke about the cultural vibrancy of Barrio Logan:

> The community—despite its obvious low-income/working class status, and all the things that come with poverty—it's very alive, vibrant. The people are actively engaged in their lives here. They're either working or hustling, or just trying to make it. They are hardy people, they don't roll over, they stand up for themselves and there's a long history here of this community. You know, I think as far as barrios go, it has its empowered component of the people. It's generally peaceful—children and elders walking the streets at night. Very different from the suburbs where I lived for the past 18 years. I seldom saw anybody, and only knew one neighbor. And there wasn't a lot of what I call life. Here you got the *paletero, tamalero* going by. It's a vibrant community. (M. Contreras, interview, May 2015)

Out of necessity, the poor and working class construct a variety of social and economic networks which allow their communities to adapt to structurally degraded environments (Diaz, 2005; Wilson & Keil, 2008). In Barrio Logan, there is a robust urban informal sector, including *paleteros* (ice-cream vendors), *tamaleros* (tamale vendors) and *eloteros* (corn-on-the-cob vendors), as well as vast social networks to support friends and extended family members. Barrio inhabitants are often criminalized for time they spend on the streets. But people occupy public spaces to be social, and to break from cramped spaces at home. They may walk the streets at night because they have no other means of transportation. Romanticizing this perceived vibrancy, as Martin does above, is risky. As noted by Lloyd (2002), gentrifiers often fetishize poverty and survival as part of an "authentic urban experience."

Jerry Smith is another newcomer in the community, having lived there for less than one year. As a White artist and gallery manager, he has a vested interest in neighborhood change. During his interview, he spoke about how newcomers must be the "right" kind of people who are willing to assimilate to the culture of the neighborhood. Justifying his position in this seemingly authentic cultural art space, he explained how artists are leading the change in Barrio Logan:

> There's a soul of artists here. I think they are the lead premise of the change. I think it's bringing the first onslaught of major assimilation, integration. So, some will stay some will go. Everybody's getting outraged about the money coming in, but the truth is, it's going to happen. So, when it does, the question becomes, what happens to the neighborhood? I think money won't be able to change it, the art will always be a community here. And I think that out of all the political beasts, it brings the *right kind of soul of people* here. (our emphasis; J. Smith, interview, September 2015)

Jerry claims that money won't change the neighborhood. Yet, the influx of White and higher classed Chicano/Latino artists and businesspeople have already changed the neighborhood's demographics and class composition. Evidence from other gentrifying neighborhoods (Zukin, 2009) suggests that once this class shift becomes well established, these artists will eventually be pushed out as well.

Many of the new boutiques and shops in Barrio Logan aim to represent Chicano culture. The monthly Barrio Art Crawl, founded in 2016, offers a self-guided tour of not only Chicano Park, but also art collections in new galleries, tattoo parlors, coffee shops, and craft breweries. The Barrio Art Crawl is hosted by the Logan Avenue Consortium, an organization that strives to promote cultural events and help maintain the community's cultural integrity. In fact, in 2017 the Logan Avenue Consortium collaborated with the Barrio Logan Association, the City of San Diego and Glashaus Artist Studios to spearhead a successful application to become a California Arts Council Cultural

District. This program is designed to increase the visibility of local artists and promote socio-economic and ethnic diversity through creative expression (La Prensa, 2017). At the same time, some are skeptical. Long-time resident Beto Placencia states,

> I know there's the art walks that started. That's a good thing, but towards what end? Is it just to bring in and capitalize on the money that is being poured into Barrio Logan? Is it to really build community development in the context of collective distribution of economic wealth? (B. Placencia, interview, October 2015)

Some argue that cultural representations for profit create a façade that distracts, and even justifies the disappearance of the very people whose culture is being commodified (Dávila, 2004). Marketing strategies commoditize and fetishize Chicano/Latino culture by catering to tourists and visitors, while communities of long-term residents are limited in their "ability to control how [their] culture will be promoted and defined" (Dávila, 2004, p. 211). In fact, according to David Morales, a long-term resident, "We can't deny that it is those same galleries and shops that attract outsider culture vultures, affluent folks and developers to the hood … When this happens, rent prices go up and people who have lived in Logan for many, many years are displaced" (Zaragoza, 2017).

