

Gentrification of Color in Asian Ethnic Enclaves

How has gentrification of color impacted the socioeconomic structure of Asian enclaves in New York City?

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INTRODUCTION

- Most of New York City's Asian immigrant residents are concentrated in two Asian ethnic enclaves: Chinatown and Flushing. These neighborhoods were formed in low-rent districts that white Americans who already resided there deemed undesirable.
- Gentrification is a demographic and economic shift that displaces established working-class communities and communities of color in favor of wealthier newcomers. Gentrification previously has been opposed by minority communities as affluent white populations are usually the gentrifiers who cause cultural displacement.
- In recent years, Asian real estate developers and investors have started to play a more active role in the gentrification of Asian ethnic enclaves. This is gentrification of color.
- Sales for One Manhattan Square, one of Chinatown's newest luxury developments, were launched exclusively overseas, targeting international Asian buyers.
- F&T Group, a Taiwanese-American real estate development group, has facilitated major luxury real estate development projects in Flushing like One Fulton Square, Tangram Mall, and Flushing Commons.

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

Through the analysis of oral histories, historical archives, and local newspapers, this study addresses the following research questions:

- How has gentrification of color impacted the socioeconomic structure of Asian enclaves in New York City?
- How does gentrification of color impact relationships between different classes within the Asian community and what are the efforts made to deal with its consequences?

IMPORTANCE

- While Asian real estate developers and upper-class residents tend to support gentrification of color because they believe they serve the neighborhood's best interest, the lower-income and working-class residents who can not afford the new amenities suffer from the loss of affordable housing.
- Understanding the motivations of ethnic gentrifiers, which often extend beyond economic factors, enables urban planners to engage and collaborate with them on community projects.



Manni Lee on the rooftop of her building in Chinatown with One Manhattan Square in the background. (Mengwen Cao)

RESULTS

- The tensions in Chinatown and Flushing surrounding gentrification are evident from the oral histories, newspaper accounts, and archival materials.
- The class disparities that gentrification of color highlights ultimately breaks down the supportive social structure of Asian ethnic enclaves.

DISCUSSION

- The findings of this study indicate that gentrification of color displaces lower-income residents while highlighting intra-racial class disparities.
- The pushback to gentrification of color exposes conflicting interests between the socioeconomic classes within the Asian community.
- These intra-racial class disparities impact organizing efforts to preserve the culture of Asian ethnic enclaves in New York City.
- At the same time, the concept of gentrification of color introduces the possibility that gentrification may provide benefits to the gentrifying ethnic group and thus suggests a form of gentrification that is culturally inclusive.

LIMITATIONS

- Given the recent nature of this subject, not many oral histories specifically regarding the new luxury development projects have been conducted in Chinatown and Flushing.
- Some oral history databases, like MOCA, have biases that may impact the oral histories they choose to publish.



Images of the Special Waterfront District Proposal. (NYC Planning)

SOURCES

- Oral histories (The Queens Memory Project, MOCA, and The Chinatown Legacy Project).
- Historical archives (The Minkwon Center for Community Action, People First NYC, and Coalition to Protect Chinatown).
- Local newspapers (QNS, *The Gotham Gazette*).

