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**Gentrification by Design: Rhetoric, Race, and Style in Neighborhood
“Revitalization”**

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“Revitalization”**

by

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Dedication

For the advocates and activists who work tirelessly towards more just and equitable communities.

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Gentrification by Design: Rhetoric, Race, and Style in Neighborhood “Revitalization”

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The University of Texas at Austin, 2016

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Stories about communities being displaced by gentrification in the name of revitalization and redevelopment are commonplace today and despite its many drawbacks, gentrification remains a pervasive mode of city growth and strategy for development. An analytical and interventionist project, my research is concerned with illuminating the disparities gentrification engenders, questioning the common assumptions and general wisdom shared on the topic, and ultimately critiquing this increasingly accepted form of urban change.

At the heart of my dissertation I ask how gentrification has become such a powerful hegemonic force and aim to examine how rhetoric and communication have been employed in an agenda that marks serious change for neighborhoods with grave consequences for community members and public life. With this goal in mind, I develop a theoretical lens for exploring gentrification at the intersection of hegemony, whiteness, and style and develop a methodological approach for studying the rhetorical style of gentrification. Austin’s gentrifying East Riverside Drive and 11th and 12th Street Corridors serve as case studies for this research and I examine a range of artifacts and texts from community meetings, to slide presentations, architectural renderings, community surveys, articles in local publications, and neighborhood planning strategies.

The analyses conducted in both case studies highlight the power of style in shaping discourses, opinions, the articulation of problems and solutions, and public sentiment about gentrification. I ultimately argue that gentrification is a rhetorical style that has been put to use to legitimize displacement and wholesale redevelopment, perpetuates inequalities, and has lasting impact.

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Chapter 1: The Problem of Gentrification

It was 2013 and the change to the neighborhood was slow and steady over the previous two years. First, there was the construction of a fancy new apartment complex a few blocks away. The building's empty storefronts took a while to fill, but soon a sports bar, Radio Shack, electric bike company and standup paddling shop attracted shoppers and residents alike. Although food trailers always characterized that part of town, the "trailer park" at the edge of the new mixed-use development diverged from typical East Riverside taco truck fare and featured trailers offering everything from sandwiches, to desserts, to Krispy Kreme. Other parts of the neighborhood were changing too. Two Red River music venues relocated to the area as increasing rents and sound regulations forced Emo's and Beauty Ballroom to move east of their downtown digs. A little further up the road at Riverside and I-35, multi-million dollar condos were being built. At the time, I lived within walking distance of these new amenities in an apartment complex surrounded by acres of vacant lots and construction sites. Where low-income housing units once stood, a construction zone emerged. Construction crews worked six days a week and with each passing month, the transformation of the physical and cultural characteristics of the neighborhood intensified.

Writing in 2013, I began the final paragraph of my dissertation prospectus with the following: "Once the dissertation is complete, my neighborhood will have completely transformed. The description in this prospectus will render East Riverside Corridor unrecognizable to those who encounter it months from now." After those sentences were written, the change along East Riverside was rapid. This kind of change, frequently referred to as revitalization or redevelopment is often welcomed, celebrated, and promoted as proponents cite environmental, social, and economic benefits to the city,

neighborhood, and residents. In fact, in 2009 East Riverside residents (a largely low income community of Hispanic immigrants, families, and renters) participated in the planning process for the East Riverside Corridor; they described their needs and wishes for their community (Mueller and Dooling 212-213) and helped “[pioneer] the . . . vision of a more compact, walkable city with more services” (Paup). The idea of a dense, mixed-use, transit oriented neighborhood understandably had its appeal to a community identified as “transit-dependent” (Mueller and Dooling 213) since the prospect of living along a transit corridor could mean easy access to work and other city features.

Later, city planners would cite these meetings and conversations, promote the notion that the change along East Riverside came from the ground up, and celebrate the outreach efforts, democratic process, debates, dialogues and public input that formed the Master Plan for the area. At the core of this logic, open communication will have shaped the changing cityscape; residents, stakeholders, and the public all helped shape the vision for the future of East Riverside, including those who would eventually be displaced by it. As a rhetorician, I couldn’t help but reflect on the ways in which the plan for change would be persuasive for an audience of low-income residents at that meeting in 2009. When your community depends on public transportation, who wouldn’t be attracted to walkable and transit-oriented streets? The promise of sidewalks, better infrastructure, and improved conditions for all certainly has its appeal. When landlords have neglected apartment complexes to the point that chipping paint, broken fences, and regular crime have taken over, who would resist the possibility of better, safer housing? When new developments are supposed to have certain percentage of “affordable housing” units, most don’t ask that the term be defined, but assume that it means their neighborhood will remain affordable for those currently living there. When residents are invited to give input on the vision for the future of their neighborhood, they are invested in seeing that

vision come to fruition and would likely assume they will be included in the future plans. These examples present only a small selection of the powerful rhetorical appeals employed in discourses about the change along East Riverside that would have residents believe revitalization is a public good that would benefit all. The circulation, prevalence, and repetition of these appeals appear everywhere from neighborhood meetings, to newspaper articles, to casual conversations with neighbors.

One hopeful but cautious resident spoke up at a neighborhood planning meeting in 2009, “We are in favor of a plan that converts the zone into a more beautiful area, more pleasant for pedestrians, and with greater access to public transportation - we just ask that these changes don’t have the effect of raising our rents and, in effect, forcing us to leave the community that we have spent years building” (quoted in Mueller and Dooling 215). Unfortunately, this resident’s fears have since been realized. Instead of including current residents in the plan for the future of East Riverside, housing advocate Karen Paup accurately observed, “city planners seem to view them as an obstacle to be removed.” Despite involvement in and contributions to the initial planning stages, low-income residents of East Riverside were left out of the plan for “compatible and attractive development that will enhance the neighborhood” as if to suggest that their presence conflicted with city goals for developing “places [people] want to live near” (City of Austin, “ERC: Bringing the Vision”). In sum, the plan for a better community has come to mean extreme loss for a large part of the East Riverside community, specifically for folks who don’t fit the vision for the future neighborhood. Once a community on the margins of Austin’s downtown, East Riverside has been swept up in the change of Austin’s metro area and, as a result, the largely marginalized community that once populated the neighborhood has paid the greatest costs.

This story and scenario is not unique to East Riverside, or Austin, for that matter. Similar stories about communities being displaced by gentrification in the name of revitalization and redevelopment are commonplace today and have become an accepted aspect of city growth. This form of development and the discourses around it reflects a process occurring in neighborhoods throughout Austin and in communities across the country¹ and around the globe.²

In the case of Austin's gentrifying neighborhoods, rhetoric and communication have been employed in an agenda that has marked serious change for neighborhoods with grave consequences for community members and public life. There is much at stake when we shift the cityscape or formulate a vision for a community; that is to say, the process of place-making is inherently rhetorical. Place is rhetorical because it is "meaningful, legible, partisan, and consequential" and helps shape what it means to be a "public" (Dickinson, Blair, and Ott 6). In Austin's gentrifying neighborhoods, the consequences are clear and the public that once comprised these neighborhoods has changed significantly.

In neighborhoods across the City of Austin, gentrification is prevalent to such a degree that East Austin was ranked fifth among the "fastest-gentrifying neighborhoods" in the country (Berg, "Fastest-Gentrifying"). There is no question, what is happening in Austin is full-blown gentrification, but while *some* view gentrification as "cultural genocide" (Quintanilla) others think that revitalization and urban change are set to improve our city and the quality of living for the majority of its residents. The majority

¹ Gentrification in cities like New York (for example see Zukin or Freeman), San Francisco (for example see Solnit and Schwartzberg), Chicago (for example see Bennett and Schaefer or Fleming) has been studied somewhat extensively, though the shape it takes varies by neighborhood, time, and place.

² Just to name a few, cities like London (for example see Glass or Butler and Robson), Melbourne (Jager), Sydney (Shaw), and Montreal (Rose) have all experienced gentrification.

take the latter stance as the process of gentrification seems to be overwhelmingly accepted, if not celebrated. Acceptance of gentrification in Austin slides along a scale from laying out the welcome mat to acquiescing to its assumed inevitability; such a view is perpetuated in the discourses of City Council members, journalists, and Austin residents alike.

According to the popular narrative, the wave of gentrification is powerful and there is little anyone can do to control it. In response to concerns about decreasing housing options for the poor, one city representative shirked responsibility stating, “I keep hearing the city is doing it. The market is doing it” (City of Austin, “ERC: Bringing the Vision”). According to this discourse, the city’s hands are tied when it comes to the destruction of low-income housing to make way for new condos; the market is in control. As neighborhoods are transformed from ethnic enclaves to “hipster havens,” news reports simultaneously lament the change and its impact on residents while aligning gentrification with progress, renewal, and revitalization. “East Austin is moving on up,” they say (Smithson). When a historic residential area once home to working-class and minority families is transformed into an entertainment district, the *Austin Chronicle* encourages readers to “take a walk, have a snack, and enjoy a beer. And while you’re at it, soak up some history” (Feit, “Ghost”). We can’t stop city change, but we can learn to appreciate what once was, this rhetoric would have us believe. As one commenter writes in response to a letter to the editor in the *Austin Chronicle*, Austin’s change is not malevolent, but it is unavoidable. The commenter makes the distinction, “If someone forcibly removes you from your property or cheats you in some way, that’s horrible, especially if it’s racially or culturally motivated. If you build a city that everyone wants to live in and property values rise, that’s just part of the inevitable change that is and will be affecting every resident here in Austin, regardless of ethnicity” (Quintanilla).

Gentrification is the price of progress, many residents believe, an unfortunate, but inevitable factor to deal with when you live in a city where everyone else wants to live too.

In a city known for its focus on sustainability and diversity, “progressive” politics, weird sensibilities, and creative cachet, it is puzzling that (re)development and its accompanying displacement go so easily unquestioned. Where are the scathing critiques of the city’s generic “vision” for future development that directly contradicts the city’s “Keep Austin Weird” ethos? In a community once galvanized to Save Our Springs and fight off developers, where are the masses resisting current developments to help save our communities and neighbors?³ If Austin is focused on sustainability and prides itself on diversity as local activist Susana Almanza and housing advocate Karen Paup suggest (Castillo, “Many Longtime”), where are the efforts at sustaining the diverse neighborhoods in the urban core? With hundreds of low-income units demolished and none being built in their stead, where is the outrage from a city that in 2006 voted to approve housing bonds designed to help low-income families (Wendler)? Where more than one in five residents live under the federal poverty line (Castillo, “More Than”) and two in five are considered low-income (Castillo, “Report”), why aren’t more Austinites concerned about the destruction of its low-income housing stock?⁴ What about the impact of redevelopment, particularly on the most vulnerable populations? What about equity?

³ Austin’s relationship with developers and growth has always been turbulent. The battle for the “soul of the city” has been waged multiple times over multiple issues. The Terence Malick and Robert Redford produced documentary *The Unforeseen* portrays an excellent example of one such battle.

⁴ I pose these questions with full knowledge that Austin’s character is not static and I do not mean to essentialize Austin or suggest that Austinites make up a monoculture. To acknowledge its multiplicities and identities (Massey, “Space, Place, and Gender” 153) does not negate what Rev. Joseph C. Parker Jr. refers to as Austin’s “personality and collective spirit that emerged from a combination of history, surroundings, systems, the people who have moved through it and the events that have occurred in it.”

What about justice? Comedian and social critic George Carlin once said that people either care about people or property. Is it really that simple? Does no one care?

There was a time when Austinites cared deeply about how the city dealt with change and growth; the development discourse was extremely contentious. Joshua Long's (2010) book *Weird City* focuses on modes of creative resistance to development in Austin and describes it as a "hot button issue" (7). The geographer writes, "the city has long served as an ideological battle-ground between 'developers' and 'anti-growth' advocates" (3). Rhetorician Jenny Rice (2012) starts her book *Distant Publics* at the scene of protest over the removal of trees to make way for a larger football stadium at the University of Texas in the 1960s. She describes an epic battle over the removal of oak trees that spurred a "reaction from Austin's population [that] was nothing short of outrage" (2).

Today, Austin's skyline is freckled with developer's cranes. Especially across East Austin, industrial cranes may have started to outnumber their natural world equivalent: Austin's perpetual ornithological nuisance, the Grackle. And, of course, we still hear complaints about city growth, and traffic, and concerns about keeping Austin weird. *Texas Monthly* shared a headline from a 1983 article in the *New York Times* that read "Booming Austin Fears it Will Lose Its Charms," demonstrating that Austinites complaining about city change is nothing new (Solomon, "1983"). But the outrage, anxieties, and contempt for development and fears that Austin is losing its soul does not often fix its sights on gentrification and the displacement that has accompanied it. According to Robert Jensen we need to focus less on keeping Austin weird and more on making it more just. He argues, "Lots of smug, self-indulgent liberals in Austin decry changes in the city as it becomes larger and more business-oriented, with more open flaunting of wealth and depraved events such as Formula One racing. But we should not

confuse this critique with serious commitment to the critical self-reflection that is needed to save our souls” (Jensen, “Souls”).

Broadly speaking, the roar of dissent so prevalent in discourses about gentrification in the 1960s has quieted in recent years.⁵ Though gentrification is taking place at a much larger scale and to far many more communities, popular public perceptions of the phenomenon have shifted from total outrage to reluctant acceptance and even celebration. Ultimately, contemporary discourses of gentrification have helped naturalize this (still largely urban) phenomenon and changed gentrification’s reputation from Beelzebub to benign and, in some cases, benevolent.⁶ At the heart of this dissertation, I am seeking to understand how this came to be. In what follows, I first delineate several research questions that inform my dissertation, then I offer definitions for several key terms that are central to my research. I move on to explore some of the ways gentrification has been studied and identify the gaps that remain, and I conclude with a preview of the remaining chapters in this dissertation.

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

An enduring dilemma, the problem of gentrification is particularly vexing. Despite its many drawbacks, gentrification remains a pervasive mode of city change and strategy for development. While academics can’t even agree on its definition, the popular imaginary views gentrification as inevitable, natural, even beneficial to all. In light of all this, my dissertation is designed to provide a starting point for investigating this quandary. Academics, politicians, and even the most well-meaning city councils,

⁵ For the most thorough analysis of early versus contemporary literature on gentrification see Slater’s 2006 article “The Eviction of Critical Perspectives from Gentrification Research.” According to Slater, “Up until the late 1980s, very few, if any, scholarly articles celebrating gentrification existed (“The Eviction” 740). See also N. Smith (1996) or Hammel.

⁶ See for example Duany and Hampson.

urbanites, and housing advocates may view gentrification as a social good. Insofar as gentrification, its processes, and consequences have become seemingly naturalized and widely accepted, the central question animating my dissertation will ask:

- *How, and under what conditions, has gentrification achieved such powerful hegemonic status?*

With this overarching question in mind, I will zoom in on the rhetorical function of gentrification and seek to understand the following:

- *What is the rhetoric that maintains this hegemony? More specifically, how is the hegemony of gentrification perpetuated through visual, material, and discursive rhetorics?*
- *What strategies are put to use in order to justify and legitimize gentrification? And how are issues of gentrification negotiated rhetorically?*

Gentrification (both term and process) is political, influential, meaningful and consequential. Gentrification has developed into an authoritative hegemonic force that has come to serve as the dominant mode of city redevelopment. Its influence stretches beyond the neighborhood and determines who has the right to the city. It invites some and deters others, it embraces a particular aesthetic and regulates anything that defies its aesthetic. Gentrification deserves our attention because its influence is not fleeting. It is caught up with capital, political, and cultural forces and it will determine the shape of our cities for decades to come. In short, gentrification is a rhetorical project and there is much at stake in how we describe, envision, and ultimately (re)build our cities.

At the conclusion of *Naked City* Zukin laments “If this is not the end of history, at least it is the end of place-bound cultures and local identities that we thought, mistakenly, would last forever;” what seems to be her acquiescence to the gentrification of New York serves as a warning to other cities and citizens (222). She implores readers to plant their

roots firmly in place, build political will from the bottom up, and reshape the rights of ownership - an effort she insists will require rhetoric (244-245). Indeed, rhetoricians are well positioned to contribute a critical lens to gentrification studies and extend our understanding of this powerful hegemony. With a focus on transformation, my research is concerned with illuminating the disparities gentrification engenders, questioning the common assumptions and general wisdom shared on the topic, and ultimately combatting this increasingly accepted form of urban change. As such, this dissertation is both analytical and interventionist. My goal is to provide (what I view as) a much-needed rhetorical and critical lens to both the (inter)disciplinary and public discussions of gentrification in hopes it can be applied in academic and policy contexts.

DEFINITION OF TERMS

Gentrification

Academics have constantly struggled to settle on a singular definition of gentrification. The study of gentrification is a truly interdisciplinary effort as scholars from fields such as sociology, geography, law, American studies, planning and urban studies, art history, and architecture (to name only a few) contribute to this large body of scholarship. These disciplines represent a small variety of theoretical and methodological approaches to the topic, outnumbered only by the variety of definitions, assumptions, and conclusions derived from studies of gentrification.

Using the term gentrification is in and of itself a political statement. Coined by sociologist Ruth Glass in 1964, the term was constructed with critical intent meant to capture the destructive effects of an encroaching middle class onto poor urban areas in the sixties (Lees, Slater, and Wyly, *Gentrification* 217). Still relevant today, gentrification has grown from a process taking place in a couple of urban cities in the

1960s to a global development strategy impacting cities, suburbs, and rural areas around the world. Certainly, “there can be no single theory of an invariant gentrification process” (Beauregard, “Chaos” 35). Because it has changed so much over time, one of the central debates in gentrification studies is over the use of the term itself and how exactly to define it. In her book *The Gentrification Debates*, Japonica Brown-Saracino traces this debate and echoes an assertion of scholars before her who allow that the term and process is multifaceted and cannot be reduced to a singular definition or explanation (“Conclusion” 356; see also Smith and Williams 3; Slater, “Gentrification” 1196). Still, some argue that the label is outdated, oversimplified, lacks specificity, and does not capture the dynamic spatial, economic, and social implications of gentrification today (Hartigan, *Racial Situations* 168; see also Zukin, *Naked City* 221).

Having studied gentrification since the 1980s and traced its development from a process of individuals seeking authenticity and distinction from the middle class (*The Cultures of Cities; Landscapes of Power*) to a global development strategy (*Naked City*), Sharon Zukin worries that calling the contemporary iteration “gentrification” minimizes the organizational effort and collective investment in the current process (*Naked City* 221). I respectfully disagree with this assertion as it assumes structural and institutionalized forces did not always already influence and engender gentrification. Like the gentrification of today, gentrification of the sixties, seventies, eighties, and nineties was not some organic or natural occurrence, but occurred as a result of racist, capitalist, and patriarchal practices (Soja 199). Additionally, even at its earliest conception, gentrification could not be reduced to a simple definition as different contexts and cultures influenced its formation. As such, to use the term “gentrification” does not reduce or essentialize the process and still allows for multiple approaches, interpretations, and understandings.

More important than internal debates about what to call or how to define gentrification is an exploration of the use of the term and “the rhetorical effects the label achieves” (Hartigan, *Racial Situations* 169). Ultimately, “the way we talk about the places we live has material implications for how those places develop and change” (Modan 7). According to the linguist Neil Smith (not to be confused with the geographer), our language “usage reflects the preconceptions of the dominant group and is aimed, consciously or unconsciously, at preserving a culture which will reinforce the status quo the resources of language are recruited to bolster the power base of the elite” (*Language* 56). He goes on to state that “Whatever the power structure, you can guarantee that it will arrogate to itself the right to linguistic hegemony . . . deriding the dissidents as it does so” (N. Smith, *Language* 57). When referred to as urban revitalization, renewal, resurrection, renaissance, regeneration, revival, redevelopment, rehabilitation, and reclamation,⁷ gentrification is framed in a positive light, “anaesthetizing our critical understanding of [it]” (N. Smith, “New Globalism” 446). This is an area in which rhetorical studies is especially positioned to examine the discursive functions of gentrification. As a process that is constantly in flux, rhetorical scholars can explore how gentrification is described and discussed to examine how it operates as a hegemonic force in contemporary culture.

This is all to say that how I define gentrification will impact my ways of seeing this phenomenon. Additionally, my use of the term is a political one. In many ways, it connects me to the communities I study and allows me to align myself with the critical

⁷ All of these terms have been used to describe gentrification. In fact, all of these terms are part of book titles about processes of urban change. The linguistic range of ways scholars describe this process points to one of the central issues in studies of gentrification: a lack of agreement on what it actually is and whether or not it is a positive or negative social, spatial, economic, structural, organizing force.

perspectives of activists and advocates fighting gentrification in their communities.⁸ For the purposes of my dissertation I borrow from Zukin and Perez to define gentrification as “the movement of rich, well-educated folks, the gentry, in to lower-class neighborhoods, and the higher property values that follow them, transforming a ‘declining’ district into an expensive neighborhood” (Zukin, *Naked City* 8) which ultimately “reconfigures a neighborhood’s racial and social landscape” (Perez 324). The addition of race to the definition is of paramount concern, particularly in a city like Austin and gentrifying neighborhoods in the United States more broadly. Class has often overshadowed race when it comes to definitions of gentrification, but people of color are disproportionately affected by the downsides of gentrification.

Hegemony

In very basic terms, hegemony consists of a web of relations and meanings that function as both a self-interested strategy and unconscious perpetuation of the dominance of one group, culture, or identity over another. Always dynamic and shifting, Gramsci’s concept of hegemony suggests “culture, politics and the economy are organized in a relationship of mutual exchange with one another, a constantly circulating network of influence” (Jones 5). Hegemony is often a product not of force, but of consent as “successful hegemony not only expresses the interest of a dominant class, but also is able to get a subordinate class to see these interests as ‘natural’ or a matter of ‘common sense’” (Childers and Hentzi 131). How gentrification is normalized and the ways in which particular forms of urban development are commonly seen as solutions to urban issues and legitimize urban renewal practices are a central concern for this dissertation.

⁸ After giving a talk about gentrification in Austin at the University of Texas, many residents and activists came up to me afterwards and thanked me for using the word “gentrification.” The previous talks in the series (as well as community meetings and forums hosted by city planners) did not call it that, but referred to the same changing neighborhoods as revitalizing or transitioning corridors.

How the shifting city relates to issues of power, control, and dominance is of great import as this dissertation examines the rhetorics that support and are crucial to the creation of a particular hegemonic order. Located beyond the realm of pure economics, the term hegemony incorporates the cultural realm as well and is tied to institutions and aspects of everyday life (Hebdige 17). The conceptualization of hegemony in this project borrows from Gramsci who views hegemony not as static, but dynamic, opening up the possibility for counterhegemonic resistance.

Discourse

Throughout my dissertation, I examine gentrification discourse. I equate discourse with the term “text,” meant broadly to capture the visual, material, and discursive aspects of gentrification discourse. Though some would suggest discourse lies solely in the linguistic, my definition of discourse expands beyond this usage to incorporate texts such as buildings, city spaces and places, imagery, and architecture. Whether in material, visual, or linguistic form, I view discourses as rhetorical and communicative forces that persuade, invite, argue and instruct. Discourse shapes our understanding and perspectives of phenomena and can be extremely influential. This dissertation explores a variety of texts to uncover the rhetorical patterns located in gentrification discourse.