Perhaps ironically, two of the Chicano galleries highlighted in the California Council Cultural District press release—Mesheeka and the Chicano Art Gallery—have since closed due to escalating rent prices. First opened in 2013, the Chicano Art Gallery was a key protagonist in Barrio Logan's *gentefication* story and served as an important hub in the Barrio arts community. Yet, signs posted in the front windows of the now closed Chicano Art Gallery and Gift Shop decry gentrification in the neighborhood. One states, "Defend our hoods! Evicted due to gentrification! Stop the displacement of POC [people of color]! Stop the colonization of our homes and safe places!" (Figure 2).

Community displacement

Displacement through eviction and uncontrolled rent increases can be profoundly traumatic experiences for long-term residents (Slater, 2006). Nevertheless, there are many forms of indirect displacements that are often underexplored and which can help explain wider neighborhood transformations (Davidson, 2008). Curran (2018, p. 1714) suggests that by focusing on the everyday, we can see how displacements occur through a series of seemingly minor occurrences, such as the closure of a local shop, a community agency or even a local school. The loss of community resources, the loss of

Figure 2. Chicano art gallery and gift shop, closed due to gentrification in June 2019 (Credit: Kate Swanson).

political control, the loss of traditional neighborhood services, and the loss of former neighborhood cohesion all contribute to displacements in indirect ways (Davidson, 2008).

While gentrification has already consumed many of San Diego's centrally-located neighborhoods, gentrification in Barrio Logan has been slower to take off, partly due to environmental concerns. Like many racialized, working class neighborhoods, Barrio Logan is home to dense urban housing mixed with commercial and industrial developments. This includes small industry, recycling centers, heavy diesel truck traffic, and U.S. Navy shipyards. Combined with its proximity to a major highway, air pollution has been a concern, with reports of disproportionately high asthma rates (Environmental Health Coalition, 2013). In fact, the California EPA and Office of Health Hazard Assessment recently determined that Barrio Logan's pollution burden, which includes environmental exposures and effects, ranks among the very worst in the state (Office of Environmental Health Hazard Assessment [OEHHA], 2017). Joanna Rodriguez grew up in Barrio Logan in the 1990s. She reminisced about her experiences a child:

> I lived in a house sandwiched by two steel welding companies. Most of the time I was not able to get through the block on my way to school because industrial trucks obstructed the road. I would be late to school most times because of the trucks. The steel company trucks would delay traffic and pollute as well. The industrial activities had long-term effects on my family health-wise. My brother developed asthma. Over and above that, my mother developed cancer. I do not think it was a coincidence that these illnesses developed around the same time we moved to this industrially zoned, residential area. (J. Rodriguez, interview, September 2014)

Barrio Logan's families and community organizations have been advocating for environmental change for decades. In the past, various heavily polluting industries were successfully forced out due to community activism and the support of the Environmental Health Coalition. In 2005, a San Diego law passed to prevent commercial trucks from driving through or parking in residential parts of the neighborhood (San Diego City Council, 2005). Yet, municipal support for environmental change has only recently begun to accelerate. At the end of 2014, the San Diego City Council approved a 17-member Barrio Logan community planning group to review development proposals, land use planning proposals, and address social and environmental concerns, such as air pollution, noise pollution and excessive traffic (Wilkens, 2015). This means that Barrio Logan finally has a political voice, which seems to be coinciding with increased financial interest in the neighborhood.