Gentrification can function rhetorically and the ways we shape our discourses about gentrification also shape our understanding of its causes and effects. Difficult to define, contested, but enjoying its position in hegemonic understandings of place, development, and city growth, this dissertation explores gentrification as a phenomenon with lasting consequences that deserves further consideration.

Urban Growth: Extending Definitions, Explaining, Connections, and Expelling Assumptions

The terms defined above are all interconnected to some degree. They share complex relationships that converge to explain, challenge, and perpetuate what we've come to understand as commonplaces of gentrification. The proceeding section offers a brief extension of the aforementioned definitions as they commonly connect with terms related to growth and urban change.

A more nascent development in studies of gentrification, gentrification is currently enjoying its place in the hegemonic structure and critical scholars are starting to take notice. Once reviled and resisted, mainstream perceptions of gentrification have shifted quite significantly since it was first studied in the 1960s. Several scholars have started to explore the ways in which gentrification has come to be an accepted form of urban development in academic and public discourses. According to Tom Slater, "mainstream scholarship [on gentrification] . . . does nothing more than parrot and perpetuate the status quo (widening class inequality in cities) with so much appeal to the media and neoliberal policy elites" ("Gentrification of the City" 572). Academic studies that have been most cited in the popular press deny displacement as a problem of gentrification and suggest gentrification is a common good. Such studies are taken up and help legitimize and naturalize gentrification. One of the dominant themes in the gentrification literature attributes the hegemony of gentrification to its powerful connection to rhetorics of growth.

Much of the discourse promotes the economic, social, and ecological advantages of city life and, as a result, urban growth is often viewed as both a means to generate these advantages and a solution to economic, ecological, and environmental problems in the city. David Harvey theorizes that because we've seen so many cities crumble and

recover, we've grown to view "the extraordinary growth of cities" as solutions "set to override catastrophes, losses, indignities and woundings" and growth has often been employed as the solution to economic crises ("Body Politic" 25). Simply defined, urban growth strategies focus on reviving what have been deemed declining downtown areas in order to generate profit and increase tax revenues for cities, and are often accompanied by the refurbishment or replacement of old buildings with new ones (Logan and Molotch). The logics that propel urban renewal and growth prevail because of their purported economic and social promise promoting the collective belief that growth equals good. In their book *Urban Fortunes: The Political Economy of Place*, urban sociologists John Logan and Harvey Molotch argue that cities are "growth machines" created by politicians, media, culture, and elites and the desire for growth generates consensus that meets little resistance and goes largely unquestioned (51; see also Zukin, *Naked City* 228). They suggest growth's central ideological thrust connects growth goals with civic pride and "better lives for the majority" (61-2) and is perpetuated by a belief that for neighborhoods both rich and poor "there is nowhere worth going but up" (145). The claim that growth benefits all groups meets little opposition because the general consensus is "growth strengthens the local tax base, creates jobs, provides resources to solve existing social problems, meets the housing needs caused by natural population growth, and allows the market to serve public tastes in housing, neighborhoods, and commercial development" (Logan and Molotch 85). The consensus-generating advantages Logan and Molotch highlighted in 1987 continue to characterize common assumptions about growth and help to explain the compulsion towards it. Consequently, today's cities have developed comprehensive plans and strategies to attract, generate, or propel growth and its accompanying (re)development and revitalization. Sociologist John Hannigan observes that narratives of growth and better design "legitimate development

and secure public approval” as cities market urban strategies as “plausible and non-threatening” (61-3). This point is underscored by sociologist Sharon Zukin who explains, “Together capital investment and consumer culture encourage both city governments and city dwellers to think they could have it all: a postindustrial revolution with no human costs, both a corporate city and new urban village” (*Naked City* 223).

The rhetorics of growth are pervasive and compelling, but growth does not always benefit the collective good as so many would have us believe. Logan and Molotch question the wisdom of growth and reject overarching claims that growth solves urban problems or benefits all urban residents, calling such assertions deceptive, extravagant, and inaccurate descriptions of reality (85). While they admit growth can be beneficial in some cases, it is not value-free and most often its advantages and disadvantages are unevenly distributed (13, 93-8). Columnist George Monbiot calls growth a “political sedative, snuffing out protest” and excusing government “from dealing with inequality” (quoted in Greider 202). In fact, in many ways, growth is built upon and perpetuates inequality. According to Elizabeth Mueller and Sarah Dooling, scholars from the University of Texas School of Architecture, urban growth and development often targets minority, low-income neighborhoods. They write, “Low property values in central-core neighborhoods make these neighborhoods prime locations for redevelopment efforts;” a settlement pattern, they argue, is built upon outdated patterns of urban growth that purposefully excluded vulnerable populations (202). Indeed, contemporary processes of urban change are eerily familiar to those of the past, whether written in 1872⁹ or reflected in the housing policies of the 1950s.¹⁰ According to Harvey, growth is a deliberate

⁹ Harvey quote Friedrich Engels’ description of the transformation of modern cities at length and marks its direct application to urban processes in Asia and gentrification in the US (“Right to the City” 28).

¹⁰ Sampson worries that despite claims to the contrary, we haven’t learned from the past and approaches to urban renewal today are similar to the teardown approach to poverty in the past (420).

process driven by economic, social, and political interests where the violence of the wrecking ball and subsequent redevelopment “are often every bit as destructive as arbitrary acts of war” (“Body Politic” 26).

Neighborhoods and people are casualties in the pursuit of growth and a competitive edge over other cities, but there is evidence to suggest that plans for growth and redevelopment may be at odds with city economic goals as well. The growth of creative cities encouraged by Richard Florida (“How the Crash”) has proven to be a “delicate ecosystem” (Hannigan 75). Even Florida argues the lack of affordability in cities is “profoundly unhealthy for our society;” he uses New York as an example of a place where high priced real estate reduced diversity and made the city “arguably less stimulating” (“How the Crash”).¹¹ Edward McMahon warns that many communities suffer economic consequences when planners neglect community distinctiveness and focus mostly on numbers. He argues that thinking about the “values, customs, character, and quirks that make a place worth caring about” are central to the sustainability and economic success of cities. This distinctiveness is threatened when “authenticity” is turned into a rhetoric of growth by developers and city officials, replicated in cities around the world, and subsequently results in what Zukin describes as an “overbearing sameness” (*Naked City* 231). Ultimately, “unlimited growth is not the only urban policy” and “has turned out to be a false measure of urban health” (Rybczynski 227; see also Greider 204).

In sum, our cities are changing and growth is encouraged, but the financial returns (never guaranteed and unevenly distributed), often come at a steep cost. The commonly held belief that individuals and cities have to choose people or property when planning

¹¹ Of course, Florida fails to acknowledge his complicity in this problem or recognize that his own strategies of growth have helped drive low-income people from city centers.

for change is simply not the case. To hope for change or improvement in a community shouldn't mean opening the floodgates to development, gentrification, and displacement; as Robert Sampson writes in *Great American City*, "Physical infrastructure and housing are crucial, but so too is the social infrastructure" (421). Situating gentrification within the broader context of urban change and growth contributes to our understanding of why gentrification may occur, but it would be a mistake to conflate the two or assume gentrification (and the displacement that accompanies it) is a necessary and inevitable characteristic of urban change (Wilson and Grammenos 296). Such an assertion has unfortunately become commonplace and helps to sanitize and naturalize gentrification as a solution to urban troubles. Despite evidence to the contrary, gentrification continues to maintain its hegemonic status as positive panacea. As such, the question about how this occurs and what rhetoric maintains this hegemony remains. In the following section, I review some of the literature related more specifically to my research questions and examine the existing research on gentrification, hegemony, communication, and rhetoric.

GENTRIFICATION & HEGEMONY: REVITALIZATION AND RESIGNATION

Narratives of revitalization impact not only our cities and communities, but academic perspectives of the process as well. When the dominant narrative frames gentrification as a solution to urban problems rather than a problem itself, a call for social justice, spatial equality, or the right to the city is subsumed by discourses that present a choice between "*either* unlivable disinvestment and decay *or* reinvestment and displacement" (Slate, "Eviction" 753; see also DeFillippis 89; August and Walks 284). According to Doreen Massey, "It is this framing . . . that underpins the assertion that there is no alternative [to the prevailing model of development]" ("Is the World"). The purchase of gentrification as a critical term is depleted and transformed in to a force of

goodwill linked with neighborhood improvement (Newman and Wyly) and social mixing, making it a major planning and policy goal (Lees, Butler, and Bridge 2). Such impressions of gentrification have become “entrenched and normal” (Glynn 166), muffle the voices of discontent, and buttress support for gentrification.

In their book *Mixed Communities: Gentrification by Stealth?*, gentrification scholars Gary Bridge, Tim Butler, and Loretta Lees examine hegemony at the intersection of gentrification and the goal for mixed communities where “social mix policies are accepted and sometimes deployed uncritically by various levels of urban governance in the face of evidence that suggests they will not be successful” (Lees, Butler and Bridge 9). Such policies are commonly deployed in the US where New Urbanist mixed-income communities have become the ideal, despite increasing criticisms that they don’t fulfill their goals and better results could be achieved through other strategies (4). Whether one describes it as (re)development, revitalization, or gentrification, this process of urban change is currently employed as a development strategy, answer to growth, and a remedy for urban “decay” thus warranting our careful consideration.

A more explicit example of the study of hegemony and gentrification comes from Kirsteen Paton, a sociologist who examined what she termed “gentrification hegemony” in the neighborhood of Partick in Glasgow. Paton’s work asks us to understand gentrification as a hegemonic shift. Such a view, she suggests, “problematizes the notion of gentrification as ‘good’ or ‘evil’” as her study reveals the ways the working-class participates in and benefits from the process of gentrification (262). While Paton recognizes working-class inclusion is limited and controlled, her analysis offers some explanation for why gentrification in Partick has met little resistance. A strength of her study is her focus on working-class experiences and perspectives, but her research seems

to ultimately support the discourse that shifts attention away from the negative effects of gentrification. This poses some dangers that I hope to resist in my own research as,

[C]aution must be taken when commenting on the decline of resistance, as this is only a short step away from saying that gentrification is not resisted at all, and thus by implication not a problem . . . simply to put out that observations of the decline of resistance can so easily be appropriated by agents of gentrification and used to justify the process with rhetoric such as ‘Nobody is objecting to what is going on here!’ The lack of conflict over space in a number of cases does not mean that gentrification is somehow ‘softer’ or less feared by low-income and working-class people. (Lees, Slater and Wyly, *Gentrification* 249)

In fact, a lack of conflict and the appearance of consensus further supports the contention that gentrification has become part of the hegemonic fold. While scholars have started to pave the way for studies that explore the question of how gentrification’s hegemony is constructed and maintained, there remain limitations. Much of the studies of gentrification and hegemony have focused on major cities like London and very few have examined smaller metropolitan areas. Additionally, those studies that do use smaller cities as case studies are often located in the UK, a place where housing policies and planning largely differs from the U.S. (Paton). To gain a greater understanding of gentrification’s hegemony, context is an important consideration and further studies of hegemony and gentrification in the U.S. and in smaller, mid-size, and growing metro-areas are needed. Another critique of the gentrification literature asks scholars to move beyond theoretical and empirical studies and argues that “discourse also matters” when it comes to exploring the hegemonic significance of gentrification. A nascent area of study, Lees, Slater, and Wyly contend the discursive features of gentrification are experiencing steady growth and have become part of “an enormous society conversation on the

meaning of home and community” that contribute to the complexity of resisting such a hegemonic process (*Gentrification* 243).

Beyond discourse, there is a proliferation of research, policies, and discussions that ignore the difficult topic of race as it relates to gentrification. The issue of class has so often been prioritized and the connection between race and gentrification has too often been ignored (Butler and Robson; see also P. Jackson 184; Magin 193). In *Landscapes of Power*, Zukin claimed that “race poses the most serious barrier to all new private-sector capital investment, including gentrification Only when gentrification risks displacing people of color . . . is there even a chance of mobilizing against it” (187). This was in 1991; today racially and economically segregated neighborhoods continue to be gentrified with thousands displaced, but the overwhelming perception of inevitability and resignation has replaced indignation. In the words of sociologist Michael Keith who focuses on race and urban politics, the “appalling institutional indifference and complicit political inaction” of racist urban processes in the 1990s continue to haunt processes of gentrification today (522). Gentrification has come to enjoy such hegemonic dominance that even the displacement of people of color has not slowed its implementation. Especially in the United States, when we look around our cities, one can’t help but think “when it comes to housing and residential patterns, race is the dominant organizing principle” (Massey and Denton 114). Even a cursory look at gentrified neighborhoods would seem to suggest “gentrification reconfigures a neighborhood’s racial and social landscape” (Perez 324). Even if unintentional, gentrification policies and planning have racial consequences (Saito 4). While some have argued that gentrification is primarily an issue of class (Bennett and Schaefer), I argue that race is incredibly important when it comes to issues of gentrification, especially in changing urban communities where minority identities are predominant. Jennings argues, “race, and the fight against racism,

has to be prioritized by everyone,” a history of racial exclusion cannot be ignored and must be challenged (11). Hegemonic understandings of gentrification often dismiss race altogether, but it remains an important consideration and one that I put at the forefront of the case studies featured in this dissertation.

Beyond our cities and communities, gentrification poses “an enduring dilemma” in academic discussion as well and, as mentioned above, its hegemony has been perpetuated and maintained by mainstream gentrification scholarship (Slater, “Eviction” 747). Debates over what it is, how to define it, and the causes and effects of gentrification continue to describe research on the topic, but according to geographer Tom Slater these debates distract from and depoliticize “the reality of working-class upheaval and displacement” (“Eviction” 744). The enduring dilemma in academe is characterized by what Slater describes in his famed essay of the same title: “The Eviction of Critical Perspectives in Gentrification Research” (747; see also Bridge, Butler, and Lees). Slater is not alone in his assertion; the critical lens that once shaped the discussion of gentrification in public, political, and academic discourse has quieted. Even if (as Edward Soja argues) there is a growing awareness of inequality and increased need for spatial justice (197), mobilizing people, communities, and cities around the problem of gentrification has proven difficult (Katiya and Reid 294-5, 304). More and more, gentrification is “often viewed as the natural outcome for urban neighborhoods, and increasingly viewed as they way things ‘should’ be” (Lees, Slater, and Wyly, *Gentrification* 247). How this hegemonic perspective is perpetuated and maintained in and through gentrification discourses is a central question of this dissertation.

GENTRIFICATION, COMMUNICATION, AND RHETORIC

Though researched for nearly five decades across a variety of disciplines, only a handful of researchers from the field of communication and rhetorical studies have examined gentrification in some form or another (Aiello; Fleming; Gibson; Koschmann and Laster; Macek; Makagon; Pollock; J. Rice; Simpson; Waymer). Scholars have approached the topic from organizational communication, critical ethnography, media studies, and rhetorical perspectives, but the contributions of communication scholars to the gentrification literature are few and have both strengths and limitations.

Several scholars have explored discourses about gentrification in organizational contexts. Waymer examines discourses of eminent domain in Cincinnati through the lens of governmental organizational rhetoric. His study highlights the paradox imposed on governing bodies that attempt to balance issues of growth and urban renewal with the interests of all publics in a municipality. Koschmann and Laster look at communicative tensions in a neighborhood association in Austin, Texas. Through qualitative analysis, they identify two central tensions: dispositional and positional paradoxes (gentrification falls in the category of the latter). Their research finds that the neighborhood association successfully diverts attention from intra-organizational tensions between gentrifiers and long-time residents through a communication strategy of finding a “common enemy” in developers. Both of these studies contribute to scholarship focused on organization contexts, but lack a critical lens. For example, Koschmann and Laster’s impression sounds dangerously close to an urban savior/emancipation narrative when they consider the political benefits of one organization member/gentrifier: “His acknowledgement of being part of the problem [of gentrification] motivated him to action and to invite the participation of others. In the end the neighborhood association may gain much more from his involvement than they lose from him moving into the neighborhood” (43). The

gentrifier as savior or singular source of cultural and political capital is commonly found in studies of gentrification. This trope tends to deny the political and cultural caché of longtime residents and scholars must approach this concept with a critical lens. While organizational communication contributions lack a critical lens, other studies in communication have offered critical perspectives of gentrification and its effects.

Tim Simpson's ethnographic explorations of Ybor City in 1990s Florida laid the early groundwork for urban communication scholarship. He employs the metaphor of "sampling place" in one study ("Recycling") and uses Sennett's concept of "narrative" space in another ("Streets") to explore the possibilities for oppositional voices in his gentrifying neighborhood. Using a similar method, Daniel Makagon's book *Where the Ball Drops* documents the ways in which symbolic and material practices intersect with multiple and often contradictory desires and fantasies in the city. His ethnographic study of the remake of iconic Times Square explores how individuals negotiate issues of power, class, race, identity, morality, and authenticity to achieve their own sense of place in a changing city and connects these individual struggles to larger cultural issues.

Steve Macek and Daniel Makagon explore the media's role in shaping public perceptions of gentrification in the city. In *Urban Nightmares*, Macek shows how media perpetuate conservative ideologies through the production of discourses that portray urban centers as violent, dangerous, and morally reprehensible. Though not explicitly about gentrification, his book traces the ways in which moral panic over inner cities impact how we view cities and the people who occupy them. Makagon's critical-rhetorical analysis of media representations of artists and gentrification from 1985-2008 reveals how "the press advances a specific narrative about urban change" ("Shock Troops" 28). By looking at popular press coverage from publications around the country, Makagon finds several troubling themes: artists are portrayed as "rhetorical heroes,"

urban pioneers, and victims of gentrification, artist-led gentrification is framed as an organic and natural form of urban progress, and those who lived in the neighborhoods before artists are constructed as deviant. These narratives shape audience understandings of urban change, further classist and racist perceptions of previous neighborhood residents, and cloud the realities of gentrification and its consequences. Makagon issues a call for more research and makes a case for the importance of communication scholarship to studies of gentrification (48). He argues “an analysis of how communication facilitates and frames the class remake of urban neighborhoods allows us to understand better this mode of urban change” (27).

Scholars David Fleming and Giorgia Aiello offer rhetorical analyses of gentrification in Chicago and Bologna respectively. Fleming’s *City of Rhetoric* focuses on urban renewal in Cabrini Green and explores how the spatial influences the political. His research connects design, discourse, and democracy to argue that the way places are designed literally shapes the public sphere and the activity that takes place in it. In a review of the book, Joan Faber McAlister distinguishes discourses about and practices in residential spaces to suggest Fleming’s analysis “does more to politicize space than it does to spatialize politics” (“Review” 306). However, she describes the text as “an invitation to further study” that “helps to lay the foundation for future explorations of the links between rhetoric, politics, and social space on which others may build” (306). More recently, Giorgia Aiello studied the visual-material performance of urban renewal in her hometown of Bologna. Through a combination of first-person narrative and rhetorical analysis, Aiello develops a new approach to exploring the material and symbolic landscape. She argues that the physical qualities of the cityscape are communicative and “the urban built environment should be considered as a key contemporary form/force of mediation and mediatization alike” (344). Aiello’s analysis thoroughly explores the

textural, symbolic, visual-material, and constitutive elements of Manifattura delle Arti to demonstrate how the physical environment creates spaces of exclusion and distinction that invite the global(ist) gaze and reinforce inequalities. Her work makes a significant contribution to studies of urban renewal, but much remains to be seen from rhetorical studies of gentrification.

Timothy Gibson does well to offer some ideas for combatting gentrification in his account of gentrification in Seattle. He invites readers to work within the resonant rhetorical frames and common concepts of the city by employing the same tropes cities and developers use. He also recommends an increased focus on democratic participation where “the policy-making and city planning apparatus itself must be democratized if these alternative principles of ‘urban vitality’ are to be achieved” (279). In practice, however, the democratic ideals of “community” and “participation” have proven to be just that, ideals. Now a common practice in planning (e.g. New Urban charrettes), the social promise and hegemonic function of participation are not aligned. According to Austen, they may, in fact, be part of the (neoliberal) machine, “a relatively benign outlet for an underclass that often feels acted upon by larger, intractable forces” (47). I point this out not to discount Gibson’s recommendations, but to highlight the importance of putting forth recommendations in the first place. Rhetorical critics can work not simply to explore rhetorics of gentrification, but conduct research with the goal of challenging them and discovering possibilities for alternatives.

Finally and most recently, Jenny Rice’s book *Distant Publics* examines discourses of gentrification and urban development predominantly using case studies in Austin, Texas. She describes her work as taking a public approach to place with the goal of improving public discourse on urban development and argues “interrogating the underlying discourses of public subjectivities is the best way rhetoricians can intervene in

actual crises” (15). Rice defines discourse as public talk and identifies three commonplaces in gentrification discourse: injury claims, memory claims, and equivalence claims. Most relevant to my project is Rice’s analysis of equivalence claims in relationship to gentrification in East Austin. She describes equivalence claims as claims that are neither pro- or anti-gentrification but see it both as good and bad, a position that “effectively writes itself out of any interventionist role” (131). Such claims, Rice writes, are not starting points for deliberation, debate, or conversation, but conclusions that shut down critical inquiry (15). Rice’s contributions to research on gentrification in Austin are many. She demonstrates the ways in which rhetorical scholarship can contribute to the academic, policy, and public discourse and develops a method for rhetorical inquiry of gentrification that fills a gap in the literature. This dissertation hopes to build on Rice’s work, which, because she is a Rhetoric and Composition scholar, limits discourse to public talk. My research will add to her analysis by moving beyond traditional notions of talk and text and incorporate visual, material, and performative discourses as well.

Urban studies scholars have called for increased contributions from rhetoricians and requested further investigation of the discourses of gentrification (J. Rice; Lees, Slater, and Wyly). A number of scholars from other disciplines have identified various rhetorics of gentrification, but this fundamentally rhetorical phenomenon has not been adequately addressed in rhetorical studies itself. Geographer Neil Smith described gentrification’s postwar “rhetoric of disinvestment, dilapidation, decay, [and] blight” in *The New Urban Frontier* (32). Anthropologist John Hartigan Jr. contemplates the term “gentrifier” in his study of whiteness in Detroit and describes it “as a rhetorical identity, as a means of articulating a range of anxious ambivalent matters for whites in the inner city zone” (*Racial Situations* 170). Tom Slater addresses the disconnect between “the

rhetoric and reality of gentrification” and focuses on the way gentrification theory and policy language “consistently deflects criticism and resistance” (“Eviction” 751). More recently, geographers Wilson and Grammenos studied discourses in Chicago’s Humboldt Park and identified a progentrification “ethnicized rhetoric” that attacked youth bodies while antigentrifiers used a rhetoric of proud, civic-minded people. Wilson and Grammenos claim that the failure of antigentrification rhetors to “defend youth bodies [was] a crucial omission” (308). The battle for Humboldt Park pitted “rhetoric against rhetoric” with real estate capital winning by turning bodies into texts to be read as deviant. In her study of several Atlanta neighborhoods sociologist Leslie Martin discovered a rhetoric of child protection put to use as “children are nearly indisputable in their rhetorical power” (332). Discussion of child safety was a socially acceptable and culturally resonant frame for rhetor’s to draw upon to create and maintain boundaries between gentrifying and longtime residents while obscuring race and class anxieties and differences (Martin). Rhetoric was most recently evoked by sociologists Rowland Atkinson and Hazel Easthope in their study of economic and development policy used to create “creative cities.” They discovered a “rhetoric of engagement and social potential” that privileged some and excluded others (77). What these studies demonstrate is that multiple rhetorics are employed in different places and at different times, but their limitation is that they focus solely on discourse. Understanding the discursive rhetorics of gentrification is certainly important, but the material, visual, and performative discourses and tools employed in gentrifying contexts are far too understudied. Most studies in gentrification explore rhetorical actors in gentrifying spaces, but fail to investigate gentrification (the physical, material, visual, and discursive process) as rhetorical itself. This is underscored by Michael Keith who recognizes that in much of the research place “serves as a rhetorical backbone rather than as a medium of

articulation” (550). He goes on to state, “‘the street’ is more than a stage on which authority claims are made; it is a constitutive feature of the authority itself . . . These spatialities are themselves conditions of possibility which demand a more sophisticated and contingent notion of both politics and social justice than we are normally ready to develop” (531).

The research in this dissertation builds on a growing body of scholarship that engages the discursive, performative, visual, and material aspects of place in rhetorical studies as places themselves, visual depictions of place, and discussions in, through, and about places are critical rhetorical loci. Place is not “merely a backdrop” for the rhetorical, it is itself rhetorical (Dickinson, Blair, and Ott 2). Places are not just the sites, “they are the messages themselves” (A. Wood 31). As Carole Blair contends, “architecture, like natural language use, expresses degrees of significance not just through its symbolic substance, but by its very existence” (“Contemporary” 34). Much work has been done to develop theories of materiality, space, and place, in rhetorical studies, but there remains very little research on gentrification.

To truly understand gentrification, critics should explore its specifically rhetorical character. The studies above all illuminate the ways in which communication and rhetorical studies can contribute to scholarship on gentrification, but gaps in the literature remain. Many of these studies examine gentrification before the economic downturn in 2008, so new studies that explore gentrification in the contemporary economic, political, and cultural climate are needed. Geographers David Wilson and Dennis Grammenos argue that gentrification rhetoric has been “fluid and evolving since its inception in the United States” and always “borrows from current ideologies and sentiments to make its case.” They go on to state that we “need more investigation to advance understanding of current gentrification. General political times have changed, and the rhetoric and politics

of gentrification need deeper exploration in this light” (310). In questioning how gentrification has become such a hegemonic force, this dissertation investigates the current the current sentiments and frames that give gentrification such rhetorical power.

Additionally, with the election of Barack Obama in 2008, the idea that we live in a post-racist society circulates widely. As such, further studies of the elements of gentrification that deepen economic and racial inequalities are necessary for problematizing and dismantling the oft-unquestioned assumption that gentrification can be a force of good. Communication scholars Michael Lacy and Kent Ono write,

While spectacles of overt racist acts warrant scholarly attention, we believe that inferential and figural dimensions of race and racism require further discussion, illumination, and theorization, and response, especially from scholars and educators concerned about social justice This means that any effective critique must be able to change perspectives to see and appreciate the shifting historical contexts and racial formations while being sturdy enough to unearth its rhetorical residue. (2-3)

There is no question that race is a neglected category in studies of gentrification. This dissertation hopes to shift the perspective and examine how racial privileges are (re)inscribed and bodied forth through the material forms and discourses of gentrifying places as well as the visual conceptualization of future development.

In recent decades, a turn to the aesthetic and studies of place in rhetorical studies has developed a body of scholarship useful for understanding symbolic, material, and rhetorical significance of place. Though there remains a dearth of scholarship on gentrification, this growing body of research has created a space for rhetoricians to contribute to the interdisciplinary dialogue on gentrification. Having explored this literature in depth, six central themes emerge from the rhetorical scholarship on space and

place: place is communicative, place shapes our social world, place is influential, place frames our experience of the world and the ways in which we negotiate its tensions, the materiality of place is significant, and place can serve as a site of both social control and social change.¹² These themes inform this dissertation and constitute the general assumptions with which I approach my research on gentrification. Given the foundation laid by rhetorical scholars, rhetoricians are well-equipped to provide distinctively rhetorical explanations, observations, and critiques of gentrification, adding a neglected element to a common and much-researched issue.

From a rhetorical perspective, the big issue with gentrification is three-fold: Gentrification, its discourses, and its processes are persuasive and consequential, it changes our cities and city spaces with social and political implications, and the dominant discourse sustains particular interests while silencing others. With so much still debated, with gentrification being a celebrated and planned goal for communities, and with so many negatively impacted by its consequences, we need to think about the problem of gentrification differently, we need a new lens to illuminate the ways in which planning forums, visions of future city spaces, and style maintain hegemony and ultimately perpetuate inequality. The discourses of gentrification create problematic appeals and arguments, which have become commonplace. The research that follows seeks to further interrogate these appeals and their influence.

¹² I use the word place strategically here. I borrow from Dickinson, Blair, and Ott who argue place is always already rhetorical and distinguish place and space by defining place as “bordered, specified, and locatable by being named” and space as “open, undifferentiated, and undesignated space” (23). That said, my prospectus and dissertation will follow suit for what much of the rhetorical scholarship on the subject does, which is use the words space and place interchangeably so as not to cause confusion when quoting from a range of sources.

CHAPTER PREVIEW

While this introductory chapter provides a brief overview of how gentrification has been studied in relation to hegemony and communication, chapter two expands on these ideas and provides a theoretical framework for this dissertation. I borrow my theoretical lens from Gramsci's hegemony, critical whiteness theory, and Barry Brummett's rhetoric of style to formulate a new approach to looking at gentrification. I ultimately theorize gentrification at the intersection between hegemony, whiteness, and style in order to assert that gentrification is itself a rhetorical style.

Chapter three describes my methodological framework for project. I first describe my case studies and the artifacts that comprise my research, making the case that gentrifying neighborhoods in Austin are both unique and representative of gentrification taking place in cities like it all over the U.S. I then go on to articulate a method of rhetorical criticism informed by the theory set up in chapter two. This particular methodology invites the critic to look for particular elements of and ask particular questions about gentrification's connection to hegemony, whiteness, and style.

Chapter four and five are case studies of two gentrifying neighborhoods in Austin, Texas. In chapter four, I examine gentrification in the East Riverside Corridor, a once predominantly low-income immigrant neighborhood that rapidly gentrified over the past few years. Chapter five explores gentrification in the 11th and 12th Street Corridor neighborhood, a historically African American enclave, which has recently been the focus of city-led revitalization efforts. Both case studies are distinct, but taken together demonstrate some of the ways in which rhetoric is often put to use to justify and legitimize gentrification.

Finally, chapter six will serve as the conclusion of the dissertation. Here I offer a summary of the manuscript and examine the broader implications and key takeaways

from my research. I end by discussing some of the limitations of my research and make some suggestions for future research.

Chapter 2: Theorizing a Rhetorical Style of Gentrification

In his *New York Times* best seller, *Stuff White People Like: The Definitive Guide to the Unique Taste of Millions*,¹³ Christian Lander compiles a laundry list of items from free-trade gourmet coffee, to vintage tees, to food co-ops and the like. A dictionary of markers that signify “whiteness” in some way or another, the entry on gentrification reads:

In general, white people love situations where they can’t lose. While this is already true for most of their lives, perhaps the safest bet a white person can make is to buy a house in an up-and-coming neighborhood.

White people like to live in these neighborhoods because they get credibility and respect from other white people for living in a more “authentic” neighborhood where they are exposed to “true culture” every day. So whenever their friends mention their homes in the suburbs or wealthier urban areas, these people can say, “Oh, it’s so boring out there, so fake. In our neighborhood things are just more real.” This superiority is important as white people jockey for position in their circle of friends. They are like modern-day Lewises and Clarks, except that instead of searching for the ocean, they are searching for old houses to renovate. (91)

In this brief entry, Lander illustrates the intersection of gentrification, style, and race. Though tongue-in-cheek, Lander’s entry on gentrification unwittingly connects the

¹³ I use this source ironically, in some sense, and because it connects gentrification to popular discourse, which plays a significant role in popular and public perceptions (and portrayals) of gentrification.

theories that inform my dissertation research. In this chapter, I describe and situate myself within the established theories (and theoretical interpretations) of Gramsci's hegemony, critical whiteness theory, and Barry Brummett's rhetoric of style in order to formulate a new approach to looking at gentrification. These theories connect, intersect, and overlap to serve as the foundation on which this study is built. A common thread between the theories I employ here is not simply that they will help me to explain the rhetorical ways in which gentrification operates, but they all offer a critical lens for looking at the world.

Most often, gentrification is theorized and defined by empirical research that seeks to understand its causes or the research (much too rarely) is focused on its results (displacement), but little has been done by way of understanding the discourses of gentrification. Discourse can influence the emergence of gentrification in the first place, impact our perceptions of gentrification, and is an important factor to consider as we seek to understand how gentrification operates. This is where I think communication scholars can offer a critical intervention.

How might communication contribute to gentrification's hegemonic status? I posit that gentrification is a communicative phenomenon. Yes, it involves (particular) bodies moving in space, urban planning and development are significant elements, and forces of capitalism and consumption play a part, but I would like to suggest that communication (and more specifically, rhetoric) plays a significant role in the production and maintenance of gentrification. And yet, this significant component of gentrification is not well-understood.

Investigating gentrification's discourse requires that I consider gentrification in a different light than studies that have come before. This dissertation will theorize gentrification at the intersection of hegemony, whiteness, and style to assert that

gentrification itself is a rhetorical style. As you'll read in the pages that follow, some scholars have examined gentrification and hegemony, far fewer have looked at gentrification and whiteness, and there is very little research on gentrification and style (mostly on the aesthetic of gentrification). As mentioned in the previous chapter, I am not satisfied with these approaches and think it most fruitful to combine them in order to better explore how gentrification materializes today. Ultimately, the focus on rhetorical style is where my research marks a significant departure from prevailing approaches to the study of gentrification.

Before narrowing my focus on style, allow me to give a brief overview of my theoretical approach. Hegemony is the central organizing theory of this dissertation. As I conceptualize it, hegemony functions as the theoretical base that helps to explain the relationships *between* and my positioning *in* the other theories employed in this work. From hegemony comes whiteness; for whiteness to have any power in the first place it must operate within a hegemonic structure. And finally, style. For the purposes of this dissertation, the focus on style emerges from observation of the process and politics of gentrification – style, in both an abstract and material sense, is a central piece of today's gentrification discourse. Additionally, style allows me to narrow my scope of analysis and focus on a seemingly simple element of gentrification that I believe has major impact. In order to better explain the connections between the theories and the ways I use them to consider gentrification, I offer an illustration in Figure 1.

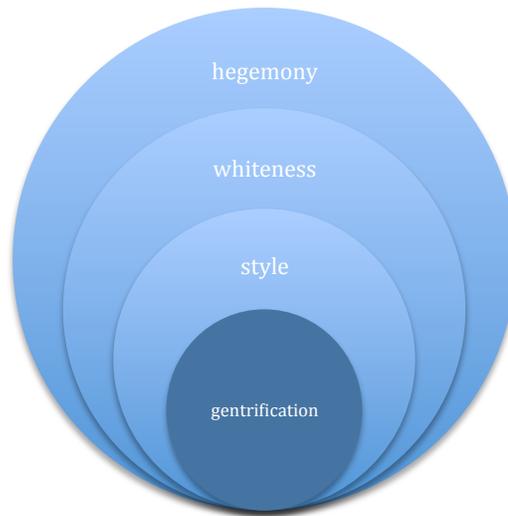


Figure 1: Theoretical Connections.

In the illustration above, gentrification is the object of study. However, I think this theoretical lens may be valuable for studying any number of rhetorical phenomena in contemporary culture in order to better understand how hegemony, whiteness, and style impact our lives through rhetoric in a variety of realms. In other words, I hope this approach offers a speculative instrument for exploring how rhetoric actually works in a world dominated by a combination of visual, material, and discursive elements, a world dominated by style. This theoretical lens assumes, like Brummett, that style is the central driving force of politics and persuasion and seeks to investigate its power.¹⁴

This approach to the study of gentrification demands that we question what seems normative or commonplace (hegemony), requires that we look at the ways in which whiteness operates to elevate the status of some and disenfranchise others (critical

¹⁴ Just to be clear, this visual is meant to get the reader thinking about the connections between these theories. What I am hoping this figure helps illustrate is that style is at the core of how whiteness and hegemony operate. Style might operate within the hegemonic structure, but could also potentially be used to shift it. I use a different shade of blue for gentrification to indicate that gentrification could be switched out with other objects of study as well.

whiteness theory), and allows us to focus on matters of style that impact our world in significant ways (a rhetoric of style).

This chapter is organized from the broad to the specific. I begin by discussing Gramsci's theory of hegemony. I go on to explain the role of critical whiteness theory in my approach, and conclude by offering Brummett's theory of style as a useful and focused approach to understanding gentrification. With each theoretical layer, this tripartite theoretical approach becomes more focused and interwoven in order to ultimately make the case that thinking about gentrification as a rhetorical style gives us some useful tools for imagining gentrification as a powerful hegemonic that valorizes whiteness and operates rhetorically. It is my hope that theorizing gentrification in this way will help us explain how gentrification has come to dominate our urban landscapes and think about gentrification not just as a thing or a process, but as a rhetorical style that produces privileges of whiteness and is often seen as a natural or organic commonplace, the equivalent to "the way things are," as if to suggest there is nothing we can do about it. As such, gentrification is hegemonic and by thinking about it in these terms we also open up the possibilities for counter-hegemonics. If, as I hypothesize here, style is the dominant rhetoric by which gentrification is legitimized, it also may be an avenue that opens up the possibility of critique and ultimately social change.

But we're getting ahead of ourselves. Let us start by reviewing the theories I employ in this dissertation and examine their utility for studying gentrification. As is true of my research questions, I begin this research project and chapter with the assumption that gentrification is hegemonic.

HEGEMONY

Should we find ourselves on the hunt for proof that gentrification is hegemonic, the fact that we find it as an entry in *Stuff White People Like: Guide to the Unique Taste of Millions* should serve as a clue. Gentrification is everywhere, and it doesn't seem to be slowing down.

As is stated in the previous chapter, the overwhelming supposition in public discourse that gentrification is natural, inevitable, and unstoppable operates within a hegemonic framework. Though multiple interpretations of Gramsci's theory of hegemony exist, any claims to a wholesale understanding or definitive approach to the study of hegemony are futile. Gramsci's writings on hegemony are fragmented, difficult, and partial (Mumby 345). Describing his writings on hegemony as a compilation of unfinished notes, Stuart Hall contends Gramsci does not offer a coherent theoretical treatise (6). His prison notebooks underscore this contention as Gramsci can seemingly contradict himself at times throughout his writings. This contradiction, however, serves as a useful insight into Gramsci's idea of hegemony as a fluid, shifting, and malleable theoretical concept that can be translated (not transferred) to help us understand the problems of the present (M. Green 3). Hegemony can be adapted and translated to varying contexts and offers a way of thinking that is uniquely Gramscian, which is to say it "requires a continual rethinking of past and present conditions from one context to the next and adapting one's theoretical perspective according to changing socio-political conditions and circumstances" (M. Green 3).¹⁵ There may not be a universal definition of hegemony for us to follow, but that is also why it is useful as a theory. It allows us to

¹⁵ Gramsci is careful to note that while the content (e.g. it involves a dialectical relationship between civil society and the State) might be the same, the process of hegemony is different in different contexts (Gramsci specifically notes that the process is different in different countries). The people, history, places, power dynamics and form hegemony takes vary according to the context (Gramsci 241).

critique power without having to create exact parallels between the power dynamics, sources of power, place, and time Gramsci was writing in. It is this theoretical framework that allows us to think and theorize hegemony through a lens of whiteness and style in the context of gentrification in Austin. Before making these connections, I first summarize Gramsci's theory of hegemony and align myself with particular interpretations of his approach within communication studies.

Gramsci's Hegemony

Hegemony represents the dominant ideology or beliefs of a society that define what is right, natural, ideal, and unavoidable; what is hegemonic is often considered what is best and most beneficial for society as a whole and is understood as "the way things are." According to Gramsci, hegemony is a seemingly *natural* process that primarily takes place in *civil society*, is inherently *dialectical*, and operates through *consent*. In the following section I tackle each of these key features in turn.

Throughout his lengthy *Prison Notebooks*, Gramsci characterizes hegemony in scarce quotes that describe its development as "spontaneous," "organic," and "normal" (59-60). Countering the impression that hegemony seemingly develops naturally out of varying circumstances, Gramsci's utilization of quotation marks emphasizes a central assertion in his theory of hegemony: while perhaps a *seemingly* natural process, there is nothing "organic" or "spontaneous" about it.

The idea that hegemony emerges naturally likely exists because hegemony takes place primarily in the private realm or what is otherwise referred to as civil society. Gramsci's model of hegemony (as described in *Prison Notebooks*) is concerned with ideological influence in what he deems the private realm of civil society, which he classifies under institutions and social forces like religion, the family, the media,

education, and culture. For Gramsci, the dominant group exercises hegemony in the cultural realm and his explication asks us to consider “ideology as lived, habitual social practice – which must then presumably encompass the unconscious, inarticulate dimension of social experience as well as the workings of formal institutions” (Lahiji 215).

While his theory focuses predominantly on civil society, it should be noted that Gramsci did not ignore issues of the State or political realm. Rather, he placed emphasis on the fact that civil society and the State are not mutually exclusive and operate dialectically. Though they function differently, through consent and coercion/force respectively, they serve the same end, forming “the apparatus of the political and cultural hegemony of the ruling class” (Gramsci 258). Though often interpreted otherwise, an undialectical separation of civil society and State would be foolhardy because a) “Gramsci did not succeed in finding a single, wholly satisfactory conception of ‘civil society’ or the State” (Hoare and Smith 207) and b) he considered civil society “‘State’ too, indeed...the state itself” (Gramsci 261). What Gramsci means by this is “the general notion of the State includes elements which need to be referred back to the notion of civil society (in the sense that one might say that State = political society + civil society, in other words hegemony protected by the armour of coercion” (Gramsci 262). A false dichotomy, conceptions of State and civil society are always shifting and never static. The two are connected and always engaged in a process of struggle. To be sure, the State must adapt in order to maintain its power; this potentially unstable characteristic connects hegemony to power and, importantly, resistance.

The dialectical view of civil society and State highlights the fact that Gramsci saw his theory of hegemony as complementary to more traditional Marxist theories of State as force (Hoare and Smith 56). While hegemony deals with consent rather than direct

domination, the two aren't completely separate. In fact, an idea central to hegemony suggests that the two balance each other out (80). Gramsci's translators, Hoare and Smith, offer the following in a footnote about exercising hegemony:

the attempt is always made to ensure that force will appear to be based on the consent of the majority, expressed by the so-called organs of public opinion – newspapers and associations – where, therefore, in certain situations, are artificially multiplied. (80)

For the rhetorical critic looking to employ this theory, it is important to locate avenues in the civic realm that seem to perpetuate and promote this notion of consent, whereby so-called public opinion is relied upon, but serves as mere appearance and “in reality” serves the interests of the dominant group (Gramsci 258; 80). Like Gramsci, we must ask ourselves “In what form and by what means,” does the dominant group “succeed in establishing the apparatus (mechanism) of their intellectual, moral, and political hegemony?” (Gramsci 59-60).¹⁶ Rather than reproducing false dichotomies of political and private, State and civil, consent and force, Gramsci viewed these hegemonic factors dialectically. His conception of hegemony is “characterized by the combination of force and consent” (Hoare and Smith 80), but ultimately comes down to leadership. To exercise hegemony, a group must lead, not dominate. To lead is to “concord interests and aspirations with the interests and aspirations of other groups” (Gramsci 104). As a result,

¹⁶ It is with this in mind that the remaining theories of this chapter are utilized. Critical Whiteness Studies allows us to theorize dominance while the theory of style allows us to explore a potential form and means by which contemporary hegemony operates. Not only that, style allows us to explore the individual and private (rather than political) means Gramsci saw as so crucial to hegemony (see Gramsci 59). Additionally, as Moe suggests, Gramsci's theory of hegemony helped him elaborate on the subject of “cultural politics,” a part of which he included style (131).

hegemonic forces generate a tangle of meanings that produce no clear opposition. For the purposes of this dissertation, I must ask myself what interests and aspirations are relied upon to develop consent and create concordance when it comes to gentrification in Austin?

Because there can be no singular approach to the study of hegemony, I situate myself with Dennis Mumby and Stuart Hall's interpretations of Gramsci's theory. Their takes highlight the fact that other dialectics operate within Gramsci's theory of hegemony. For example, Mumby and Hall's perspectives allow that hegemony is not simply about power, but resistance as well. Such an interpretation is necessary for this dissertation, as finding avenues and possibilities for resistance to gentrification is also an end goal of this project. Mumby's interpretive frame focuses "on the possibilities that [Gramsci's] concept of hegemony provides for revitalizing the relationship between power and resistance" (345). In adopting this frame, my work attempts to offer a critique of existing structures of power" and, like Mumby's piece, is "political[ly] motivated, critically inclined . . . [and] interested in articulating possibilities for critique and change" (346). While this dissertation is less focused on modes of resistance, hegemonic theory helps us look at structures of power in order to intervene. Knowing that resistance and change begin within the hegemonic structure, this dissertation is an attempt to better understand how power operates so that we might create avenues for change. This connection between critiques of power and criticism leads to a related dialectic: theory and practice.

Mumby enlists Gramsci's philosophy of praxis as central to theorizing hegemony. A philosophy of praxis regards theory as a practice that is not just about ideas, but about action as well. This point of view locates Gramsci's theory of hegemony within a broader philosophy of praxis whereby theory and practice intersect in the everyday to develop

possibilities for empowerment and real political and material change. In addition, according to Gramsci, the civil realm operates ideologically to fashion our experiences and “produce common sense (i.e. unreflective) conceptions of the world” (Mumby 350). In relation to research on hegemony within communication studies, Mumby contends, “Within the framework of the philosophy of praxis, the critical analysis of communication processes is concerned with analyzing the relationship between ‘common sense’ and philosophical ‘good sense’” (350). A critical eye is required because our “assumptions of what makes common sense produce and reinforce our consent to the current social order and its power structures” (Crenshaw 256). The pervasiveness of hegemony in our everyday lives dictates what we unconsciously internalize as common sense, thus fortifying our acceptance of what is considered the status quo. For the rhetorical critic, a keen eye for the mechanisms that produce common sense understandings of the world as well as rely on knowledge considered common sense will be particularly useful for analysis.

In his 1997 article on “The Problem of Hegemony,” Mumby problematizes traditional readings of Gramsci’s theory that tend to characterize it in pejorative terms and narrowly focus on its negative aspects. In Mumby’s interpretation, it is a mistake to consider hegemony as the equivalent of ideological domination (as is the case in Althusser’s conceptualization) because it characterizes the audience as dominated, passive recipients (353). Gramsci’s conceptualization of hegemony, however, is not always negative and offers a spark of possibility for change. Mumby offers hegemony as a descriptive construct and argues that it operates as “dialectic between resistance and consensual domination” (349). I should be careful to note that this conceptualization does not necessarily give hegemony a positive valence or take it to mean “concordance” or compromise as Condit’s reworking of the term does (Cloud). Rather, Mumby

contextualizes hegemony within the framework of Gramsci's philosophy of praxis in order to resist the inclination to see hegemony as a positive or negative, about either resistance or dominance, but as a "process of struggle" (365). Mumby writes, "Gramsci's philosophy of praxis recognizes both the possibilities for social change and the tenacity of the dominant hegemony that resists such change" (366).