Residents often welcome these changes, particularly positive environmental improvements. For instance, in 2015 the city obtained a $1 million state grant to build two new playgrounds, an adult fitness area, a handball court, a skate area, and improve landscaping in Chicano Park (Richards, 2015). That year also saw the completion of a Chicano Park community garden, funded by the County of San Diego (Showley, 2013). In 2017, Chicano Park was recognized as a National Historic Landmark (Anderson, 2017), a designation that members of the Chicano Park Steering Committee sought after for years. This process finally gained momentum in 2015 when Federal Congressman Juan Vargas, an elected representative for Barrio Logan, introduced the *Chicano Park Preservation Act.*

This simultaneous greening and whitening of the barrio follows a longstanding pattern of environmental gentrification elsewhere (Checker, 2011). For decades, Barrio Logan's residents have been segregated through redlining and racial covenants, displaced and divided by freeway constructions, and environmentally marginalized by the city's residential-industrial mixed zoning. Yet, as the neighborhood becomes more attractive to developers and investors, long-term residents face a seeming paradox: while the environmental changes they have fought for are finally coming, gentrification and displacement are pushing them out of the barrio before they get a chance to enjoy them.

While some of the newcomers to Barrio Logan are Latinos, many have limited roots in the barrio. Nevertheless, they perceive Barrio Logan as a place where they culturally fit in—a place that they can contribute to, and perhaps gain from. For example, Amador Hernandez is an architect and a developer of a new live/work building in the core of the new arts district in Barrio Logan. He was raised in a low-income barrio in Mexico and moved to the United States as a teenager. He traveled around the U.S. and Europe for

his education before settling in San Diego. Amador is well aware of the environmental problems in Barrio Logan, and views investors as the force that can clean up the polluted neighborhood. He explained:

> Many toxics have been infiltrated into this barrio. The change that is coming will get rid of those uses. But it will also bring, inevitably, an influx of socio-economics that is different to what we are used to. It will bring new people, not from the barrio, that don't look like you or I. You may ask, "what are these people coming to do?" Nobody is coming to take anything away from us. They only come to occupy, displace, and in reality, they only displace the undesirable. This improvement of urban infrastructure will remove much stress that generations have endured here. (A. Hernandez, interview, October 2015)

When Amador states, "they only displace the undesirable," we are certain—given the broader context of the conversation—that he is referring to pollution and polluting companies. But consider the implications of "displacing the undesirable." Urban research has long demonstrated that urban redevelopment strategies often cast the racialized poor as "undesirable" (Smith, 1996). Unfortunately, the people who have lived through decades of pollution, who have fought for and gained regulations that protect current residents, are increasingly being pushed out due to rising rent and housing prices.

Another key necessity for the established population is affordable housing. Edgar, a long-term resident, understands the concrete risks of displacement through gentrification. He explained how he had to move multiple times due to rising rents:

> When I lived in Golden Hill, I paid $400 [rent], now I cannot afford the rent there. But the Anglo has been moving into these communities, because they are prepared. They can afford the rising rent costs. At the same time, we don't want for the people who are currently living here, to get priced out of the community. So they will continue to corner us until who knows where we'll go … Tijuana, Mexico? Sure, one can apply for Section 8 housing, but I'd have to wait 'til my old age to get that benefit because of the waiting time. So, it's like I said, there are good and bad aspects of our community progression. (E. Garcia, interview, October 2015)

Since Petco Park opened in 2004, Edgar and his family have had to move five times. Though redevelopment brings much needed resources, the people who need them the most are often pushed out to the periphery where they no longer have access to them.