Hall's interpretation of Gramsci's definition of hegemony underscores this assertion. In Hall's understanding, hegemony involves "relations of force" whereby absolute victory of one set of forces over another is not possible. Instead, the relations of social forces are characterized by an "unstable balance" that is ever-changing and dynamic (14). Importantly, Hall emphasizes that Gramsci considered dominant ideas as a multi-dimensional discursive formation. He writes, "There is never any one, single unified and coherent 'dominant ideology' which pervades everything" (22). Multi-dimensional though they may be, dominant ideologies become successfully hegemonic when they reach the status of "the way things are;" gentrification has surely reached that standing.

Hegemony & Gentrification

Hegemony offers a particularly useful heuristic for examining gentrification. Through hegemony, gentrification is made to seem natural, it occurs in civil society (and in collusion with the State), it operates through consent, and mainstream discourse would suggest that it even contributes to the public good.

In her study of gentrification in Glasgow, Kirsteen Paton articulates the concept of gentrification hegemony and argues that, "[i]t naturalises dominance, making the state's promotion of gentrification and middle-class settlement seemingly normal, and essentialises the values of middle-class social reproduction" ("Probing" 434). In relation

to the state and civil society, Paton sees the connection between gentrification and urban policy as best conceived as a hegemonic project that involves negotiation and consent. She highlights the fact that the dominant approach to gentrification involves working-class participation in the process of gentrification and suggests that they are “simultaneously excluded and included” (253). For Paton, hegemony is a particularly useful framework for studying gentrification because it

Problematizes the notion of gentrification as ‘good’ or ‘evil’. It allows studies of gentrification to be inclusive of working-class agency and to explore how and why gentrification is both resisted and negotiated by this group, since hegemony is achieved as much consensually as it is coercively. (262-3)

Paton is not alone in her efforts to articulate a connection between gentrification and hegemony. In his study of Antwerp, Belgium, Maarten Loopmans talks about shifts in gentrification hegemonics over time. Loopmans’ work underscores the assertion that hegemony is always shifting and suggests that, consequently, gentrification’s dominant hegemonic is always in flux. This is a testament to the importance of studying gentrification’s ever-changing hegemonic terrain and further underscores the need for a communication understanding of this phenomenon, since communication is central to that flux. As Loopman suggests, using Gramsci’s theory “might enhance our understanding of the historical and geographical particularities of the interplay between urban policy and gentrification” (2501).

Using a hegemonic framework offers a more complex understanding of how gentrification operates and moves the discourse beyond the typical production and consumption debates so prominent in the gentrification literature. As Paton insists, “in order to fully know the effects [of gentrification] we must first understand what gentrification hegemony is communicating” (437). To further this claim, I add that we

have to seek to understand gentrification as a form of rhetorical communication itself. This is where communication scholars can offer their expertise as “an enriched understanding of Gramsci can enlighten critical rhetoric. By looking at Gramsci’s notion of hegemony in addition to other concepts, communication scholars may be able to observe better the nature of power relations and hegemonic practices” (Zompetti 67).

Gramsci’s theory of hegemony lays the groundwork for a theory that helps us analyze gentrification as a rhetorical style. It gives rhetorical weight to culture and everyday life and asks us to consider how consent is produced, how common sense is relied upon, and to explore what is made to seem natural and so often goes unquestioned. While the above studies give us a vocabulary for thinking about gentrification and hegemony, the authors’ focus on class overlooks a crucial part of how gentrification operates. The present research does not give the role of race its due. Additionally, the gentrification research that does include race tends to focus on the negative impacts on minority groups, but does not always highlight the ways in which it benefits whiteness, an important category for understanding gentrification’s relationship to race. As a result, much work remains in order to better understand how gentrification operates in this moment, and particularly in the United States. It is with this shortcoming in mind that I now turn to the second theoretical layer, Critical Whiteness Studies.

CRITICAL WHITENESS STUDIES

If there was any doubt that gentrification is connected to whiteness, its codification into the pages of a book on *Stuff White People Like* should be a strong indicator that the two are somehow related. And yet, race has taken a backseat to class in studies of gentrification. Especially in the United States, when we look around our cities, one can’t help but think “when it comes to housing and residential patterns, race is the

dominant organizing principle” (Massey and Denton 114). But still, the bulk of the gentrification literature fails to address race or subordinates race to class. The connection between gentrification and race, however, is undeniable. It is worth repeating: even a cursory look at gentrified neighborhoods would seem to suggest “gentrification reconfigures a neighborhood’s racial and social landscape” (Perez 324). One can take a number of approaches to studying race, but for this particular project, I employ Critical Whiteness Studies, an offshoot of Critical Race Theory.¹⁷ While other theories of race and racism offer invaluable insight, I selected this particular theoretical approach because it deals with issues of identity,¹⁸ which in many ways is largely connected to style.¹⁹ In the following section, I provide a quick review of the theory of whiteness, highlight its key characteristics, and connect whiteness, more specifically, to the study of gentrification.

The Study of Race through the Lens of Whiteness

In general, Critical Whiteness Theory “attends to the ways in which White privilege is normalized and institutionalized” (425) and “studies the everyday performances of white privilege through discourse and other practices” (419; see also Alley-Young 309). Whiteness is worthy of our investigation because “whiteness, as a conceptual and analytical tool, can be used to unravel the complexities of how people whose identity is ‘White’ are put into a racial and cultural position that creates systems of domination and subordination” (Yee 1397). The means by which we study this

¹⁷ To adopt whiteness as a central theory for the study of gentrification does not privilege a focus on race above other factors. Rather, I borrow from Roediger who “place[s] race in a dialectical relationship to factors such as class, ethnicity, gender, age, and sexuality in the belief that doing so enhances our understanding of the pervasive influence of race in the United States” (609).

¹⁸ I’m thinking here of identity as constructed, performed, and contingent. This borrows from Nakayama and Martin’s assertion that Whiteness is the communication of social identity.

¹⁹ More on this later, but an approach using Whiteness may help us better theorize gentrification as a rhetorical style.

phenomenon is through the theoretical construct of whiteness. So what exactly do I mean by whiteness? In her essay on the social construction of whiteness, feminist and critical race scholar Ruth Frankenberg helpfully outlines a set of interconnected facets of whiteness. She writes, “First, whiteness is a location of structural advantage, of race privilege. Second, it is a ‘standpoint,’ a place from which white people look at ourselves, at others, and at society. Third, ‘whiteness’ refers to a set of cultural practices that are usually unmarked and unnamed” (“White Woman” 519; see also “Mirage” 76). The third point is essential to critical studies of whiteness in that its most critical contribution lies in making whiteness visible in order to investigate how it shapes power and privilege (Roediger 607). Additionally, those cultural practices Frankenberg highlights in her third point are often connected to style.

How whiteness operates in the world (as privilege, standpoint, and cultural practice) is a relatively stable theoretical construct, but each of these elements is dynamic and highly mutable. For example, what constitutes whiteness (as privilege, standpoint, and cultural practice) is always in flux. Nakayama and Martin offer, “As a social construction, whiteness gains its meaning from its encounters with nonwhiteness. The negotiations and definitions of ‘whiteness’ and ‘nonwhiteness’ are part of the fuel of this social phenomenon” (vii; see also Alley-Young 313; Johnson 3; Wander, Martin, and Nakayama 14, 21). This gets to whiteness’ inherent connection to communication as what constitutes whiteness itself is shaped by communication (see for example Alley-Young 313; Johnson 5; Nakayama and Martin viii).

Critical studies of whiteness is a growing area of race scholarship and has been the subject of praise as well as critique. While I must be careful of the dangers of

focusing on whiteness,²⁰ I see the advantages of examining a social construction that tends to be largely invisible, seen as the norm, and functions to reproduce privilege and power. Communication scholar Raka Shome values this line of race research because it rightly recognizes that whiteness, as an institutionalized and systemic problem, is maintained and produced not by overt rhetorics of whiteness, but rather by its “everydayness,” by the everyday, unquestioned racialized social relations that have acquired seeming normativity and through that normativity function to make invisible the ways in which whites participate in, and derive protection and benefits from, a system whose rules and organizational relations work to their advantage. (“Outing Whiteness” 366)

Shome connects whiteness to hegemony and communication in her article “Outing Whiteness” and suggests that looking at whiteness shifts our frame of looking at racism. A focus on whiteness allows us to look at racism not as an individual problem that puts others at a disadvantage, but as a systemic problem worth investigating (see also Roediger). Shome’s work in whiteness theory examines how communication operates to construct and maintain white privilege. In fact, the need for the study of whiteness as it is “manifested in discourse, communication, and culture” is a central concern for contemporary studies of whiteness (Back and Solomos 22). Discourse, communication, and culture are three aspects I am looking to explore throughout the case studies in this dissertation as the discursive and material manifestations of whiteness will inform my analysis.

²⁰ Some have argued that the study of whiteness recenters and reifies whiteness to the point that it may celebrate it; for Shome, the dangers of not examining whiteness are more great and it demands the critical attention of rhetorical scholars (370). A reason whiteness studies emerged in the first place was because of an original critique of race studies that focus on the racial object rather than the subjects who perpetrate it (see Back and Solomos).

Though the concept of whiteness is different from white (the racial designation) (Wander, Martin, and Nakayama 14), its connection to white skin cannot be underestimated. All of these facets of whiteness (as privilege, standpoint, and set of cultural practices) are associated with white skin/race in some sense (for example, whiteness can draw its power from meanings ascribed to skin color), but even that is an unstable category. Kitchin and Thrift explain that white skin is never a stable signifier of whiteness because it is a construct; it is produced and performed in ways that are contextually, geographically, and historically contingent. Shome elaborates “Whiteness, thus is not merely a discourse that is contained in societies inhabited by white people; it is not a phenomenon that is enacted where only white bodies exist but rather more about the discursive practices that . . . privilege and sustain the global dominance of white imperial subjects and Eurocentric worldviews” (“Location” 108). Whiteness should not be reduced to white skin, but connecting the two concepts is important for understanding the consequences of the ubiquity of whiteness in our culture. Lisa Flores and Dreama Moon argue that while using racial language may not be ideal, it cannot be avoided. We have to navigate the tensions between anti-essentialist views of race and the materiality of race and for these critical scholars, racial language is necessary for understanding racial (and racist) realities (Flores and Moon 187).

To study any phenomenon through the lens of whiteness theory means starting with several assumptions. The analyst of whiteness views race as a construction “produced by social relations over time and is not biological and fixed” (Roediger 604).²¹ Hartigan’s study of whiteness and class highlights the fact that white skin does not always equate to whiteness and its concomitant privileges (*Odd Tribes* 59; see also Alley-

²¹ For more examples, see Berger 4; Frankenberg, “White Women” 523; Harris 1761; Mahoney 1659; Nakayama and Krizek 293.

Young 319). Seshadri-Crooks adds that whiteness is an unstable category, “a historical and cultural invention” (21). While critical whiteness scholars agree that whiteness is a social construction, George Lipsitz is careful to add that although a “cultural fiction,” whiteness is “a social fact, an identity created and continued with all-too-real consequences for the distribution of wealth, prestige, and opportunity” (vii). For scholars of critical whiteness studies (as Roediger prefers to call it), whiteness is dynamic and diverse, “not a monolithic formation,” and operates in different ways in different places (Shome, “Outing Whiteness” 368).²² Another assumption grounded in theories of whiteness is that racial identity is relational and dependent upon and produced by the “claiming and imposition of samenesses and othernesses” (Frankenberg, “Being White” 4; Shaw 4-5, 176).²³

So whiteness operates as a location of structural advantage and race privilege, as a standpoint from which one views themselves and others, and as a set of cultural practices and each of these facets of whiteness share some common features. An approach to any phenomenon using whiteness theory provides a framework for analysis that relies on a number of central (and not mutually exclusive) characteristics that help us identify whiteness at work: invisibility and everydayness, normativity, power and privilege. If these categories sound familiar, it is because these characteristics point to whiteness as hegemonic.²⁴

Whiteness is often unmarked and difficult to identify because it is equated with what is considered “normal.”²⁵ Whiteness can be made to seem natural in any number of

²² See, for example, Berger 4; Mahoney 1660; Roediger 604.

²³ For more on this, see Frankenberg, “White Women” 526; Mahoney 1662; Ware and Back 5.

²⁴ Several scholars highlight the utility of Gramsci’s hegemony to the study of race and ethnicity (see for example Crenshaw; Hall; Omi and Winant; Seshadri-Crooks)

²⁵ This is considered a key characteristic in every study cited here. For more information, see for example, Mahoney 1659).

ways, with some being more apparent than others. According to Nakayama and Krizek, it is the invisibility of whiteness that helps it maintain its privilege and dominance (291); because it is constructed as natural, “whiteness eludes a critique of the systems of power that determines its positioning” (Griffin and Calafell 121). White power is reproduced “regardless of intention . . . because it is not seen as whiteness but as normal” (Dyer 12; see also Yee 1397). It’s characteristic unmarkedness is key to critical scholars as we must work to expose the systems of domination and advantage that manifest in ways so subtle that people don’t even realize they are colluding in them (Bush xvi). Joe Feagin discusses the mechanism of coded language often used to hide racial and stereotypical viewpoints just below the surface (xi). It is not only the linguistic coding Feagin highlights, but what communication scholar Crenshaw refers to as “Whiteness’ Rhetorical Silence” that helps maintain its power. For Crenshaw, scholars must make whiteness visible and “locate interactions that implicate unspoken issues of race, discursive spaces where the power of whiteness is invoked but its explicit terminology is not” (254). According to race scholars Vron Ware and Les Back, a challenge to critical whiteness studies “is to question the basis of what counts as normal and to expose the historical and contemporary devices that are employed to maintain those ‘white-friendly’ systems and structures” (5-6).

Looking at contemporary modes of gentrification, I use whiteness theory to examine the strategies used to manage and maintain those systems in the process of gentrification. Critical whiteness theory helps us better conceptualize how gentrification functions as a rhetoric that isn’t necessarily strategic or intentional (though it can be), but that manifests itself in ways that are often subtle and go undetected. Reading gentrification through the lens of whiteness assumes already that gentrification benefits white identities and can reproduce privileges for some while limiting possibilities for others. Examining gentrification through this theoretical perspective invites the rhetorical

critic to look for ways in which the everyday, normal, subtle, and invisible influence our understanding of urban change, how cities are shaped, and who benefits from it.

As stated in the previous chapter and as the gentrification research so clearly shows, gentrification is more often than not a predominantly “white-friendly” process. While the discourse overwhelmingly touts advantages for all, a look at gentrification through the lens of critical whiteness theory may help uncover some of the ways the impacts of gentrification are distorted and illuminate some of the mechanisms employed in sustaining white privilege. As Henry Giroux contends, “Analyzing ‘whiteness’ as a central element of racial politics becomes useful in exploring how ‘whiteness’ as a cultural practice promotes race-based hierarchies, how white racial identity structures the struggle over cultural and political resources, and how rights and responsibilities are defined, confirmed, or contested across diverse racial claims” (295). The perpetuation of the privilege that whiteness engenders takes place in a variety of realms. Often unmarked and unnamed, whiteness “manifests a certain logic in its political, aesthetic, and historical sensibilities” (Hartigan, *Racial Situations* 16). It is this logic and these sensibilities that connect whiteness with gentrification, a process where whiteness, its accompanying privileges, and racist patterns are nowhere more prevalent (Sullivan 126). Whiteness, I argue, is always already part and parcel of the process of gentrification. In the following section, I narrow my focus and describe in depth the connections between gentrification, race, and whiteness.

Gentrification, Race, and Whiteness

While it might seem obvious to some that gentrification and race are inextricably linked, the connection has not been at the forefront of gentrification research. Issues of race are predominantly subsumed by class in analyses of gentrification, but as Edward

Soja warns, “struggles over the right to the city must not be reduced only to struggles against capitalism” (198). Studies that interrogate gentrification solely in terms of markets and economies can be used to justify and defend racial exclusion by invoking what David Freund identifies as a post World War II language that employs supposed “nonracial” variables to the market. This new language reflects “ideas about race largely born in and sustained by the politics of metropolitan change itself,” subsequently, gentrification and race should not be separated (12). As the critical perspectives on gentrification flounder, it is incumbent upon critical scholars to push back against the status quo and expose the relationship between gentrification and continued inequality (Slater, “Eviction” 747). Contrary to the widely agreed upon class factors of gentrification, the significance of race in relationship to gentrification has been either hotly debated or entirely ignored. When it comes to gentrification, some have focused exclusively on class, others have argued race plays very little part, and others have suggested that race should be at the forefront of discussions of gentrification (Sullivan 148). By putting a spotlight on the racist disparities gentrification helps calcify, through the use of critical race theory, and the theoretical perspective of whiteness in particular, I hope my dissertation will contribute to this gap in the literature.

Looking at gentrification through the lens of whiteness has us examine gentrification in several ways. It asks us to consider the everyday, seemingly invisible ways gentrification inserts itself into our world; it allows us to interrogate the mundane and normative; and it places emphasis on structures of privilege to help us focus on who gentrification actually benefits. In the proceeding pages, I use the framework and analytical tools of critical whiteness theory to examine each of these in turn in order to help us understand and build upon previous studies of gentrification.

Gentrification and the “Invisibility” of Race

According to sociologist Leland Saito, two dominant forms of policies and planning have been enacted when it comes to gentrification and race: race-neutral and race-based. When it comes to race-neutral (wherein race is invisible) policies and planning, race is ignored or at the very most deemphasized. This perspective strictly avoids race, assumes that the United States was founded on the ideals of equality and democracy, and considers the connection between race, policy, and planning unnecessary (Saito 4). Sociologist Monique Taylor warns that when race becomes a factor central to anti-gentrification efforts, gentrification can often be reduced to a white-versus-black issue. Others worry that “a focus on explicitly racialized places and peoples unintentionally runs the risk of normalizing the spatial dominance of the racialized majority” (Bonnett and Nayak 305). These are the dangers of a focus on racial difference, however, the risks of not taking race into account are also quite high.

The opposing perspective argues that race must be made visible as race-based policies are important and necessary in order to address racial inequalities of the past as well as the present. This perspective suggests that race-neutral policies actually reinforce racialized practices. Even if unintentional, race-neutral policies can still have racial consequences and ultimately help reproduce the invisibility of whiteness (Wander, Martin, and Nakayama 21). I agree with Saito,

[R]edistricting, economic redevelopment, and historic preservation demonstrate how a range of factors, both explicitly racial and seemingly race neutral, constitute the sedimentation of inequality in public policy. Economic redevelopment and the demolition of building or neighborhood take place within a history of explicit racial inequality. (4)

This history has all too often been ignored as the connection between race and gentrification has not been adequately addressed in the gentrification literature (Butler and Robson; see also R. Jackson 184; Magin 193). To render race invisible, ignore it, or attempt to be race-neutral may also ignore inequalities brought about through systemic as well as unintentional racist practices.

In their 2003 study of gentrification in London, researchers Tim Butler and Gary Robson recognized a lack in the gentrification literature dealing with race and concluded that race deserves far more consideration. In London, they discovered very few instances of gentrification by non-white people and also saw that the urban black community was most widely affected by gentrification. Their research not only points to a gap in the literature, but also highlights some major concerns about the nature of gentrification and its relationship to race.

While some have argued that gentrification is primarily an issue of class (Bennett and Schaefer), I argue that race²⁶ is incredibly important when it comes to issues of gentrification, especially in changing urban communities where minority identities are predominant. Jennings argues “race, and the fight against racism, has to be prioritized by everyone,” a history of racial exclusion cannot be ignored and must be challenged (11). Though most gentrification researchers will allow that race is an important consideration, it is often subordinate to other aspects of gentrification (Thomas; see also Freund 382-399). The danger of focusing on economic factors is that it can obscure the racial reality - while some might argue developing in inexpensive (previously less desirable) areas is

²⁶ With the term “race” here, I am referring to race as a social construct and category that is neither inherent nor objective; though often based on physical difference (e.g. skin color), the meanings assigned to those differences by society are arbitrary. This line of thinking views race as an invention, but one with real material consequences.

economically rational, we have to remember that “it is made possible by the existence of racial hierarchy [and] reproduces racial inequality” (Pulido 16; see also Barraclough 15).

A variety of scholars have examined the relationship between race and gentrification in cities like London (Butler and Robson), Harlem (Freeman), Greensboro (Shipp), and Philadelphia (Adams et al.), to name a few. Many of the studies that discuss race rely on quantitative measures, policy and law, or historic factors to assert racial significance in gentrification theory; these are important contributions but don’t quite capture the centrality of race to the gentrification process and discourse. Even in places where data may not capture a shift in racial and ethnic makeup as a result of gentrification, race plays an important role as gentrification “perpetuate[s] the spatial aspects of white privilege” (Sullivan 159).

Some might point to studies by Lance Freeman that talk about black gentrification in Harlem in order to discount the significance of race in gentrification studies. This is where the utility of a theory of whiteness comes into play as it helps explain how gentrification is still a racial issue. First, Harlem’s status as a once undesirable place to live was a construction of whiteness whereby certain areas were deemed blighted or unattractive. The current case of gentrification in Harlem has gentrifiers benefitting from the disadvantages that whiteness created. Second, whiteness can still operate powerfully in spaces of non-white bodies (Shome, “Location” 108).²⁷

Using critical whiteness theory provides a resource for focusing on that which is so often rendered invisible; “[i]n contrast with its often presumed invisibility, here whiteness is marked and conspicuous” (Cahill 302). Calling for a deeper investigation of

²⁷ Shome writes about her own varying experiences of whiteness as it relates to her location in the United States as well as in India. Where her experience in the United States was more about being in contact with white bodies, her experience of whiteness in decolonizing India was significantly different. In India, she experienced a disembodied, discursive whiteness, but saw the powerful influence of whiteness nonetheless.

space, gentrification, and whiteness, Sullivan argues, “We can more fully combat racial oppression when we are better aware of how racialized space and habits of lived spatiality impact human existence, striving to make the racialization of space visible will be crucial to the fight against racism” (158). As much as race may be ignored in gentrification discourse in Austin (e.g. who it impacts, who it benefits), whiteness allows us to examine race (and its concomitant social constructions and material realities), even when it is not explicitly addressed.

Gentrification, Whiteness, & Normativity

A second factor that allows us to read the gentrification research through the lens of whiteness is the issue of normativity. This is the idea that gentrification is naturalized, seen as inevitable, and that whiteness is the norm or standard by which all other things are measured when it comes to gentrification.

The idea that gentrification is normalized or seen as inevitable is already discussed above, but critical whiteness theory invites us to look at the ways in which that normalization allocates privilege and power. The seemingly mundane ways in which gentrification occurs and is shaped often “produces unequal places and systems of place into which phenotypically distinct bodies are sorted” (Barraclough 15). Whiteness comes into play when that normalization also sets whiteness as the benchmark on which neighborhood quality is measured. Yee describes the social and cultural processes that create whiteness as “simultaneously everywhere but also nowhere” and writes, “whiteness is universalized as the way things are and ought to be” (1398). The repercussions of this normativity run deep. Mahoney’s research underscores the dangerous connection between whiteness and gentrification,

The physicality of home and community . . . tends to make our lived experiences appear natural. The appearance that this is “the way things are” in turn tends to make prevailing patterns of race, ethnicity, power, and the distribution of privilege appear as features of the natural world. (1662)

This approach asks us to look for the ways in which the landscape, discourses about city change, and gentrification naturalize and normalize systems of power. This adds another theoretical layer to our investigation of gentrification and asks us to look for ways in which whiteness is presented as the norm or as the standard by which everything else is measured.

Gentrification, Whiteness, Privilege & Power

Gentrification scholars Powell and Spencer argue that any study of gentrification must take whiteness and white privilege into account for “being white contributes to and draws benefits from the privileges and entitlements associated with the ‘white face’ of gentrification” (439). An approach to gentrification using critical whiteness theory allows us to critique gentrification contra the studies that suggest gentrification is the rising tide that lifts all boats. When studies of gentrification (typically empirical in nature) argue that no one is displaced or disadvantaged by gentrification, whiteness allows us to remain critical of the process and its accompanying rhetorics by “turning the lens on processes that privilege rather than focusing on exemplars of disadvantage” (Shaw 6). The final category of analysis invites us to look for the ways in which advantage, power, and privilege are negotiated. More specifically, it asks us to examine how whiteness is privileged in gentrification discourse and how gentrification ultimately [re]produces white privilege.²⁸ This category of whiteness theory asks us to consider the power of

²⁸ I say [re]produces here because for gentrification to even exist it must emerge out of a structure of white privilege and then it also produces more white privilege.

whiteness and look for the ways in which it is constructed as a valuable investment and gets equated with “the good.”

Notably, Cheryl Harris and Martha Mahoney are two leaders in critical race studies (originating from the study of law) who gained recognition through their analyses of whiteness and property. Since their seminal articles were published in law reviews, the inherent connection between whiteness and property is understood as significant in critical race theory. This connection also helps us gain a better sense of how whiteness garners power and privilege.

In her influential essay “Whiteness as Property,” Cheryl Harris connects whiteness with housing and the idea of property in nuanced ways. She argues that whiteness is itself a form of property. This perspective inserts itself into the debates in critical race theory by demonstrating the ways in which whiteness functions as privilege and property for even the most materially and economically disadvantaged. Whiteness as property buttresses white privilege and structures of domination. The concept that whiteness is property also means that it is something that is perceived as valuable, that should be invested in as well as protected (Harris 1759; Pulido 16; Shaw 5). We are “encouraged to invest in whiteness” because it provides “resources, power, and opportunity” (Lipsitz viii). In other words, whiteness “pays off” (Pulido 16) and “afford[s] access to a host of public, private, and psychological benefits” (Harris 1760). According to Harris, its power thwarts “not only conceptions of racial justice, but also conceptions of property that embrace more equitable possibilities” (1791). This is of particular interest to my study of gentrification as racial justice and equitable possibilities for housing and property are a central concern of this research project.

Mahoney’s essay on housing segregation and whiteness underscores Harris’ point. Part of the power of whiteness is derived from its invisibility and its equation with what

is normal or what is good. Mahoney points out that the materiality of the home – its physical presence in our everyday lives – “tends to make our lived experiences feel natural [which] in turn tends to make prevailing patterns of race, ethnicity, power, and the distribution of privilege appear as features of the natural world” (1662). Investment and disinvestment, land distribution, residential segregation, and ultimately gentrification can unconsciously and unintentionally produce and protect white privilege even when they appear to have nothing to do with race (1678). In a system where whiteness is equated “with something that reflects positive values” (1664) and is “both required and rewarded as a feature of development” (1670), interrogating the connection between whiteness (plus its accompanying white privilege) and gentrification will be central to my research.

The theory of whiteness tells us to look for several things in discourse. Most importantly for the purposes of this study, the theory asks us to shine a light on the ways in which race is ignored and whiteness is invisible, it asks us to listen in the silences, look for examples of the ways whiteness is seen as the norm and privileged in everyday life, and seek to discover how whiteness is connected to structures of power and gives advantages to white people. The theories of hegemony and whiteness offer some analytical tools that begin to answer my research questions that ask how gentrification is legitimized, justified, operates through consent, and is sometimes even seen as a social good. Building on these theories, I move to my final theoretical layer and posit that style is the rhetoric that maintains this hegemony and gentrification is itself a rhetorical style.

GENTRIFICATION AS RHETORICAL STYLE

Lander’s entry in his *Definitive Guide to Stuff White People Like* connects hegemony and whiteness to style. Gentrification allows white people to gain a sort of

cultural advantage and claim superiority over their vanilla, suburban peers through style. Authenticity, renovated houses with character, coffee shops, wine bars, lofts, and hipsters occupy the social imaginary when it comes to matters of gentrified style. These material aspects of style may help us better identify gentrification as it is happening, but to posit that gentrification is a rhetorical style helps us explain gentrification's powerful hegemonic in ways that move beyond the surface. Contrary to Plato's axiom, the surface can tell us much about substance as well, and that is where Brummett's theory of style will help to explain some of the ways that style has influenced hegemonic perspectives on gentrification.

As discussed in the previous chapter, gentrification and style are connected in significant and influential ways. While the topic has been explored to some degree, much remains to be seen in terms of examining gentrification's rhetorical style and Brummett's theory provides a useful starting point for exploring the research questions posed in chapter one. With just a cursory look at the artifacts and texts from my case studies, answering these questions lies in the prominence of what I will term the *aestheticization of gentrification*.²⁹ In the following section, I outline the ways in which a theory of style might contribute to the study of gentrification and the aestheticization of gentrification phenomenon. First, I offer an overview of style as a theoretical construct, then I connect rhetorical style to studies of gentrification, and finally I offer my own interpretive framework for understanding gentrification as a rhetorical style.

²⁹ More on this later, but as a preliminary definition. I think of this term as the depoliticization of gentrification through an overwhelming focus on aesthetics and style. As a result of the aestheticization of gentrification, the issues and outcomes of the process are obscured or, at the very least, watered down.

Theorizing Style

In his book, *A Rhetoric of Style*, Barry Brummett argues that our current era is preoccupied with matters of style and that style functions as the primary realm where social, political, and cultural practices, arguments, and opinions are negotiated and struggled over. He connects style, communication, and rhetoric primarily through the mode of influence and suggests we employ style to communicate particular things about ourselves and others in order to bring about desired results. Brummett argues that style is a mode of global rhetoric that we all have in common and may function as the rhetoric for the twenty-first century. He is careful to note that this rhetoric does not replace others, but in an increasingly globalized world, style is what “knits the world into a relatively homogenous system of communication” and is “the basis for a rhetoric that undergirds today’s global culture” (*Style* xiii). Brummett bases his theory of style on the following definition

Style is a complex system of actions, objects, and behaviors that is used to form messages that announce who we are, who we want to be, and who we want to be considered akin to. It is therefore also a system of communication with rhetorical influence on others. And as such, style is a means by which power and advantage are negotiated, distributed, and struggled over in society. (*Style* xi)

According to Brummett, style is decidedly political, social, and communicative. It is, in fact, such a powerful part of our everyday lives that Brummett argues it is the “rhetoric for the social system that we all have in common” (xiii). The rhetoric of style crosses contexts and global systems of communication, and is central to how our world is organized today. While a shared system of signification and a rhetorical force, style is still often relegated to the category of frivolity; style is all but superficial and needs our attention (Brummett; Maffesoli; Vivian, *Strange*). For Maffesoli, style creates our social

life and is a powerful, essential characteristic, a collective sentiment, “a ‘forming form’ that gives birth to whole manners of being, to customs, representations, and the various fashions by which life in society is expressed” (5).

For the rhetorical critic, Brummett delineates five structural components to a rhetoric of style: primacy of the text, imaginary communities, market contexts, aesthetic rationales, and stylistic homologies.

Primacy of the Text

Style is a performance that can be read through text. The text is the primary means by which we communicate and, as such, identity, values, meanings, communities, allegiances, and motivations can be read off of texts (Brummett 118). In other words, the primacy of the text is the thing that makes style legible as, by definition, style is designed as a text to be read. We see the patterns, redundancies, and convergence of signs that allow the critic to read the style of gentrification through these primary textual sites. Brummett writes that the textual component of style draws our gaze towards attention and effort and suggests that, even if unconsciously crafted, style is strategic. In the example of gentrification, we can discern style through a collection of texts that allow us to identify the style of gentrification. Coffee shops, wine bars, high-end businesses, and wealthier patrons all signal texts of gentrified style. Additionally, the oft-utilized, seemingly universal approach to dealing with neighborhood change at the city and community level seem to share stylistic elements as well.³⁰

³⁰ More on this a little later. This is my initial impression, but will be further articulated in the case studies that follow.

Imaginary Communities

With the text as primary, the audience (or what Brummett refers to as the imaginary community) is called into being. Particularly when it comes to the rhetoric of style, the audience is produced by the rhetoric itself, it is a consequence of and manifested by the text (Brummett 119-120). Communities are constructed in relationship to texts as elements of style attract individuals. Not necessarily intentional, an imaginary community is formed around a text and the whole process is largely unconscious (122-123). Conversely, while some communities are formed or called into being around a style, others find themselves outsiders and it is the element of style that renders them such. If we take for example a gentrified or gentrifying community, we can see how this theoretical element operates conceptually. It is not until there's a textual, stylistic element that is attractive to a certain type of consumer (an imaginary community) for people to want to go, invest, consume, play there in the first place.

For example, San Francisco's Divisadero Street has undergone significant changes in recent years but one of the changes that does a good job of illustrating this idea of imaginary communities has to do with the street's corner barbeque joint. Once a neighborhood staple that served a small (mostly low-income, African-American) community, Da'Pitt eventually went out of business as the neighborhood gentrified, their clientele was slowly displaced, and eventually they could no longer afford to pay their rent. Today, in place of Da'Pitt is 4505 Meats. A bustling business, this barbeque joint attracts the new transplants to the neighborhood via style. They offer organic and vegetarian options, source their meat ethically, and serve craft beer alongside their barbeque offerings. The décor has been spruced up and they hired young, tattooed, bearded men to run the shop. As one local writer puts it, "The building is the same, the barbeque is – well – still barbeque, but lines of yuppies and hipsters now extend down the

block, and local food blogs are singing its praises. Art-ified and White-ified, Da’Pitt is now Da’Place to be” (Kreitler). It’s still a barbeque joint, but with a style that speaks to and attracts the new community in the area.

To offer another example, as places gentrify and urban planners begin to shape neighborhood change, the future community is imagined and literally imaged. City planners and architects work hard to construct and present a particular image that represents of the future of a place, the potential community is shaped into an image that expresses aspirations for the future of a place through the performance of style. The audience that participates in this imagining and buys into it becomes party to its rhetoric of style. Brummett elaborates,

By imagining who we are and who are the others to whom we want to speak through style, we construct the schemes of signs and images that present a representation of ourselves to others as we have image-ined them. And as audience members we are called to in terms of subject positions that we can or cannot assume so as to align or not with the images of others. Style is the medium in which this socially charged process of imagination takes place, and thus we construct, call to, and respond to imaginary communities. (121)

The idea of the imaginary community also connects style to hegemony, as pressure to display a particular style is characteristic of communities that cohere around texts (123). Imaginary communities can be limiting, controlling and dogmatic forces; the symbolic demands of communities can limit “the subjects and identities that form in alignment with them” (123). Certain businesses and kinds of consumption call an imaginary community into being as patterns of consumption and taste appeal to particular subjects.

Market Contexts

The third element of a rhetoric of style is the contention that rhetoric today takes place in market contexts and results in the conflation of consumers and citizens. While Brummett talks about how this can potentially be democratizing and even empowering, it might also limit the realm of citizenship to those who are valued as consumers. In the context of gentrification, I would suggest that if one cannot consume, cannot display a certain aesthetic through consumed goods and services, or cannot themselves operate within the market context (e.g. to help bring up property values), then there is a danger they might not be viewed as citizens at all.

Brummett also notes that style is a global system of rhetoric that makes use of the market and as a result can be recognized across contexts. While some aspects may shift across contexts, they share the meanings produced by a rhetoric of style at their core. In light of its place within market contexts, then, perhaps this is a helpful way for thinking about the rhetorical style of gentrification. Surely, the way gentrification looks and takes shape may change in various settings, but we recognize it when we see it, wherever we are, through the shared rhetorical system of style. We recognize it in our neighborhoods, in the news, in television and film, and in other texts of popular culture.³¹ Brummett suggests that, “we may think of the market as selling texts” which it then “advertises widely” (126-27).

³¹ It would seem that over the last couple of years gentrification has become an increasing part of globalized culture. The rhetorical critic is able to spot it more easily these days as it is commonly depicted in film, magazines, television, and other elements of popular culture. We get to know the aesthetic of gentrification through its style and the products that have come to represent it.

Aesthetic Rationales

For a rhetoric of style, the thing that influences and moves people, the distinctive rationale through which rhetoric is presented, is the aesthetic. In this mode of rhetoric, image and aesthetic are invoked and managed to produce desired effects (Brummett 127-30). Sometimes it is through elements of pleasure, while in other cases ugliness or decay may be utilized to garner a particular response. In a moment dominated by rhetorical style, reasons and motives are aesthetically activated while judgments and decisions are based on aesthetic criteria (127). With this element in mind, a critic might look at the ways in which the aesthetic is invoked as well as its effects.

Aesthetic rationales abound when it comes to issues of gentrification. As I've already mentioned before, much of the debate about gentrification happens on the level of style. Matters of image, aesthetic, and look and feel dominate the discussion and often overshadow more severe issues like displacement, racism, and affordability, to name a few. Buildings, streetscapes, housing options, and debates about scale figure prominently in city discourse and decisions that significantly affect people are simply presented and viewed in terms of their affect on place. With a focus on improving neighborhood infrastructure or beautifying public spaces, it is no surprise that elements of neighborhood change would garner a positive response. But the decision is framed as an aesthetic one, rather than one that could impact the lives of people in negative ways. To oppose gentrification is not to oppose beautification or neighborhood improvement, as some would suggest. This aspect of the rhetoric of style connects style to the power of whiteness as well. As Mahoney writes, "It is difficult to overestimate the importance of this lesson – that whiteness equaled attractiveness, safeness, and financial security" (1672). Though she was writing about postwar America, the same sentiment rings true today as "a preference for whiteness reflects a preference for qualities that have been

attached to whiteness” (1677). This preference is often seen in renderings as planners and developers imagine the shape a community will take; often a preference for a lifestyle that displays a set of cultural practices associated with whiteness, the rendering functions as a kind of aesthetic rationale and makes a visual argument about the way a place *should* be.

Stylistic Homologies

The final component of a rhetoric of style is stylistic homologies. This is the idea that a series of texts, actions, objects, performances, events, and experiences are tied together to form a coherent discourse or style. It is a system of signification that is connected to the previously discussed elements and one that comes together in such a way that we might recognize it. For example, a coffee shop is simply a coffee shop, but taken with other texts that signify gentrification, we come to understand it as a part of gentrified style. On the one hand, that style might mean to some that the neighborhood is improving, and on the other hand, it may serve as a symbolic (and material) threat to those who are at risk of being gentrified. Brummett also highlights the fact that style is connected to ideology through stylistic homologies and suggests that “a critic might also compare the ways in which different stylistic performances call out different ideologies through strategic combinations of signs, and showing the struggle of competing significations may be an important critical task” (131-32). Recently in the gentrifying Mission district of San Francisco, some long-time residents vehemently opposed a street beautification project that planned on planting trees along the sidewalks. One might frown his brow and wonder why anyone would be opposed to such a thing; trees could provide beauty, shade, and a green element in an otherwise concrete jungle. That’s a fact, but the rhetoric of style connects those trees to other ideological factors, power, aesthetic

rationales, and market contexts that would help to explain why someone would be opposed to trees as a part of a larger system of symbols and material relations.

Brummett notes that an aptitude for reading form must be developed by the critic, that facts and stats alone won't reveal the homology (132). The same goes for gentrification research, which is why I argue a theory of a rhetoric of style can make such a contribution to the study of gentrification. The facts and stats of gentrification can sometimes point to positive city change, but adding a theoretical layer that has us analyze hegemony, whiteness, and rhetorical style will give us a more well-rounded interpretation of gentrification and its impact. Brummett's theory of style goes beyond its status as a form of expression to suggest that style shapes our human relations. As a speculative instrument, examining style from a rhetorical perspective allows us to explore the ways in which it shapes our experiences, culture, and perceptions (Brummett 42). With this in mind, I move on to discuss gentrification's inherent connection to style.

Connecting Style and Gentrification

Gentrification has been a hot topic of academic discussion since the eighties. It's history, relevance, and importance has been hotly debated in both academic and popular contexts. Some see its value in revitalization and urban renewal while others argue it is a means by which city governments remove and relocate social malaise rather than addressing it head on. Whichever side of the debate one lies on, style plays a significant role in how discourses about gentrification are constructed and as a result, deserves much further examination. A look at gentrification through the lens of style offers new insights into decades-old debates as an approach through "rhetorical inquiry offers an invaluable means of disclosing, not merely the importance of style as an organizing feature of social and political relations, but more significantly the ways in which it engenders, maintains,

or reconfigures them” (Vivian, *Strange* 114). Specifically, thinking about gentrification as a style will help us explore its rhetorical functions, examine the appropriation of space by particular class and race groups, and hopefully uncover new ways to address social, spatial, and aesthetic inequalities in the city. Bradford Vivian makes the case for the importance of the study of style and writes,

The text of postmodern social life is shaped by the aesthetic patterns of cohesion and dispersion, of inclusion and exclusion, according to which groups and individuals participate in a common sentiment, a shared social or political style. Rhetorical inquiry can account for the aesthetic nature of a social text by interpreting the political functions of a common sentiment, of style in this form. It can investigate how the communication of style among certain groups, how the distribution and consumption of certain tropes, images, or rituals, engenders specific social and political practices. It can also scrutinize how these practices influence larger social arrangements by virtue of the patterns of aesthetic communication sustaining them. Finally, this form of rhetorical inquiry can evaluate the ethical quality of such relations, but not deriving a moral lesson from them; instead one must measure their ethical quality according to their capacity to maintain a robust aesthetic agon ethical consideration of a communal style therefore amounts to asking if it either displays a capacity for producing a variety of responses to multiple social and political exigencies, or if it invokes a privileged sentiment merely to impose a dogmatic civic pathos on diverse cultural practices. (*Strange* 128)

Examining gentrification as a rhetorical style will answer questions such as whose style is privileged? What does that style communicate? What kinds of work do gentrified rhetorical styles do? How is gentrified style used to communicate, persuade, include and

exclude? If the “design of contemporary urban space represents ‘a new class war . . . at the level of the built environment” (Carragee 124), then what is at stake and what are the costs of one side winning over another? Does gentrified style inculcate particular values and beliefs, and if so, what is its impact on civic and democratic life? Whose needs and interests are served by the rhetorical style of gentrification?

These are just a few of the questions the critical scholar can ask when examining gentrification through a rhetorical lens, but there are additional benefits to this approach. First, studying gentrification using rhetorical style as a speculative instrument allows us to interrogate the rhetoric of growth and progress that often accompany gentrification. Gentrification occurs on the level of style, and changes in the urban environment are an inevitable aspect of its process. Urban dwellers, city developers, and politicians often point to gentrified neighborhoods as areas of aesthetic and economic revitalization. The discourse of these groups often reflects a narrative of a return to roots or a revival of authenticity. Zukin explains:

Our tastes as consumers...now define the city as they also define us. These tastes are reflected in the media’s language and images, from lifestyle magazines to local wikis and food blogs; this discourse, which has become more participatory through the Internet, forms our social imaginary of the ‘authentic city,’ including the kinds of spaces and social groups that belong there. Filtered through the actions of developers and city officials, our rhetoric of authenticity becomes their rhetoric of growth. We need tools to talk about those changes. (*Naked City* 27)

The rhetoric of style offers one such tool for unpacking the discourses that serve this rhetorical function. How displacement is packaged as growth is a rhetorical discourse that functions primarily on the plane of style. Advocates of gentrification point to economic and social improvements in urban areas “perennially wracked with poverty, disenfranchisement, and disrepair” and the assumption is that gentrification “is an end result that, one would think, all would embrace” (Cravatts; see also Whyte). An improved quality of life means improvement for everyone according to this logic, but a look at gentrification through the lens of style would likely suggest otherwise.

This assertion brings me to the second major benefit: exploring gentrification through the lens of style will allow us to uncover the privileging of particular identities through style and allow us to push back against the powerful rhetorical narrative of community improvement. The typical symbols and signs of gentrification are coded in such a way that privileges the aesthetic of the middle- and upper-class as well as white identities. The process of gentrification has been likened to the new urban colonialism because “the aesthetic and cultural aspects of the process assert a white Anglo appropriation of urban space and urban history” (Atkinson and Bridge xii). Urban identity that defaults to an image of whiteness points to another site of struggle over style and flattens out the diverse identities that attract people to the city in the first place. Brummett suggests that “there are clearly styles through which different versions of White identity are bodied forth” and the style of gentrified neighborhoods is one such style (*Style* 93). Recognizing this style and its rhetorical implications, would allow scholars who study gentrification to acknowledge “the consequential geography of urban life and the need for those most negatively affected by the urban condition to take greater control over the social production of urbanized space” (Soja 7).

Finally, looking at gentrification as a style has a third benefit. It contributes to the interdisciplinary dialogue about gentrification and mediates some of its debates. Classically, discussions of gentrification have approached the topic from either a production or consumption perspective. The production explanation focuses on economic conditions, capital, and supply-side arguments to explain gentrification, but has been criticized for privileging economics over culture. Alternatively, the consumption approach focuses on gentrifiers themselves and cites their consumption preferences and lifestyles as productive of gentrified urban environments. Researchers worry that this approach is too limited in scope and could support a conservative tendency to see gentrification as benevolent and harmless (Lees, Butler, and Bridge). An approach from Brummett's theory of style (with its focus on the cultural, political, and commercial) would straddle both sides of the debate, incorporate both critical perspectives, and hopefully help move the discussion forward. According to Beauregard, "there can be no single theory of an invariant gentrification process," so examining gentrification using rhetorical style would add another perspective to this rich body of research (qtd. in Lees Slater, and Wyly, *The Gentrification Reader* xix). Daniel Makagon describes gentrification as both a material process and a form of symbolic action and argues that "an analysis of how communication facilitates and frames the class remake of urban neighborhoods allows us to understand better this mode of urban change, and fills a gap in gentrification literature" ("Shock Troops" 27). Brummett's theory of style will serve as a useful tool for examining gentrification, its relationship to hegemony, affiliation with whiteness, and problematic rhetorical appeals.

So style and gentrification are connected in significant ways, but I want to take it a step beyond simply connecting the two or saying style is influential and gentrification is influential. Rather, I'd like to theorize gentrification as a rhetorical style itself. In the next

section, I propose a framework for studying gentrification as a rhetorical style that will direct subsequent analyses.

What Gentrification as Rhetorical Style is Not

To understand gentrification as a rhetorical style, I think it is important to first explore what a gentrified rhetorical style is not.

1. Gentrified style is not just about aesthetics.

When we talk about gentrified style we aren't talking exclusively about the aesthetic. A bevy of bearded, beanie-wearing bright young things with a penchant for modern architecture, expensive coffee, fresh cold-pressed juice, beet consumption and an unusual propensity for wheat allergies³² does not a rhetoric of gentrified style make. That said, the aesthetic can often play a part. Particular styles and aesthetics attract imaginary communities. In a similar vein, the aesthetic can make others feel unwelcome or uncomfortable, like they no longer belong, so the aesthetic element is not without consequence. The look and feel of a place is certainly an element that warrants our attention, particularly when it comes to the aesthetics of urban areas. The built environment of the urban landscape is a powerful and influential aesthetic because it “seems to merely ‘reflect’ the natural attributes, wishes, or desires of the human agents who live within it.” In other words, we have to be mindful of the perception that those who occupy the space are “responsible for the way it looks. In this way, the landscape shapes ideologies, political standpoints, social movements, and the formulation of policy in such a way as to secure hegemonic consent and support of the legitimacy of the existing social order” (Barraclough 18).