Sofia, a mother and grandmother, has lived in Barrio Logan for over twenty years. Like many working-class long-term residents, she works in the service industry for a major downtown hotel. She has also had to move multiple times because of the increasing rent. She explained her situation:

> We first lived a block away from Chicano Park, and I was able to take my girls to the park to play. We love the park. Even though there was a lot of gang activity before, this has always been where we belong, and feel welcomed. Though it's a humble park, it's our park, and people who live here will tell you the same thing. Shortly after we moved into the barrio, they opened Petco Park, and the landlord raised the rent by $200. I couldn't afford it, so I moved to the other side of the freeway. Then five years after that, my new landlord raised the rent on me, and again I had to move further away. Little by little I am being pushed out. (S. Ramirez, interview, May 2015)

Jorge Morales, a life-long resident and real estate agent, also described how some established residents have already had to move out of the neighborhood:

> The building where I grew up, Doña Pati lived there for over 25 years, and once the guy took over and started remodeling the place, she left. She was paying around $650 on a studio where five people were living. It's what you can afford. But right now, if you try to lease that studio, it goes for about $1,075/month. The thing is, that they bring this concept of "lease" which we're not used to. The Latino community, we pay month-to-month, we shake hands, and that's it. And here you have to sign a document and is a little frightening. "Oh, I'm committed for a year!" So, it's scary. (J. Morales, interview, May 2015)

In the case of some Latino residents, a lease can be an intimidating document. Based on a history of intimidation through legal means, Latinos, especially immigrants, are weary of paperwork that may be used against them.

Socializing norms also differ among established residents and new residents. Long-term residents critique the new residents for their lack of interaction and integration into the existing community. Most established residents in Barrio Logan are accustomed to interacting with one-another frequently, whether through work, on the streets, or at the store. Nina, a long-term resident, explained

that she can tell who is new by their lack of greetings: "The blond-haired people do not greet." She continued:

> I think the people who live here have changed. If you talk to them, they're nice, but if you don't say hi, they don't pay any attention to you. I usually say hi to most people, and sometimes they answer and sometimes they don't. They ignore me. They must think I'm crazy. (N. Jaramillo, interview, August 2015)

Similarly, many of the new developments—along with the people who frequent them—are subtly exclusive. The established residents who live across the street from these new trendy venues, avoid the artsy events because they are preoccupied with their daily lives and/or they feel like outsiders within their own neighborhood. One neighbor commented about the arts events: "The events are very noisy, and they play music loudly. Damn pot heads! We have to sleep and go to work the next day" (R. Briseño, interview, August 2015). Places and people that symbolize wealth often alienate marginalized populations (Granzow & Dean, 2008), not by explicitly excluding them, but simply by the visual appearance of distinct classes. In this case, the arts scene alienates the poor from the richer classes.

As development progresses, investors are scurrying to take advantage of undervalued land in the neighborhood. Moreover, new developments are raising the cost of living for the working class in the neighborhood. Real estate agent, Jorge Morales, described his experiences with developers, some of whom are seeking vast profits with little regard for long-term residents:

> I've had developers that want me to do assemblage for them, which means to go after multiple and adjacent individual houses and buy them up together. So the developer can come in, tear them down. … A clear example: Further down, there's an Italian Restaurant that just moved in, Strozzi's. And Doña Maria lives in and owns the house next to it. The previous owner said, "Jorge, try to get me this land [Doña Maria's place], I need to tear it down and put some parking in." He was leasing space to park his client's cars. When I spoke to Doña Maria, I told her that the guy is willing to give her top price for the place. She said, "There's no price. It's already under my grandkid's name" and I said, "I understand," and that was the end of the talk. I did that a lot around here. (J. Morales, interview, October 2015)

The impacts of displacements are vast in Barrio Logan. While long-term residents experience direct displacement through rising rents and lack of affordable housing, they also experience indirect displacements through environmental gentrification, changing neighborhood dynamics, subtle every day exclusions, legal intimidation from landlords, and rising pressures from developers. Together these changes serve to make long-term residents feel "out of place" in their own neighborhood.

Arts in the Barrio

Chicano Park muralist, Vicente Orozco, argues that despite recent media excitement over the arts renaissance in the barrio, "there has always been an art scene in Barrio Logan" (Interview, February 2015). Many new artists are leaving previously gentrified neighborhoods to move into Barrio Logan's abandoned warehouses and turn them into art studios in this newly "discovered" arts enclave. Artist Jerry Smith is excited about the "happy changes" in Barrio Logan:

> I only see that progression [Jerry points to downtown] coming this way, but with the limit of keeping the heritage as it is and keep[ing] the community as it is. I think the right people support that struggle of not knocking things down, but modifying to the next. So, the changes that I've seen are all happy changes because we see that people are coming in and moving into the neighborhood are bringing in that soul and heritage. (J. Smith, interview, August 2015)

When asked about his role as an artist in Barrio Logan, Jerry explained:

> I think art serves a purpose, it's not necessarily to sell art. My art is more expensive than people here can pay. My paintings go for $6,000-$7,000. But I am constantly in support of any art venue that comes in. My purpose is to draw the people into what was previously *a dark side of the barrio and show them the light*. (our emphasis; J. Smith, interview, September 2015)

Like many of our interviewees, Jerry spoke to the perceived inevitability of Barrio Logan's gentrification. He portrays himself as a benevolent artist who has chosen to bring his (very

expensive) art into Barrio Logan to attract more artists. He also wants to free newcomers from their fear of the "dark side" of Barrio Logan. He fetishizes the "soul" of the barrio and describes it as the next up and coming community. In Jerry's depiction, the "dark side" of the barrio fits with racialized stereotypes of a barrio saturated with drugs, gangs, and crime. The "light" side, on the other hand, represents the flourishing arts scene, which is clearly designed for the privileged class.

While art studios are seemingly open to the public, outsiders from beyond Barrio Logan are the main audience. Artistic social gatherings are mostly advertised through social media, which is inherently exclusive. Even younger established Barrio Logan residents who would be interested in, for example, a Chicano Comic Con event, are often unaware of these events until it is too late. Jorge Morales provided some insight into why the established community rarely frequents the art studios. He explained how established residents and new residents often perceive the arts scene in vastly different ways:

> I see that a lot of the artists are mainly Chicanos, but yeah, I'd say about 25 percent of the people attending the events are Mexican/Latino descent. Part of it is that the community feels a little bit outcast. Me growing up [in Barrio Logan], my father/mother never took me to an art event. We're more occupied with working, paying the rent. So, the arts are a luxury (J. Morales, interview, May 2015).

As Jorge points out, the luxury of viewing arts as a pastime is often reserved for those from privileged class positions. Many established community members do relate to Chicano art, but may not relate to depoliticized art that does not portray the community's culture. Porfilio Ramirez, a local store owner, expressed his opinion about this kind of art exposure:

> I don't feel that the people that have been here for a long time give a shit about an art gallery. They want to see changes, yes, but I don't think they care if we have an art gallery or not. It's not really anything that portrays the Mexican/Latin culture. I've walked into a gallery and looked at an art piece and said to myself "What the fuck is that?" Then I walk out. It doesn't do anything for me. Maybe, you know, it comes from a very ignorant person. I don't know shit about who painted this. Okay, if it was a Picasso, you know, I could buy that. But John Doe down the street painted this. Where did John Doe come from? Seattle and moved to San Diego? He don't know shit about the barrio. Or maybe he learned a little bit, read in a book, what the Hispanic culture is supposed to look like. (P. Ramirez, interview, May 2015)

Porfilio is clear about his perception of the arts scene. He's not interested and many established residents may feel the same way (Figure 3).

Figure 3. A barber shop/coffee shop/art studio on the Barrio Art Crawl (Credit: Emanuel Delgado).

Despite much evidence to the contrary (Ley, 1996; Matthews, 2010), art does not have to coincide with displacement. For example, Chicano muralists painted the pillars of the Coronado Bridge in the 1970s without triggering displacement. Chicano muralism has a purpose to educate about traditions and struggles. Taking inspiration from the Mexican muralist movement, Chicano art conveys powerful political and cultural messages. It recognizes that Chicano people bridge modernity and past, as well as life on both sides of the U.S./Mexico border (Anzaldúa, 2007). Chicano Park was made to be a cultural hub and to highlight the injustices that the Chicano community faces in the U.S. This artistic resistance against an oppressive economic system is one of the main reasons why Chicano muralism and Chicano art need to be part of the resistance against gentrification. Beto Placencia discussed the challenges with new arts in Barrio Logan.