³² Sorry if you find yourself of the gluten-intolerant ilk. I just couldn't resist ;)

2. Gentrified style is not just about development or city growth more generally.

While development and city growth might play a role, gentrified style isn't about visualizing some evil developer taking a wrecking ball to a beloved neighborhood piñata shop, laughing maniacally in the face of weeping children.³³ Gentrified style is also not about unethical landlords evicting long-term tenants, tearing down their still-running businesses, and equating them with cockroaches in public statements.³⁴ Gentrified style doesn't necessarily happen at the first sign of development or the erection of a city's first crane. Instead, something is codified as a rhetorical style of gentrification when it actually invites discourse. More specifically, a gentrified style involves a struggle over style or a discourse that is centered on style.

3. Gentrified style is not necessarily contextual.

Certainly gentrification differs from place to place and while context plays an important role, gentrification as a rhetorical style can be applied across cases and places. That doesn't necessarily mean that the style is consistent, but that there are underlying factors, homological patterns, there's a rhetoric at the heart of all gentrification that props up whiteness and is hegemonic. The scenario of gentrification can be applied across contexts as it fits into a larger cultural reality wherein groups with more power and capital are privileged. Gentrification is a rhetorical style that invites discourse and often times that discourse seems to be shaped in very particular ways, in ways that can be identified and in ways that are consistent.

4. Gentrified style is not necessarily reliant on race, but it is reliant on displacement.

Race is always an underlying factor, but a gentrified rhetorical style is not reliant on overt racial inclusions or omissions because it often occurs in seemingly (sometimes it

³³ Though something *like this* may have occurred in East Austin.

³⁴ Though this is an actual, unexaggerated account of a recent event in East Austin.

is produced to seem so) non-racial scenarios (e.g. Harlem's black-on-black gentrification). As critics, we don't have to see race in order for something to function as gentrified style. In fact, the concerted effort to avoid race as part of the discourse about gentrification is often a quality of gentrified style. When race does play a factor, it often employs it as a commodity to be consumed.³⁵ While gentrified style does not rely on overt expressions of racial transitions, gentrified style is reliant on displacement. Rhetoric comes into the fore when there is displacement or when displacement can be projected because of neighborhood change. Displacement or projected displacement is a precondition for gentrification as a rhetoric of style to emerge.

5. Gentrified style is not about consciousness or intent.

The emergence of gentrification may or may not be conscious or intentional. The fact of which is not necessarily relevant to the idea that gentrification functions as a rhetorical style. It is often at the unconscious level that the rhetoric of gentrification takes place. This conceptualization of gentrification as a rhetorical style borrows from critical whiteness theory. Writing about white privilege, Pulido explains,

[W]hites do not necessarily intend to hurt people of color, but because they are unaware of their white-skin privilege, and because they accrue social and economic benefits by maintaining the status quo, they inevitably do Because most white people do not see themselves as having malicious intentions, and because racism is associated with malicious intent, whites can exonerate themselves of all racist tendencies, all the while ignoring their investment in white

³⁵ I mean this in two regards as both whiteness stylistic markers of ethnicity and culture might function and are sometimes marketed as commodities to be consumed. An example of this might be how the popular press might sell the 11th Street Corridor in Austin as an up-and-coming neighborhood (a term associated with whiteness) while the neighborhood is simultaneously marketed as the birthplace of black music culture in Austin.

privilege. It is this ability to sever intent from outcome that allows whites to acknowledge that racism exists yet seldom identify themselves as racists. (15)

Gentrified rhetorical style is distinct in its intentionality (or lack thereof) and this is an important characterization to make. It takes the focus off of intent and allows us to consider outcomes as elements of gentrification that are significant to our understanding of its rhetorical impact.

6. Gentrified style won't always be or appear to be a bad thing.

It isn't just about overt, offensive acts of gentrification wherein 98 year old ladies are evicted by nasty landlords, permit-holding tech workers kick neighborhood kids off the community soccer field, or powerful corporations grab real estate from those of less privilege and fewer resources.³⁶ In fact, gentrification may not appear to have a negative impact at all. Folks may see new businesses coming in and the new resources that come along with them and appreciate the change in the neighborhood. Gentrified style is often more insidious than the obvious and alarming ways we see gentrification emerging in our cities. This is all to say that gentrification isn't always necessarily a bad thing or at least doesn't always appear to be bad, as some of the changes that come with it can benefit the entire community.

Now that we have a sense of what a rhetorical style of gentrification is not (and some hints about what it is), I move on to draft a framework for gentrification as rhetorical style that will guide ensuing analyses.

Identifying Gentrification as Rhetorical Style

The following pages systematically assert several propositions about how gentrification operates as a rhetorical style and the analyses conducted in later chapters

³⁶ These are all, of course, some of the stark realities of gentrification.

will reveal the rhetorical tactics, strategies, and devices it employs in order to have become such an effective (read: hegemonic) rhetoric. Rhetoric helps us understand the style(s) of gentrification as a site of struggle, not just something to be dismissed or looked over. Gentrification is a rhetorical style that reproduces hegemony and is reliant on whiteness. It is a rhetorical style that can be identified in three overarching elements: aesthetic, performance, and discourse. As will be discussed further in the methods chapter, these three factors should be elements at the forefront of the critic's mind when searching for the ways in which gentrification functions as a rhetorical style. Alas, equipped with Brummett's elements of style and informed by theories of hegemony and whiteness, the following propositions outline a heuristic for understanding gentrification as a rhetorical style. These propositions need no extended explanation since they've already been addressed in depth throughout the pages of this chapter.

1. A rhetorical style of gentrification exhibits the five elements outlined in Brummett's rhetoric of style: primacy of the text, imaginary communities, market contexts, aesthetic rationales, and stylistic homologies.
2. A rhetorical style of gentrification involves struggle over style or a discourse that is dominated by style.
3. A rhetorical style of gentrification touts public opinion and the public good.
4. A rhetorical style of gentrification strategically appeals to the interests and aspirations of multiple groups in order to generate consent.
5. A rhetorical style of gentrification creates common sense understandings of the world and relies on common sense knowledge.
6. A rhetorical style of gentrification is connected to race in significant ways – it privileges whiteness and presents whiteness as the norm or metric by which everything else is measured; it often ignores race or presents itself as race-neutral,

but this theoretical approach suggests we can come to understand its racialized aspects through style.

7. A rhetorical style of gentrification appears to be natural, organic, the way it is.
8. A rhetorical style of gentrification occurs in culture and everyday life.
9. A rhetorical style of gentrification is displayed in the aesthetic, performance, and discourse.

Final Thoughts – Theory and Gentrification

This chapter has outlined the ways in which theories of hegemony, whiteness, and style will inform my research on gentrification in Austin, Texas. I have written about each of these theory's contributions above at length and offer a distilled and summarized version of how it might be applied in the following chapter (see Table 1). While not comprehensive, the table illustrates several ways in which each theory will help identify what to look for and what questions to ask in order to examine gentrification as a rhetorical style. It is my hope that these theories and the research they inform will help reveal the particular rhetorical strategies that have made gentrification such a powerful hegemonic force today.

Chapter 3: A Method for Studying Gentrification as Rhetorical Style

In the spring of 2013, I stepped before a crowd of roughly 80 people to speak about gentrification in Austin, Texas. This talk was at once the most terrifying and illuminating experience I've had since beginning my research on gentrification. The talk was hosted by The University of Texas' *Opportunity Forum*, which describes itself as

an interdisciplinary collaboration of University of Texas faculty working to foster the expansion of equitable opportunities for low-income Texans. Through applied research, educational forums, and experiential learning opportunities, the Forum engages the university and community leaders in developing inclusive strategies to improve low-income Texans' access to economic opportunities and to foster stronger and more equitable communities. (Opportunity Forum)

This was an amazing chance to both share my research and get feedback from the diverse crowd that the forums attract. I was overwhelmed and intimidated by my obligation to say something worthwhile (the perpetual anxiety of the academic), to treat my topic carefully, and to use this forum as an opportunity to generate a public discussion about what was happening in our city.

The plan for the session was that I would speak about my research for 30 minutes and the talk would be followed by a panel discussion and finally a Q&A session. The panelists responding to my work were professors from the School of Architecture and the Journalism department at UT, a low-income advocate and community volunteer, and a planner from the City of Austin whose work I was there to critique. A diverse mix, the crowd at the Opportunity Forum was comprised of students, professors, researchers, non-profits, developers, city council members, planners and activists. They all had a stake in

the gentrification of Austin, but ran the width of the spectrum from pro- to anti-gentrification.

At the previous university forum about tenant displacement in Austin an audience participant and housing activist angrily left the meeting declaring, “UT – we’re your social incubator – when you go into our neighborhood bring a little respect! It’s genocide not gentrification!” In this context, the resident was expressing his outrage with the disconnect between research and community engagement, leading me to reflect on my own studies of gentrification. There was no way to please everyone in the crowd, and that was certainly not my goal, but it was especially important to me that the community activists in attendance felt I treated the topic and those it affects with the utmost care and respect. It was in this moment that I was confronted with the responsibility of the researcher and the historic and troubled connection between the university and gentrifying neighborhoods.

In his book, *Seeking Spatial Justice*, Edward Soja argues “the relations between major urban-based research universities in the United States and the labor-related, ethnically defined, and community-based organizations in the cities where they are located have rarely been close and productive” (157). Whether research is viewed as disconnected from the community itself and neighborhoods are made to feel like incubators, or universities themselves become gentrifiers as they expand their campuses, the history between universities and gentrifying communities is fraught with tension.

I begin this chapter by way of a personal story because these experiences have shaped how I approach the topic of gentrification in Austin. What method would best serve the community and the research questions I had posed? What would be both rhetorically sensitive and methodologically sound? This chapter describes my methodological framework and proceeds in three sections. I begin with a preview of the

case studies and the artifacts I plan to analyze. And then move on to discuss how a combination of my case studies, artifacts, and theoretical orientation inform my “method” of rhetorical criticism. Finally, I end by considering how my own role(s) influence the research presented in this dissertation. Before diving in to *how* I plan to study gentrification, I first want to highlight *what* exactly it is that I plan to study. Gentrification has increasingly become a regular part of our lives and it seeps into our lived experiences in a variety of ways. Not just found in the op-ed pages of our local publications, texts of gentrification are found everywhere from fliers pasted up on telephone poles to contentious community meetings. The following section gives the reader some insight into how and why I selected the texts I explore in this dissertation.

CASE STUDIES & ARTIFACTS

Though I previously addressed why Austin serves as an ideal site from which to study gentrification (because of the fact that I lived there and could experience it first hand) an added advantage is that this fair city is also quite significant in broader discourses about gentrification. Articles from national publications that discuss gentrification almost unanimously mention Austin, as it is one of the most rapidly gentrifying cities in the country. While gentrification can vary from place to place, city to city, even neighborhood to neighborhood, in the popular imaginary Austin is a poster child for present-day gentrification. And while my focus will be on Austin, the issues I examine within this locale have broader significance for the way hegemony, whiteness, and style operate. I heed Doreen Massey’s warning and take care to insure that though my dissertation case studies are place-based, they are not place-bound and have wider relevance (*Space, Place, and Gender* 141). In his article on “Life in Big Red” Dwight

Conquergood speaks to the significance of gentrification, housing and their wider implications. He writes,

Urban housing is just such an intersection between macro-forces and micro-realities. Housing encompasses intimate and collective as well as public space, and is situated between the deeply personal and the highly political. Housing is both physical structure and an ideological construction. It structures propinquity, shapes interactions, and provides a compelling issue around which people mobilize. (98)

What is happening in Austin is happening in society more widely. As with Conquergood's Chicago, today's Austin finds itself at the intersection of local life-world and much larger forces, making it a suitable site for study.³⁷ Jenny Rice's *Distant Publics* examines development rhetoric and primarily focuses on Austin. According to Rice, Austin is "a perfect example of urban development and place-change" and she adds, "there's value in studying Austin's rhetoric (both its development aspirations and its 'creative resistance') as an individual case study and an example of much larger patterns happening in the United States" (22). Rice's *Distant Publics* is one among several academic books in recent history that have focused primarily on Austin's development; her work adds to William Scott Swearingen's *Environmental City* and Joshua Long's *Weird City*. Austin's rapid change is a hot topic indeed, but a limitation of these recent texts is that they fail to address race in any significant way.³⁸ This is an area I hope my

³⁷ E.g structural, systemic, and economic.

³⁸ Andrew Busch wages this critique in his review of *Environmental City* and *Weird City* for *American Quarterly*, a publication of the American Studies Association.

research can make a contribution. Austin's racial and racist history is significant as we consider the way it is taking shape today.³⁹

Austin is simultaneously universal and unique. It is one place and many places. It is constructed of multiple perspectives. Massey writes "a 'place' is best thought of as a particular part of, a particular moment in, the global network of . . . social relations and understandings" ("Double Articulation" 115). She argues scholars must avoid essentializing place in favor of "constructing a sense of a locality's place in the world (it's identity) which has the courage to admit it's open (117).⁴⁰ She is careful to note that this perspective does not trivialize uniqueness and specificity, but allows us to understand place as an articulation of multiple forces in a location, a "cumulative texture" rather than some singular, coherent *there* (P. Jackson 185).

As I mention above, my approach in this dissertation is focused on being place-based and to avoid place-bound interpretations of gentrification, yet I need to create some boundaries in order to ensure this project is manageable. There are two axes upon which I limit the scope of my dissertation: time and place. Massey contends how a locality is defined ultimately reflects the research issue (*Space, Place, and Gender* 139). Because my research questions examine gentrification, I narrow my focus to Austin at a time when its gentrification really hit the national radar (roughly 2011 – present)⁴¹ and to two places gentrification has hit hardest (East Riverside Corridor and the 11th and 12th Street Corridor).

³⁹ I previously mention this in the introduction and will also dive into more site-specific detail when I characterize the history of each of the neighborhoods I examine in my case studies.

⁴⁰ Massey refers to this as a double articulation. First in the sense that place is constructed at an intersection of multiple ideas of that place and second in that the subjects within a place help to produce it as well ("Double Articulation" 118).

⁴¹ This is due in part to the results of the 2010 Census, which marked a significant change in the racial makeup of East Austin.

In terms of time, Austin's gentrification really started to gain widespread attention with the release of the 2010 Census. While Austin had been feeling the change for a long while already, the release of the Census provided the quantitative evidence that the city was in serious flux and thus Austin's shifting cityscape started to get noticed on a much bigger scale. Having lived in Austin 2006-2013 and because of the emphasis I place on the importance of presence for analyzing the rhetorics of/in place, the emphasis of my case studies will primarily examine Austin between 2011 and 2013.⁴²

Along the lines of place, I restrict my attention to two neighborhoods in particular. Both the focus of city-led revitalization because of their location as transit corridors, the areas themselves differ in terms of their history, demographic profile of residents, as well as the way in which gentrification is taking place within them.⁴³ Both neighborhoods are within Austin city limits, but find themselves on the eastern edge of town, an area primed for conflict because, according to Conquergood, "the edges, margins, and borders of a culture are always intensely contested zones charged with power and danger" ("Big Red" 107).

To look into these gentrifying neighborhoods more thoroughly, I draw from a range of analytical resources. My lived experience in Austin, the texts I explore, the places and spaces I encounter,⁴⁴ and the discourses I examine all come together to create what Brummett refers to as a rhetorical mosaic ("Heuristic" 102; Becker). As mentioned in the previous chapter, the rhetorical style of gentrification is displayed, performed, and materializes in a wide variety of consistent ways (not just in Austin, but across myriad

⁴² As I delve into publications, this will be my primary timeline, but I also draw from historical and more recent articles to provide context.

⁴³ I will describe these areas and their shared and unique characteristics in each case study chapter.

⁴⁴ For example I have lived in and walked the neighborhoods, toured new developments, and witnessed each case study's transformation. The methodological consideration of my own experience of space and place will be explicated in a later section that talks about my own role in the research.

settings both local and global, in our everyday lives and in popular culture). As Bridge writes, “The gentrification habitus is the subject of self-conscious dinner party conversation, magazine columns, and movies” (“Bourdieu” 212). In addition to my own experience of the places featured in my case studies, the nodal texts I explore which influence my analysis are diverse and include community meetings, news stories, meeting minutes, fliers, master plans, press releases, public documents, promotional materials, and PowerPoints, to name a few.

Scholars who study whiteness suggest moving beyond the study of texts with obvious racial associations in order to push the boundaries of what counts as racial (Berger 8) and scholars in urban planning have started to look at the influence and impact of things and objects in the planning process (Beauregard, “Planning with Things”). For Beauregard, “Things are participants of sorts, and they carry with them information, arguments, and commitments that shape talk and action. They empower and disempower” (186). As a result, the everyday, the mundane, and the material (e.g. a building, store, or a slide presentation) figure prominently in my reading of gentrification in Austin. Mumby writes that “hegemonic processes are played out much of the time at the level of discourse”(366) and while words remains a central focus, Conquergood’s work reminds us that discourse is “not always and exclusively verbal,” and so I am careful in my selection of texts to include rhetorical mediums that move beyond just words (“Rethinking” 189; see also Beauregard, “Planning with Things” 186). For example, the slide presentations given at community meetings as well as the city’s community survey’s that help residents make choices about what Austin will look like offer an excellent point of analysis considering the fact that the way we design and imagine space is not innocent or without consequence, but political (Buchanan 7-8; Massey “Double Articulation” 114; *For Space* 4; Shome, “Space Matters” 40).

Additionally, the built environment plays an important role in my analysis. I borrow from Aiello who suggests that understanding the built environment as visual-material performance helps us look at it more systematically. She adds that a first person account of the visual-material characteristics of space and place add information that provide “vital insights into why and how changes in the built environment may critically matter in the ‘flesh’ of everyday life” (346).

So it is from the texts of the visual, material, and discursive that my method emerges. Everything from buildings to newspaper articles to community meetings make up the mosaic of artifacts that will inform my understanding of gentrification. In the next section, I explain how I plan to study these artifacts and offer some key considerations to keep in mind as I approach these texts. This section proceeds first with a discussion of how my theoretical orientation informs my methodological approach and then goes on to discuss how the role of the critic is also influential in rhetorical research. In comparison to other disciplines and even subdivisions of the field of communication studies, method is a strange concept in rhetorical criticism, and so it is to this topic that I now turn.

THE STRANGE “METHOD” OF RHETORICAL CRITICISM

The method of rhetorical criticism is unique in its connection to theory as well as the individual critic. When it comes to rhetorical criticism, it isn’t about operationalizing an approach to a text in order to make the method replicable, as Edwin Black informs us in *Rhetorical Criticism: A Study in Method*. In fact, that isn’t even desirable (Black xi). The fact of the matter is rhetorical criticism is neither systematic nor objective, at least it shouldn’t be. Its method is a non-method informed by theory and the critic’s own sensibilities and standpoint.⁴⁵ Though this might be frustrating to some of our more

⁴⁵ More on this in the next section.

empirically inclined colleagues, the strange “method” of rhetorical criticism might be one of its finest assets, particularly when it comes to making contributions to interdisciplinary studies, because the rhetorician’s method is rhetorical in and of itself.⁴⁶ It offers a flexible and reflexive approach to scholarship where “the end result is more responsible, more invested criticism than the fateful kind based on borrowed theoretical and methodological commitments” (Zdenek 208). As I have mentioned previously, the bulk of studies of gentrification are quantitative, but the numbers alone cannot paint the whole picture. A new approach to the study of gentrification is both necessary and desired in order for us to get a sharper view of this urban phenomenon. In the case of this dissertation, theory informed my object of study and vice versa. Campbell and Burkholder offer a clear articulation of the reciprocal relationship between theory and object, critic and text: “critics come to know the discourse on its own terms, place the discourse in its context, and select or invent an approach or system to complete the evaluation” (109). This is the method I used for the dissertation, wherein the theories I employ both emerge from and offer a lens for the study of gentrification.

Closely connected to method in rhetorical studies, theory provides a particular way of looking at and approaching texts, and as a result, “method is merged with and subordinated to theory” (Brummett, “Heuristic” 99). A division between theory and method is much weaker in rhetorical studies than in the social sciences because, as Brummett informs us, “theories and methods of rhetorical criticism are often blurred because theory *is* a method of experiencing rhetoric in the real world;” it is about “looking and hearing *with sensibilities sharpened by the theory*” (“Heuristic” 105). Thus,

⁴⁶ Zdenek explains that a rhetorical approach to research promotes a process where each element (theory, method, artifact, question/problem) is equally responsive to the situation.

the theories of hegemony, whiteness, and style guide my analysis of the case studies in this dissertation.

Informed by these theories, I am led to look at particular things when examining gentrification as well as ask particular questions (with the central focus being on answering my research questions, of course). According to Brummett in *Techniques of Close Reading*, theory offers the map and method provides the vehicle the critic uses to get around the texts they plan to investigate. This next section offers a description of the method I use to apply the theories I described in the previous chapter and to demonstrate the ways in which those theories actually function in the world. Though I already explained each of the theories and how they will be employed in the study of gentrification in the previous chapter, below I offer a brief description of how each theory will inform my methodological approach to the study of gentrification as a rhetorical style.

The theory of hegemony asks the critic to look for rhetoric in the realm of culture as well as for rhetoric that occurs in the every day and appears “natural.” It asks that the critic look for mechanisms that produce common sense understandings of the world as well as for claims that rely on knowledge that is considered common sense. Because hegemony is about leading rather than domination, the critic using Gramsci’s theory must ask: when it comes to gentrification, what interests and aspirations are relied upon to develop consent and create concordance? Finally, the critic must look out for moments when public opinion is relied upon to gain legitimacy and support. So the everyday, common sense, and things occurring in the realm of culture play a significant role in understanding how hegemony operates. To that end, examining the built environment will offer some insight into the everyday and cultural realm. How the neighborhood changes and my experience of that change will also provide some insight. From public

discussions to news articles, I will look out for moments when the discourse turns to the organic, natural, and inevitability of gentrification. When the discourse leans on common sense understandings of the catalysts, processes, and outcomes of gentrification, I will pay particular attention. For example, a slide presentation at one community meeting presented a before and after that invited the audience to follow the logic that the neighborhood in its current state needs improvement and that the “after” is the best vision for that place. This was presented as a given and didn’t allow for alternate interpretations of the neighborhood. Such visuals (and the arguments they make) warrant interrogation. The reliance on public opinion is a factor in hegemony as well so community meetings designed to gather “public opinions” about neighborhood change will be ideal for analysis. Additionally, listening and looking for examples of what aspirations are called forth in those meetings (as well as in discourse found in other outlets as well) should prove fruitful for analysis.