> … my question is what is the relationship of these art galleries to political struggle in the community? There has to be that coordination [between the arts and established community] in order to build resistance to capital, so that capital doesn't buy out our cultural workers, the artists. This way the art culture is a real representation of the aspirations of our people: to achieve social/cultural economic development that benefits the collective community. (B. Placencia, interview, October 2015)

New artists have the potential to unite with the working class and organize a united front against injustice in Barrio Logan. Yet, despite clear overlaps, there is limited connection between the newly formed arts community and the long-established Mexica dancers, Unión del Barrio, political protests around the neighborhood, and the Indigenous ceremonies at Chicano Park. Though there may be a sense of unity between community artists and new cultural commodifiers, they create an environment that inadvertently alienates much of the working-class inhabitants. Martin explains the complex role of artists:

> As an artist, it's a little tricky. One of the things we've learned is that the arts—even though in our case it was the art of protest, and muralism, the permanent socio-political statement—it also is the harbinger of development. We've seen studies that wherever an arts district begins to emerge, so too do property values go up, people who can't afford the rents, and the whole profile of the community starts to change. The middle class starts to come in, usually younger, hipsters, yuppies with beards and mustaches (M. Contreras, interview, August 2015).

One person who does engage with the arts community and the established community is Nestor Villas—an artist, educator and spiritual leader. Not only does he document the community's history through his vibrant mural paintings and art studio, he also leads Indigenous sweat lodges at Chicano Park. He is a lifelong resident of Barrio Logan and is a member of various community organizations. Nestor explained his Indigenous connection to the arts:

> People call it progress, and modernity. They tell us to move on and live in the present. They say, don't live in the past. But for us, art and our traditions are a way of maintaining our harmony and dignity as a people. We honor our ancestors who have struggled for us to be where we are. They are the ones who have laid all this out for us. (N. Villas, interview, August 2015)

Long term residents worry about the commodification of Barrio Logan's long existing arts scene as new residents and artists move in. As Beto Placencia explains, capital or money presents a genuine risk:

> I think the biggest challenge is for our established Chicano historical artists. It's difficult to be able to survive, produce art and culture in a way that does not compromise the principles of our own communities. I know that Chicano Park got a big facelift with federal grants. It's great to see the revitalization of the historical murals because they have to be preserved. It becomes problematic once capital begins to introduce itself as the primary force for so-called economic development, in that it does it in a way of appropriating culture, and art, using community cultural spaces as a form of cultural imperialism, and changing the character of the type of murals. (B. Placencia, interview, May 2015)

While some envision Barrio Logan's ongoing transformation as "happy" change, the impacts to long term residents are significant. The so-called arts revival is indirectly exclusive and largely caters to the more privileged class. While this arts revival may be framed as culturally-sensitive urban change, some fear it's more about cultural commodification and profit, which will change the long-term character of Barrio Logan in problematic ways.

Conclusion

Barrio Logan provides an excellent case study of "actually existing gentrification" (Curran, 2018), where there is a complicated and evolving struggle between long-term residents, new residents, artists and developers. The mask of *gentefication* and the commodification of Chicano culture are key ways in which gentrification unfolds in Barrio Logan. Formerly stigmatized as a low-income, racialized Mexican American neighborhood, Barrio Logan has recently been re-codified as an "up-and-coming" artistic enclave offering "authentic" cultural experiences for adventurous urbanites.

Gentrification is complicated in Barrio Logan given that many praise ongoing urban change as culturally-sensitive *gentefication*. While some perceive Latino-led *gentefication* as a bottom-up counterpoint to the hegemonic production of space in cities, others decry that it still leads to the displacement of the racialized poor. Not only through evictions, but also through systemic neighborhood change. Rhetoric and language shape controversial debates in powerful ways. By neutralizing language, powerful actors can retool discourse to their economic and political advantage. In this instance, we suggest that while *gentefication* is often celebrated for its sensitivity to cultural integrity, this rhetorical portmanteau masks underlying race and class inequalities. While *gentefication* is often embraced by business and community leaders, the focus on "gente," rather than "gentry" effectively marks the process as neutral or benign. By examining the lived experiences of long-term Latino residents in Barrio Logan, we have demonstrated that this is not the case. Rather, Barrio Logan's long-term residents are experiencing ongoing displacements across their community. In effect, *gentefication* smooths over the racialized nature of displacement, which disproportionately affects low-income Latinos.

The commodification of Barrio Logan's public art is also of great concern. Even local Latino artists may be unintentionally complicit in the gentrification process. The logic of *gentefication* suggests that Latino-led businesses and galleries should be safe from displacement. However, the recent eviction of the Chicano Art Gallery and Gift Shop—one of the first Latino-owned galleries to open in Barrio Logan in 2013—is evidence that artists facilitate the influx of investments and the gradual displacement of the established working class. In practice, the profit motive continues to supersede community concerns.

Barrio Logan's Chicano artists have fought against oppressive social structures for decades, particularly through the murals painted at Chicano Park (Davis, Mayhew, & Miller, 2005). Although we argue that arts are currently being appropriated and commodified to brand and market this neighborhood, arts are a powerful means to resist injustices. Much like the movement for Chicano Park in the 1970s, long-term residents can fight against gentrification by building upon Barrio Logan's long-established activist organizations. In fact, some already are, including Defend Barrio Logan, an organization committed to resisting gentrification and displacement in their neighborhood. As stated by activists from Defend Barrio Logan (2017),

> Gentrification is happening, no doubt. But it doesn't mean we won't organize and put up a fight. Because gentrification is a form of violence. Put in work however you can: help research to connect the dots (the money flow, the connections), organize with friends and *familias*, flyer, in the hood, but fight back and organize.

The former owner of the Chicano Art Gallery also vows to keep fighting against the negative impacts of gentrification. Anti-gentrification workshops and protests are ongoing. A banner in the front window of the former gallery states, "Gentrification is systemic oppression! I'm no longer accepting the things I cannot change, I'm changing the things I will not accept! Varrio Si! Gentrification No! Barrio Revolution!" (Figure 2)

Stripped down to its essence, *gentefication* in Barrio Logan is simply gentrification in another guise. While *gentefication* is presented as grassroots, community-led urban development, it remains a familiar tale of profit-driven racial and class reconfiguration of a working-class community of color. Despite the best intentions of some community members, embracing *gentefication* as positive urban development ends up sugarcoating ongoing displacement in a soaring real estate market. The

words of the former Chicano Art Gallery owner help summarize the reality of the situation, "I want people to know what happened here. The hard truth. I hope it will inspire people that are in a position where they can invest in property here that are not greedy people and think only on how much money they can make from us. Someone that carries the community in their heart. And that sincerely cares about something besides their wallet" (Lopez-Villafaña, 2019).

Notes

1. With a few exceptions for public figures, all interviewee names are pseudonyms.
2. Chicano Park emerged in 1970 when local community members occupied and took control of a piece of land that had been promised during the construction of the 5 Freeway and Coronado Bridge, both of which cut through this historically Mexican American community.
3. In this article, we choose to italicize every instance of *gentefication* to distinguish it from gentrification.
4. Emanuel Delgado is a first-generation Mexican American raised in the barrio of Huntington Park in Los Angeles, a primarily Latino neighborhood characterized by above average poverty. He identifies as a Chicano, Mexica/Aztec dancer, artist, and community activist. Mexica/Aztec dance is based upon ancestral Mexican Indigenous traditions. It gained popularity among American Chicanos in the 1970s.

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