Whiteness, too, offers a lens through which to analyze gentrification and asks the critic to examine how race is ignored or whiteness rendered invisible. It asks the critic to look for the unspoken issues of race and how whiteness is invoked (e.g. as a valuable investment or equivalent to what is good). Using the theory of whiteness as a methodological starting point, the critic should explore the ways that the everyday, normal, subtle, and invisible influence our understanding of urban change, how cities are shaped, and who benefits from it. Additionally, critics will be obliged to look for the ways whiteness is presented as the norm or standard by which everything else should be measured or the ways that discourses about gentrification naturalize and normalize systems of power. Finally, this theoretical foundation implores when approaching their objects of study, critics consider how whiteness is connected to structures of power and privileged in everyday life. For example, I might ask myself how whiteness is invoked in

order to sell a particular aesthetic or way of living in order to appeal to the middle class, investors, developers, and real estate agents. How whiteness is invoked through both word and image will be an important consideration here. Because race is such a significant factor in Austin's gentrification, but also a factor that is largely ignored in the discourses of those in power, I'll have to look for how race is inferred or implicitly referenced. Finally, where whiteness is seen as the model could potentially be found in a variety of texts. Take, for example, a recent poster located at a bus stop in San Francisco's historically black neighborhood, the Bayview (see Figure 2). Race is never explicitly referred to, but the poster features a white woman on her bike with the text above exclaiming "I keep it clean!" This is juxtaposed with icons that remind residents to not litter and tag. When examined through the lens of whiteness, a close reading of a public poster from the Public Works Department might reveal more than just an advertisement about keeping the neighborhood "clean."



Figure 2: Bayview Bus Stop Poster.

The theories of hegemony and whiteness lead us to think about style and gentrification in a particular way. Brummett's rhetoric of style is the final theory I use to evaluate the case studies in chapters 4 and 5. In theorizing what a rhetorical style of gentrification might consist of in the previous chapter, several elements a critic might look for emerge. The previous chapter offers nine propositions about what a rhetorical style of gentrification is and how it might be identified (its characteristics). In terms of method, I plan to look for these characteristics in the discourse, performance, and aesthetics of gentrification (all elements of style). Combining hegemony, whiteness, and the propositions about gentrified style, I will look for these elements across the range of artifacts and texts discussed above.

Below, Table 1 offers a brief summary of the theoretical frameworks that guide my approach, outlining what to look for and what questions to consider as I examine my case studies.

Hegemony	Whiteness	These theories lead us to think about style and gentrification in a particular way...	A Rhetorical Style of Gentrification
<p>- Because hegemony is about leading rather than domination, what interests and aspirations are relied upon to develop consent and create concordance when it comes to gentrification?</p> <p>* Mechanisms that produce common sense understandings of the world</p> <p>* Things that rely on knowledge that is considered common sense</p> <p>- When is “public opinion” relied upon?</p> <p>* Occurs in culture and everyday life/ appears to be natural</p>	<p>- How is race ignored or whiteness rendered invisible? Look for the unspoken issues of race and how whiteness is invoked (e.g. as a valuable investment or equivalent to what is good)</p> <p>* Ways the everyday, normal, subtle, and invisible influence our understanding of urban change, how cities are shaped, and who benefits from it</p> <p>* Ways whiteness is presented as the norm or standard by which everything else should be measured</p> <p>* Ways landscape, discourses about city change, and gentrification naturalize and normalize systems of power</p> <p>* How whiteness is connected to structures of power, gives advantages to some and not others, and is privileged in everyday life</p>		<p>* Exhibits the five elements discussed in Brummett’s Rhetoric of Style</p> <p>* Involves struggle over style or a discourse that is dominated by style.</p> <p>* Touts “public opinion” and the “public good”</p> <p>* Appeals to interests and aspirations of multiple groups in order to generate consent</p> <p>* Creates common sense understandings of the world and relies on knowledge considered common sense</p> <p>* Privileges whiteness and presents whiteness as the norm or metric by which everything else is measured</p> <p>* Often ignores race but race can be registered in style. Whether via the privileging of whiteness or through the commodification and aestheticization of otherness</p> <p>* Appears natural, organic, the way it is</p> <p>* Occurs in culture and everyday life</p> <p>* Displays itself via the aesthetic, performance, and discourse</p>
Key: * = what to look for; - = questions to ask			

Table 1: Methodological Tools – The Theories of Hegemony, Whiteness, and Gentrification as a Rhetorical Style

Each theory will shape the way I look at my case studies, and provide a lens through which to read the texts I have selected. While each theory will help guide my analysis, the methods I list here occupy a partial element of the whole picture. Another consideration central to how the critic interprets a text is, in fact, the critic herself. As Edwin Black put it, “Methods, then, admit of varying degrees of personality. And criticism, on the whole is near the indeterminate, contingent, personal end of the methodological scale” (xi). It is with this in mind that I turn to the final important feature in my methodological trajectory, myself.

THE ROLE OF THE CRITIC

A rhetorical critic wears many hats and there are three that I would like to focus on that directly influence my approach to the texts that I am studying. My role as researcher, privileged person, and community member impact the ways in which I perform rhetorical criticism. Not mutually exclusive, these three roles provide methodological considerations and remain at the forefront of my mind as I conduct my research.

Rhetorical Critic as Researcher

As a researcher, there are three categories I contend with: the personal, the critical, and the role of being there. Firstly, the personal plays a significant role in that rhetorical criticism is a highly individualized process. Rhetorical criticism is “never wholly impartial and objective” (Campbell and Burkholder 2) and “critiques are a kind of discourse that acts as an extension of a writer. . . . A critique represents a particular mind at work on an object: apprehending it, examining it, coming to understand it, placing it into history” (Black xiv; see also Brummett, “Heuristic” 102). The process of rhetorical criticism is highly personal such that the way I approach and experience a text might be

wholly different than another critic. This personal aspect is relevant in terms of what stands out to me in community meetings and news articles to how I experience the built environment. As a methodological consideration, a personal approach can be advantageous. For example, when it comes to studying space and place Aiello contends, “the sensorial and experiential quality of personal narrative also enhances the political import of visual-material analysis” (346).

This brings me to the second category as it is important I identify my approach to the study of gentrification is that of a critical scholar. This is to say that I examine texts beyond the obvious in order to uncover power dynamics and that there is a dimension of my research aimed at social transformation.⁴⁷ In terms of my critical positioning in relation to gentrification, my stance is informed by bell hooks who writes

Those of us who have class privilege, who reside somewhere in the middle of our society’s economic totem pole, will have to choose where we stand. Will we stand for the right of everyone to have safe affordable housing irrespective of income or will we stand with the greedy – the speculators in real estate who only exploit for profit? (*Where We Stand* 14)

I stand for the rights of everyone and, as I have stated previously, my position is decidedly anti-gentrification. But to be clear, that doesn’t mean I am anti- “progress” or “development.”⁴⁸ Building infrastructure, planting trees, creating safe and attractive low-income housing - I’m all for improving *everyone’s* lives, not just the lives of a few. Methodologically, this means I examine texts with a specific lens toward interrogating

⁴⁷ For more on the political, strategic, constitutive, and transformative motivations of critical scholars and the methods they employ see Middleton, Senda-Cook, and Endres on their concept of Rhetorical Field Methods.

⁴⁸ Massey does a good job of articulating this distinction and how the aims of “progress” as well as equality don’t have to be at odds with one another (“Is the World” 4-7).

power. This is to say that I am less concerned with critiquing development wholesale (what it *is*), but more interested in its influence and the impact it has (what it *does*).

The motivation towards social transformation is evidenced, for example, by my use of Gramsci's theory of hegemony and Critical Race Theory. According to Mumby, Gramsci's work is ideal for critical scholars in that his theoretical orientation employs a philosophy of praxis with an eye towards social change (366).⁴⁹ Moreover, one who employs Critical Race Theory in her research "tries not only to understand our social situation, but to change it; [she] sets out not only to ascertain how society organizes itself along racial lines and hierarchies, but to transform it for the better" (Delgado and Stefancic 7). As I approach my research, I answer the plea of gentrification scholars Loretta Lees, Tom Slater, and Elvin Wyly who call for critical research in gentrification studies. They argue that it is important for scholars not to be critical of gentrifiers themselves, but to investigate the broader mechanisms at work that have made gentrification such a hegemonic force (*Gentrification* 123). Urban Studies scholar David Imbroscio concurs and suggests that studies of the urban environment should be kept critical rather than objective and value-free (which he argues is an impossible ideal anyways). He writes, "Instead of making urban analysis more mainstream, the mainstream should actually become more urbanized" (101).⁵⁰ This is what I hope to do by taking on the role of critical scholar in my research.

The final category of my role as researcher involves a methodological approach that requires my presence. The choice to study Austin's gentrification was a strategic one.

⁴⁹ Mumby contends that this approach offers a useful way for critical scholars to situate themselves in relation to those whom they study, wherein the relationship is dialectical rather than either elitist or uncritical, opening up new possibilities for resistance and change (366-70).

⁵⁰ Imbroscio suggests scholars should try see like a city (in contrast to seeing like the State), which is to say that scholars ought to resist mainstream analytical methods that reproduce normative understandings of place.

To put it simply, I selected Austin because I lived there, because I could experience its transformation first-hand at such a critical time in its shifting urban landscape.⁵¹ As scholars like Dickinson, Blair, Pezzulo, Gallagher, McAlister, Aiello, and Makagon (to name only a few) have demonstrated, studies of place are enriched when the scholar is actually there to experience it. Our bodies in place, the actual materiality of the experience of a place (and the people and things we encounter there) lead us to unique insights and conclusions, and when we aren't there our criticism looks much different (Blair, "Reflections" 275). Middleton, Senda-Cook, and Endres describe this approach in their explanation of what they term Rhetorical Field Methods. They argue a methodology that requires our presence allows us to go beyond texts and acknowledge how meanings are co-constructed through participant-observation. In situ methods of analysis not only ask the critic to account for her analytical position, but allows the critic to interact with others, making them interlocutors in her analysis.⁵² Such a method is "aimed at understanding how texts and embodied, lived experiences interanimate one another" and, they argue, "by placing our bodies within the rhetorical situation we analyze, practitioners become accountable to the affective, sensory, and aesthetic dimensions of rhetoric," an additional benefit to *being there* (Middleton, Senda-Cook, and Endres 393). Finally, an added advantage to the critic experiencing real-time rhetorical action is that we can acknowledge and identify mundane discourses that don't often receive critical attention, but merit being taken seriously (387). To garner the most out of my presence, I regularly walked my case study neighborhoods and took notes. Walking was an important element because I could discover things (e.g. a flyer protesting gentrification

⁵¹ More on this shortly.

⁵² This is a methodological element I incorporate when acting as participant-observer in community meetings conducted in Austin.

posted in a window) that I otherwise wouldn't have been able to see. I also took pictures during the time period that I am focusing on in order to preserve my memory of the neighborhood and document its transition. I also attended neighborhood meetings to gain a better understanding of what they were like, rather than just reading meeting minutes. At the meetings I took notes on who was in attendance, how it was organized, what was presented, how people responded, and what elements sparked the most conflict. These were all efforts to attend to the visual, material, and performative elements of gentrification. My role as researcher is certainly an important one, but another important factor to take into account is an ethics of positionality. In studying a phenomenon with connections to race and class, it is important that I take my own privilege into account.

Rhetorical Critic with Privilege

In conducting research, it is essential that the rhetorical critic acknowledge her privilege and power. Crenshaw argues we must recognize our own privileged social locations to avoid (re)producing oppression and states, "In our research, this means that we must avoid the tendency to stand apart from our ideological criticisms and, instead, include as an integral part of our scholarly studies, a self-reflexive analysis of our discursive and ideological limitations" (274; see also Middleton, Senda-Cook, and Endres 402). In my life, I enjoy a number of privileges, but for the purposes of this dissertation, it is imperative that I recognize my privilege as a white woman, gentrifier, and university affiliate.

Acknowledging one's privilege is key as is a degree of reflexivity (Nakayama and Krizek 304). Marking our own position is essential for producing sound research and we must work to know our own limitations. As Robert Jensen urges,

[W]e have to retain an understanding that while we may be right in some sense about the question for justice, our specific analysis at any given moment may be slightly off, or maybe even drastically wrong. If we are not open to influences that can help us see that, if we do not hold onto intellectual and moral humility, we are more likely to make mistakes This is especially true of people in more privileged sectors of society. This is especially true of white people in the United States. (*The Heart of Whiteness* 85-6)⁵³

Self-reflexivity is required on the part of any rhetorical critic who studies whiteness and whose aim is to expose white privilege (Crenshaw 258; see also Alcoff, Berger, Omi and Winant; Sullivan; Ware and Back). As bell hooks attests to in her book *Killing Rage: Ending Racism*, my whiteness influences my research; though I try to avoid prejudice and discrimination and am motivated by racial justice, white supremacy still impacts how I see the world (188). One methodological choice informed by this understanding is to make race central to my analyses and in acknowledging that it is impossible to be color-blind. Instead, I must insist on my whiteness and consider it a relevant factor in my analyses (Sullivan 159). As Omi and Winant contend, “By noticing race, we can begin to challenge racism” (158). With whiteness as a primary analytical tool in this dissertation,

⁵³ This openness is also articulated by Mumby (when he suggests Gramsci’s philosophy of praxis better – and more ethically - connects the researcher with the subjects of her study), Middleton, Senda-Cook, and Endres (whose Rhetorical Field Methods encourage the researcher to view others who are part of the rhetorical situation as interlocutors), and Alcoff (who suggests that self-interrogation be done dialectically – a form of speaking to - as we consider what others reveal to us about ourselves). The story that begins this chapter also marked a moment that required some reflexivity about what counts as knowledge and how to approach research. If you’ll allow just one more aside, reader, I experienced a moment of humility at my own Opportunity Forum presentation. Due to time constraints and a less thorough analysis that wasn’t ready for presentation, I only presented my research on a predominantly Hispanic neighborhood and did not get a chance to present my research of gentrification in a historically black neighborhood. A black woman who attended the talk expressed her disappointment after the forum. Her feedback remains at the forefront of my mind as I begin my case analysis and will impact my approach. This incident not only confirms that race is an important factor to consider in gentrification research, but that people of color are not a monolith and experience issues of gentrification and racial exclusion in different ways.

noticing race (including, and perhaps especially, my own) is central to how I will approach my case studies. For example, this means keeping race at the forefront of my mind when in a community meeting it is insisted upon that the focus of discussion should be “look and feel.” Such a perspective invites me to ask myself what “look and feel” might represent or, better yet, what a singular focus on “look and feel” deflects or obscures in regards to race.

In addition to acknowledging my limitations and exercising reflexivity in my scholarship, I also have to reflect on and become acutely aware of what my presence might mean to those with long-term ties to gentrifying neighborhoods.⁵⁴ bell hooks speaks of whiteness and its associations with terror for communities of color writing “All black people in the United States, irrespective of their class status or politics, live with the possibility that they will be terrorized by whiteness” (“Representations” 23). In communities of color in Austin, the terror of whiteness means real estate speculation, gentrification, the breaking down of community ties, and displacement,⁵⁵ a fact I must remain conscious of as I conduct my research.

I have to recognize my own position of privilege as I investigate gentrification and its effects. I was an Austin gentrifier, a white woman living in a gentrifying neighborhood, taking advantage of lower rent. This has to be accounted for in my research because as critical race scholar George Lipsitz puts it, “those of us who are ‘white’ can only become part of the solution if we recognize the degree to which we are already a part of the problem – not because of our race, but because of our possessive investment in it” (79).

⁵⁴ My presence as a neighborhood resident and my presence in other gentrifying neighborhoods. For example, the simple act of taking pictures for my research invokes signs of real estate speculation and rising rents and property taxes.

⁵⁵ Not to mention police brutality.

A final characteristic I must consider as I examine my own privilege and attempt to understand how it impacts my research is my position as scholar and university affiliate. Della Pollock describes the intersection between “university” and “community” as “sweaty business” and acknowledges that research at this intersection may cause embarrassment or anxiety in both realms (464). In her essay “Doorjams and the Promise of Engaged Scholarship,” Pollock is troubled with the notion that engaged scholarship is something that can only happen outside the university. In reflecting on her experience working as a professor while also organizing in an anti-gentrification group called UNC NOW, Pollock describes her literal and metaphorical place on the threshold between university and community. At times very involved, Pollock also recognizes her “necessary exclusion” from the community organization and writes “This is where I belong – one foot in and one foot out. Here and simultaneously at the university, when *here* raises the stakes *there*, and *there* underscores the in-and-beyond-the-moment of what’s happening *here*” (464).

The study of gentrification is one that is difficult and comes with a lot of responsibility. We are beholden to our communities and universities (two things that can sometimes be in contention). At times our representation as being from the university compromises the community’s trust in us. Trust has to be earned as too many times communities most affected by gentrification have felt like subjects trapped in the incubator of yet another UT researcher’s study or experiment. Pollock writes,

To perform integrity – the ultimate response-ability of the ethical researcher...must be to accept that one is operating within institutions and communities of knowledge that are...each radically heterogenous. Accordingly, we can’t secure our (dis)placements by choosing one or the other or one and the

other, but must recognize that we are always already crossed through with otherness in each institutional realm. (465)

As a researcher of gentrification, I am connected to both the university I attend and the community I study, a fact that influences my analysis. One way I navigated this duality was by talking with community members and activists about my research and staying open to criticisms and suggestions from academic peers and community members alike. This leads me to my third and final role, that of community member.

Rhetorical Critic as Community Member

Scholars often live in the places they study and it is imperative that we reflect on our place in them, as it can impact our research. We are responsible for understanding the necessary exclusions (e.g. staying silent at a community planning meeting so community members themselves have an opportunity to voice their concerns) and inclusions (e.g. speaking at a city council meeting or forum provided by the university that allows one to exhibit her expertise and mobilize the interdisciplinary resources of the university) of our research.⁵⁶

More often than not, the neighborhoods and cities we study are our own. As a result, it is important to recognize ourselves as resident-researchers. At once threaded into the fabric of the community with our own investment in place, while also serving as an outsider, a transient community member, a part of a university we will one day leave. Because of the nature of academic jobs and job markets, academics, as Eric Zency describes it, are never really set in place as students and professors, but live in a perpetual state of rootlessness. Zency writes, “We are citizens of the *cosmo polis*, the mythical

⁵⁶ These are conscious decisions I made while doing the research for this dissertation. Alcoff writes, “The impetus to speak must be carefully analyzed and, in many cases (certainly for academics!), fought against” (24).

‘world city,’ academics are expected to owe no allegiance to geographical territory.” He continues, “They’re supposed to belong to the boundless world of books and ideas and eternal truths, not the infinitely particular world [of our neighborhoods and communities]” (60-61). Confronting our often-inevitable departure from the universities we attend or teach at and the communities we live in and study, we encounter a dilemma. Having left Austin recently, I struggle to answer the question of what it means now that I am displaced from the site of my scholarship. One result is that I have to make a conscious effort to avoid slipping into nostalgia, longing for an Austin that once was and will never be again.

I lived in Austin for seven years, but studying a place is not necessarily glorifying it. As Doreen Massey contends in *Space, Place, and Gender*, studying a place we have a connection to “can be an important part of exposing myths of locality and place as much as of anything else” (143). She argues that remembering place doesn’t mean one has to submit to a form of “nostalgic wallowing” and that one way to avoid this is to acknowledge the fact that there are multiple memories, interpretations, and experiences of place. hooks underscores this contention and encourages “a politicization of memory that distinguishes nostalgia, that longing for something to be as once it was, a kind of useless act, from that remembering that serves to illuminate and transform the present” (*Yearning* 147). While remaining aware of the limitations of nostalgia, I also recognize that my participation in the community is irreplaceable as I attempt to understand how gentrification works in Austin.

This is all to say that my role as researcher, my position of privilege, and my connection to the Austin community must all be accounted for because they play an influential role in my criticism. These roles present a number of strengths and weaknesses, advantages and limitations. In recognizing these various roles I enact a

politics of positionality wherein I “acknowledge the need to contribute to efforts toward social justice while remaining open to the fallibility of [my] own critical judgment” (Middleton, Senda-Cook, and Endres 402).

CONCLUSION

This chapter has outlined my method for studying gentrification in Austin, Texas. I have described the case studies and artifacts I plan to examine, addressed the strange method of rhetoric, and identified my own role(s) in the methodological and analytical process. While the goal is not to give the reader a method that can be exactly replicated, my intent is to offer a guide for readers about how I will look at my texts and how that look is informed by theory and my own position.⁵⁷ With that in mind, I move next to my first case study, Austin’s East Riverside Corridor.

⁵⁷ Campbell and Burkholder write about how rhetorical criticism itself is rhetorical as “critics ask their own audiences to see a discourse as they see it, to understand and judge it as they do” (2).

Chapter 4: East Riverside Corridor Case Study

In 2013 the *Austin American-Statesman* profiled East Austin resident Onestino Vega and tracked his ever-changing living situation in the shifting East Riverside Corridor neighborhood. Just over the course of a few short months, Mr. Vega moved three times, from one rat and cockroach-infested apartment complex to the next, each move precipitated by new ownership or massive renovations that would improve living conditions in the complex, but make it impossible for someone like Vega to stay there. First, Vega resided in Las Palmas Apartments, but he and his neighbors were evacuated when city investigators discovered a walkway in his building was in danger of collapsing. Next, he moved to Vista Lago apartments, an affordable housing complex that didn't afford any luxuries and was in-fact quite dingy and run-down, but provided a roof over his head. Vista Lago came under new ownership and, soon after, Vega and his roommates had to move again as the new management would not accept money orders (a necessity for renters who don't have bank accounts), ignored maintenance requests, and reportedly hung up on those who did not speak English. With the added rise in rent, Vega relocated to Canyon Oaks, one of the few remaining affordable apartment complexes in the area. Soon after he moved in, a Dallas real estate investment company purchased the property (Ulloa).

It is uncertain what has happened to Vega since the 2013 profile in the *Austin American-Statesman*, but the fate of the structurally dangerous, neglected, and mismanaged complexes he once lived in is a little more clear. Las Palmas, Vista Lago, and Canyon Oaks have all been renovated and rebranded as Link, Mesh, and Solaris respectively. Their new renovations boast amenities like granite countertops, stainless steel appliances, on-site dry cleaning, state-of-the-art business centers, urban dog parks,

walk-in closets, courtyard and poolside oases, bike rental, a bocce ball court, and easy access to Austin's hike and bike trail. The days of broken stoves, mold, brisk winds entering through gaps in doors and windows, and (a lack of) pest control are seemingly a thing of the past as new management groups and marketing ploys attempt to attract a new kind of renter.

The Riverside Triangle, the area bound by Riverside Drive, Lakeshore Drive, and South Pleasant Valley Road has undergone a massive overhaul in recent years. Since 2008, nine out of nine apartment complexes home to immigrant, student and other low-income populations for decades have all been demolished⁵⁸ or renovated. The neighborhood today is a glaring contrast in both décor and demographics to the neighborhood that once existed here, a tribute to the "effectiveness" of the *East Riverside Corridor Master Plan*.

Today, the Riverside Triangle is gentrified. Past tense. Up until very recently, it was the location of hundreds of units of low-income and affordable housing and today the area is comprised of luxury apartments and lots waiting to begin their transformation. And so the goal of this chapter is to understand how this came to be. How did gentrification steamroll through this neighborhood so rapidly and with such powerful hegemonic force? And what strategies were put to use to justify and legitimize gentrification, in this case? The Riverside Triangle is but one section of the 3.5 mile long East Riverside Corridor (ERC), which will serve as the focus of this chapter.

In the pages that follow I will attempt to answer the questions posed above by exploring the intersection between hegemony, whiteness, and style in the East Riverside Corridor. Not just about my own nostalgia for a neighborhood I once lived in, but what is

⁵⁸ As of September 29th, 2015, the Lakeview Apartment complex is the final affordable apartment complex still standing in this triangle, but residents have received eviction notices and the building is slated for demolition to make way for luxury apartments (Galindo).

happening here is happening all over, rooted in a flawed system of city growth and development that focuses on style, and speaks to many of the concerns scholars of gentrification have been discussing for decades. In this chapter, I argue that the East Riverside Corridor embodies gentrification by design⁵⁹ and highlights the ways in which a rhetorical style of gentrification serves to justify, legitimize, and drive gentrification in the area. To make this case, I first offer some context for the ERC. I give a brief history of the Latina/o experience in Austin and then spend some time describing the neighborhood and its inhabitants. Second, I connect the planning process in the ERC with a rhetorical style of gentrification. This section attends the focus on style and privileging property over people, hegemonic narratives in the planning process, and visualizations of a future that privileges whiteness. Before turning to my analysis, some context is essential for understanding how we found ourselves here today.

CASE IN CONTEXT

As mentioned previously, Austin is no stranger to growth. Since 1979, the city has more than doubled in population (Mueller and Dooling) and, more recently, between 2000 and 2012, Austin's population grew by 47 percent (Castillo, "Numbers"). With waves of new Austinites joining the ranks every day, that growth doesn't seem to be waning. In addition to the University and Austin's function as state capital, the tech industry is a growing sector of Austin industry that attracts new companies and residents regularly. Along with the rise in population, Austin ranks second among American cities for job growth (Toohey) and it is hard to miss the growth in Austin's industrial and residential building, evidenced by the changing city skyline and the constant rise of new

⁵⁹ That is, it defies the notion that gentrification happens organically, naturally, or solely as a result of market forces, but occurs by design (through the careful and calculated decisions made in service of empowered interests).

projects downtown and around the city's core. All of this has also led to a growing cost of living as Austin has "gone from the city with the best housing affordability index in the country to one of the most expensive housing markets in Texas" (Chusid 25). There's a growing concern that Austin is becoming too expensive even for the middle class as housing prices and property taxes have outpaced income growth (Toohey). Another area of measured growth is in the significant gap between income levels. A 2012 report named Austin the most expensive city in Texas for residents making minimum wage or lower (A. Smith). According to a recent study, "the Austin/Round Rock area is the most economically segregated large metro area in the United States" (Cantú). In addition to these startling facts, in the decade before 2013, the number of Austinites living in poverty grew by 77 percent while the suburbs around Austin saw those living in poverty grow by 140 percent (L. Rice). The rise in income segregation results in a loss of economic opportunity with its heaviest impact on those living in the region's concentrated pockets of poverty, more specifically, in the minority neighborhoods east of I-35 (Zehr, "Price"; see also King). With the Austin metro area ranking second in fastest growing city for suburban poverty, clearly not all are benefitting from its growth.

One of the areas that has seen the most dramatic impact is the East Riverside Corridor, where, reported in 2012, "aggressive redevelopment projects are displacing working-class families who had found their niche in an affordable part of town" (A. Smith). While trends in city growth were "wreaking havoc" on people (mostly Latino immigrants) of modest means who lived along East Riverside, no one might have guessed just how rapid the gentrification and displacement of the community would be. Before diving into an analysis of gentrification along East Riverside Corridor, a brief history lesson is in order.

Austin's MeXicano and Latina/o Community: A Brief History

Austin's economic and racial segregation is a result of a long history of policy and planning. Without repeating what I've already outlined in previous chapters regarding Austin segregation, a few key factors remain in order to set up the context for East Riverside's gentrification, specifically as it relates to the vulnerable, predominantly Latina/o or MeXicano⁶⁰ populations that eventually settled there.

According to *Austin: An Illustrated History*, Mexican American communities have found a home in Austin since around the 1870s, where they initially settled around the floodplains near Shoal Creek and the Colorado River. Eventually, Austinites of Mexican descent moved east, partially as a result of Austin's 1928 Master Plan, which served to segregate much of Austin. By the 1950s, Austin's Latino community comprised 10 percent of the citizenry and most lived in South East Austin,⁶¹ where they could have access to community institutions like churches, schools, social networks, and a growing food industry (Humphrey and Crawford; see also Mueller and Dooling). The area also became the primary industrial area of the city, so housing was cheap and there was access to jobs (Balli). Similar to the previous enclave that formed around Shoal Creek, the Latino, predominantly MeXicano, community that formed near the Colorado River was located along a flood plane, a muddy, undesirable, hazardous location where those with means didn't want to live (Tretter and Adams). Even before East Austin was designated

⁶⁰ I use this terminology in alliance with the organization PODER (People Organized for the Defense of Earth and her Resources), an organization that fights tirelessly against gentrification (among other forms of discrimination and inequality) in Austin. They use the term MeXicano to highlight Austin's unique lineage and "while all generic terms are fraught with degrees of conceptual inadequacy, PODER prefers the term Latina/o because it tends to root Latina/o identity in the continent of the Américas, and permits conceptual space for a more culturally and linguistically diverse understanding of the Latina/o identity" (Almanza, Herrera, and Almanza 10).

⁶¹ Much of the community formed around Our Lady of Guadalupe Church. The community stretched from the southern border of the "negro district" and to the area around East Caesar Chavez Boulevard and, to a lesser extent, just across the Colorado River to the south, an area today known as the East Riverside Corridor.

the main zone for people of color, it was one of the few areas close to downtown where African Americans and Latinos could live. More explicitly,

The privilege of living in safer areas was largely afforded only to whites who could pay the financial price to live on safer land and did not have to pay the social price of being brown or black. It was not class but racism that drove the relationship between flood risks and neighborhood demographics. (Tretter and Adams 201)

The Mexican-American community formed in this area as a result of racial segregation, but of a different sort than Austin's African-American community would face. The U.S. system of segregation was designed to be biracial. In legal terms, only African Americans were subjected to segregation and those of Mexican descent were designated "white" by law. However, in practice, the shifting boundaries of whiteness led to Latinos (officially referred to as Hispanics) in the Southwest to be "more-or-less categorized as 'non-white' persons" denying them access to the privileges of whiteness and putting into effect a tri-racial system of segregation, wherein Latinos would also face repression and exclusion. Discrimination against Mexican Americans was practiced in a variety of ways – they were denied equal access to city resources, loans and credit, city services, political representation,⁶² and equal work and education opportunities (Tretter and Adams 194; see also Tretter 208).

One primary area Latinos were affected was in terms of housing segregation. Various forms of discrimination worked together to create Austin's residential segregation, but it wasn't just the 1928 plan that set racial segregation in motion. In his report on Austin segregation, *Austin Restricted*, University of Texas Department of

⁶² For additional reading on the lack of political representation for Latinos in Austin see Balli's *Texas Monthly* article "What Nobody Says About Austin" as well as Humphrey and Crawford's *Austin: An Illustrated History*, 223-5.

Geography professor Eliot Tretter highlights several elements of discrimination that contributed to Austin's patterns of residential segregation. If one looks at current demographic maps, those patterns have essentially remained the same, showing Austin's minority neighborhoods remain concentrated on the east side of the city (Zehr, "Isolated"; see also Mueller and Dooling 208; Tretter 35), changing only recently as a result of city-led revitalization efforts and, more accurately, gentrification. Beyond the 1928 plan, zoning laws, land-use restrictions, and federal policy worked together to shape racial geographies that limited the mobility of people of color in Austin. Tretter's report highlights the fact that private covenants, in place well before the 1928 plan, excluded non-whites from neighborhoods and the economic advantages that came with home ownership in areas of opportunity. Most of the language in residential segregation would bar people of "African descent" from purchasing or renting property in particular neighborhoods, but the rise of the Latino population in Austin (and the South more broadly) required developers and planners to get crafty with language in order to exclude them as well. According to Tretter, the demographic growth of Latinos (particularly the influx of new residents of Mexican descent) paralleled a shift in the language of race employed in residential covenants and deed restrictions. In Austin in particular, Tretter notes a shift from language that excluded people of "African descent" to language that stipulated housing in the neighborhood could only be occupied by "Caucasian" or "white persons." This linguistic change "reflects the development of new forms of exclusion for partially white groups during this time period" (Tretter 7). The policies and plans of the past impacted the racial geography of Austin well into the 2000s. As recently as 2010, an *Austin American-Statesman* article reported increased segregation in "Hispanic neighborhoods," highlighting East Riverside as one of the areas with the largest Latino populations (Castillo, "Census").

So the East Riverside Corridor developed in the way that it did as a result of a long Austin history of racial and economic exclusion perpetrated by informal and formal public policies. How the neighborhood came to be a pocket of primarily low-income Latino population speaks to the ways in which housing policies and plans can become so deeply entrenched and shape the city well beyond the foreseeable future. This leads to the focal point of our case study, the gentrifying East Riverside Corridor and the Master Plan that would steer its development.

Characterizing the East Riverside Corridor

The East Riverside Corridor is an area that is populated mostly by renters, but connects to neighborhoods of homeowners in single-family homes. According to the 2010 Census, the 78741 area code was nearly 97% renters and 67.75% of the population identified as Hispanic or Latino (“2010 Demographic Profile”). A survey in 2008 reported that almost half of the household incomes in the area fell below \$25k per year and over half of those fell below \$15k (Mueller and Dooling 213). After the 2010 Census, East Riverside Drive stood out as a neighborhood that was increasingly segregated as large Latino shares of the Austin population resided there (Castillo “Census Data”). Prior to the recent redevelopment of the area, East Riverside Corridor boasted a large number of subsidized housing units that were primarily occupied by “very-low-income immigrant” families (Mueller and Dooling 209). Many of the local businesses in the area catered to this population as Latino food stores and restaurants, Spanish-language churches, Latino nightclubs, fast food restaurants, a flea market, a pawn shop, a pay day loan retailer, and services that provide transportation to Mexico were among the businesses that made the community their home. Those who lived in the area liked living there because it was one of the few neighborhoods with affordable housing, but also

because it gave them access to the social and community institutions and resources that help them in their daily lives (Mueller and Dooling 215). Residents, like Onesto Vega, would move from apartment complex to apartment complex in order to stay in the area. Even when the threat of displacement and negligent management were an issue, residents preferred to live here and stay connected to the social network that helped to sustain them. And yet, in a 2010 study conducted by students at the University of Texas, Riverside Drive was identified as the Austin neighborhood “most vulnerable to displacement as city plans and market conditions change” (Mueller and Way 40).

Located along the main artery that connects downtown Austin with the airport, East Riverside Drive was a prime target for redevelopment as city officials began the process of strategizing development for a light rail (Mueller and Dooling 208). According to an article in the *Austin Chronicle* published in 2010, the City Council’s approval of rezoning for two developers started what would be a rapid shift in the neighborhood as “[o]ther apartment owners caught the ‘owners’ market’ fever and began rehabbing or tearing down to rebuild. Some remaining properties are going the way of benign neglect until the owners can either sell or obtain the financing to redevelop” (A. Smith). In fact, East Riverside Drive was considered one of the areas thought to have the most problem properties, characterized by unsafe and unsanitary conditions (Coppola, “Austin to Target”).⁶³ Within a few years, the *Austin American-Statesman* reported the wave of development (and neglect) along the East Riverside Corridor resulted in “an exodus of

⁶³ The accounts of letting properties fall into neglect were rampant along East Riverside. Another issue in the area in terms of the threat to affordable housing is that many properties that were once considered affordable are privately owned. According to state law, local governments cannot require developers to include affordable housing, so when cheap housing becomes unlivable, is refurbished, or destroyed and rebuilt, that doesn’t mean it will be replaced with more affordable housing. In fact, it is very unlikely.

minorities from the area” (Ulloa). Between 2009 and 2013,⁶⁴ the East Riverside Corridor became a target for redevelopment and by 2013, in addition to the apartment complexes that were being remodeled, more than 1,100 luxury apartments were under construction (Novak, “Funky”). The aging housing stock, politically underrepresented and economically vulnerable community, empty lots, proximity to downtown and the airport, potential as a hub of transportation, and heavy interest from developers turned East Riverside Drive (a neighborhood the City of Austin would determine was in need of a Master Plan) into East Riverside Corridor (an exemplar of gentrification by design).

EAST RIVERSIDE’S RHETORICAL STYLE OF GENTRIFICATION

With a better sense of the neighborhood, its provenance, and its demographics, we’ve set the scene for analysis. What role did style play in the gentrification of East Riverside? A significant one, as the following pages will attest to. The process that turned East Riverside Drive into the East Riverside Corridor exhibits a rhetorical style of gentrification. Among the ten tenets of a rhetorical style of gentrification set out in the previous chapter, all were put to use in service of legitimizing and justifying gentrification in the area. Through a sustained analysis of the planning process and close read of the *East Riverside Corridor Master Plan (ERCMP)*, I contend the project failed to live up to its social promise of “address[ing] the needs of *all* citizens living in the area [emphasis added],” (City of Austin, *Vision Statement* viii). As the rest of this chapter will explain, this failure can be attributed, in part, to the process’s overwhelming focus on style, which ultimately resulted in state-sponsored gentrification. One key area indicating

⁶⁴ Some would argue this occurred as early as 2006 and 2007 when two developers purchased properties with affordable housing, demolished them, and then the lots were left empty as a result of the recession and lack of financing (Novak “Projects Will Add”).

this focus is in relationship to the consultants the city hired for the planning process and their planning approach.

From the get-go, the plan for the East Riverside Corridor (ERC) was “framed around physical transformation” and “heavily focused on urban design” (Mueller and Dooling 209). To initiate the planning process, the City of Austin hired A. Nelessen Associates, Inc. (ANA), “an award winning visioning, urban planning, and design firm that believes in building healthy, sustainable, green, pedestrian and bicycle oriented, mixed use, transit dependant cities, towns and neighborhoods [*sic*].” Known for their signature “Vision Planning” process, the firm employs images and maps to gather community⁶⁵ input on visual preferences (e.g. identifying areas of concern or envisioning potentials for improvement) in order to develop design code and create a “common vision” for future growth and development (A. Nelessen Associates, Inc., “About Our Firm”). From fieldwork, to a visual preference survey and questionnaire, to analysis, to a vision translation workshop, and the penultimate stage: The Vision Plan, style is the focus every step of the way. The results of this extensive process share this quality, as the final recommendations hone in on style and aesthetic plans “including the street regulating plan, landscape plan, land-use plan, building regulating plan, design and architectural standards, as well as design vocabulary” (“Vision Planning Process”).

The approach to city planning that makes style the focal point is a trend that emerges from New Urbanism and is an approach that we see repeatedly in planning efforts around the world.⁶⁶ Almost universally, when city forces intervene in the planning process of gentrifying neighborhoods, we can recognize the New Urbanist planning

⁶⁵ On their website, the firm specifies that those who participate in the process are citizens, government officials, builders, and other interested parties (“About Our Firm”).

⁶⁶ In general, New Urbanism focuses on physical changes and prioritizes design and planning as strategies to improve neighborhoods (Day 88).

aesthetic and technique. Widely accepted as the best possible approach for developing dense, aesthetically pleasing neighborhoods, the process involves community input, aesthetic rationales, and results in relatively standardized patterns of development. The *idea* is that communities themselves help shape the changing neighborhood and how it will ultimately look and feel. The *reality* is that the process ultimately “produces tools not for analyzing patterns but for imposing them” (Sorkin 298; see also Day). A planning process that holds so rigidly to a particular visual system of patterns is one that is not created by the people (as so boldly claimed), but is established, and ultimately validated tautologically - choices posed to the public are limited according to the scope of the New Urbanist design vision and alternatives outside the form code are not considered (Sorkin 298). This is all to say that from its very beginnings, the design and planning process for the ERC was caught up in matters of style.

The rest of the chapter will illustrate the ways in which a rhetorical style of gentrification was employed throughout the planning process in order to justify and legitimize the rapid gentrification of the ERC. First, I address the ways that style was central to the planning process by discussing the emphasis on property over people. Second, I examine some of the hegemonic tools employed in the community-driven planning process. And finally, I explore the ways in which the style-focused visioning process privileges whiteness.

Property Over People: Style as Central

All too often city planners are most concerned with the neighborhood’s built environment and lose sight of the space’s connection with lives that already exist there. The focus on style can have dangerous consequences in that it can divert our attention from other issues. Privileging property over people depoliticizes gentrification and can

result in privileging certain people over others (e.g. by privileging aesthetic benefits over social costs).

The previous chapter asks the critic to look out for moments when the discourse is dominated by style and, in the case of the ERC, so much of the discussion about the neighborhood and the city's vision for the future treated the area as if it was a blank canvas. As plans to create a vision for future development started to emerge, much of the discourse was focused on the physical makeup of the neighborhood, which overshadowed the little attention that was paid to the current population. The City of Austin website describes the goals for the *ERCMP* and the design-based code (the ERC regulating plan) that it establishes:

The ERC Regulating Plan lays out the rules that will guide new development and redevelopment to help realize the vision of making East Riverside a more vibrant, functional, and beautiful environment. Tailor-made for East Riverside Corridor, the regulations address the physical relationship between development and adjacent properties, streets, neighborhoods, and the natural environment in order to implement the vision of an urban mixed-use neighborhood that supports current and future transit options. (Planning and Zoning Department)

This statement, like many others throughout the planning process, highlights the centrality of style in the City's mission to transform the ERC. Current residents took a backseat to a focus on style that would attract future residents. In their account of the planning process Mueller and Dooling write "Emphasis was on viewing the area as a physical space and in seeing current conditions in terms of their compatibility with the future vision for the corridor" (209). From accounts in the local media, to the ways in which the neighborhood was discussed in planning meetings, property was highlighted over people. The aging housing stock and private interest in development, the

neighborhood's proximity to the airport and downtown, its conceptualization as a gateway to the city, and its potential for redevelopment and renewal were often cited as impetus for giving the ERC a master plan. But conceiving of a place in this way has effects because regenerating a place is closely connected to regenerating the people of that neighborhood and as a result targeted places become targeted lives (Paton, "Probing" 436). The overwhelming focus on style and the physical makeup of the neighborhood in the planning process "discursively evacuates the human element" (Conquergood 113). This discursive strategy turns the violence of destroying hundreds of low-income and affordable housing units into revitalization and the displacement of hundreds of families into its apolitical equivalent- neighborhood transformation.

In the public planning process (the details of which will be elaborated on in the next two sections) participant preferences for the physical design of the neighborhood was not just prioritized, but the outright concentration for public input (see, for example, Mueller and Dooling 210; City of Austin and A. Nelleson Associates Inc.). The early surveys that were conducted focused on preferences for how things should look and the areas where redevelopment was most desired. Later on in the planning process, concerns about vulnerable communities in the neighborhood were eventually heard,⁶⁷ but it was clear that the ERC plan was mostly focused on the built environment. For example, the vision for the corridor proposed a transit hub right in the location where the majority of low-income housing was located. The idealized vision for the location was drastically different from what existed there; write Mueller and Dooling, "the plan appears to be imposed on a blank slate" (217). Concerns about "Bringing the Vision to Life," a motto

⁶⁷ This was only much later in the process and after housing advocates started to take issue with the planning process.

for the public meetings, seem to take precedent over the lives that already existed in the neighborhood.

A style of rhetoric that is oriented toward the future vision leaves out those whom that vision eliminates. In addition to its presence in the public planning process, this attitude is also reflected in the local media as the focus on style vacates the existing community from the discourse about the changing neighborhood. In articles across various Austin sources, style frames the situation as a “rebuilding boom” resulting in a “very positive upward spiral” and allows one to dismiss the social negatives for the aesthetic positives. An *Austin American-Statesman* article asserts, “While Austin’s evolution isn’t embraced by everyone, local developers and economists say that most of the changes are net positive” (Novak and Hawkins). The Buzz Mill, a new coffee shop along ERC spoke about its mission to “start the transformation of East Riverside” and make it into “another destination area,” (Grimes) leaving out the fact that the area was already a destination for many who already lived there. When style is the focus, transformation is about built space, businesses, and amenities and not about the people it impacts.

The ERC plan is often described in the media in terms that revolve around the aesthetic and physical layout of the neighborhood. In one article, “redevelopment” sets out to “improve the appearance of a major gateway into the city” (Morton). Another article highlights city officials’ goals to “enhance East Riverside” and cite city planner Erica Leak who states that the new rules that govern development will “address the physical relationship between development and adjacent properties, streets, neighborhoods, and the natural environment in order to implement the vision of an urban mixed-use neighborhood that supports current and future transit options” (Novak, “Riverside Zoning”). In yet another article that focuses on the built environment, ERC’s

new wave of development spurs “the next leap forward in its evolution” (Novak and Dinges). And the focus on style permits the callous headline “Out with the Old Riverside Drive, in with the New,” a cold proclamation when you think about it, but one that reflects the privileging of property over the people who live there (Buchholz).

The focus on style treats the city in an ahistorical and apolitical manner in order to justify and legitimize gentrification. Style becomes the tool through which place is problematized (e.g. “these seas of asphalt are not people-friendly”) and serves as the solution to the problems that are posed (e.g. “we need new buildings that are oriented to the street and make the neighborhood more walkable”). A focus on style diverts attention from the larger injustices of the development taking place and puts the spotlight on a topic that elicits broad buy-in: improving the neighborhood. How this works and whom this benefits will be the focus of the remainder of this chapter. Employing the method discussed in the previous chapter, I first discuss the inherent hegemony in the public planning process and then examine the ways in which style is dictated by and ultimately reinforces whiteness in the case of the ERC.

Housing Hegemony: The Public Planning Process

From the very start, the move to concentrate City efforts and resources to guiding development along East Riverside Drive was grounded in hegemonic notions about the transformation and gentrification already taking place. The previous chapter highlights what the critic should look out for to understand how hegemony operates in the rhetorical style of gentrification. Framing the change as inevitable, the use of aesthetic rationales to produce common sense understandings of that change, as well as the egregious (and erroneous) emphasis on public opinion and input were ways hegemony was explicitly built into the process from its inception.

The supposed inevitability of gentrification of the area was built into the rhetoric that made planning for change a necessary, natural, and common sense response. Articles in local publications reported on “gentrification’s seemingly inexorable advance” (Cantú) and the “inevitable transformation” taking place (Novak and Dinges), suggested that change was “destined” for the area (Novak, “Riverside Zoning”) and that a plan for the neighborhood was necessary since it “was already evolving” (Ulloa). Gentrification and the rising cost of living were “thought perhaps an inevitable twin to the city’s success” (Toohey). And according to a public workshop press release, “The trend is clear: More development will be coming to the East Riverside Corridor within the next 20 years” (City of Austin, “Press Release”). This kind of discourse was omnipresent in discussion of what was happening along the ERC. A classic example of hegemonic discourse, the transformation in the area was framed as inevitable and its development, common sense.

A sense of resignation to this “fact” is seen in the language of the Master Plan brochure distributed at a community meeting by the Planning and Development Review Department. The copy admits that while the ERC has been a primary zone of affordable housing in the city, “maintaining affordability in the area will be a challenge as Austin continues to grow and the demand for housing Austin’s urban core increases, increasing the cost of land” (City of Austin, *ERCMP Brochure*). This places the ERC directly in market contexts, where the ambitions of capitalism are softened by a rhetoric of style.⁶⁸ In response to the “inevitability” of the ERC’s transformation, the case for the “need” for a plan employs strategies listed in the previous chapter - it is articulated through aesthetic rationales, constructed as the common sense, even benevolent response to change that was happening regardless. Charles Heimsath, a local real estate consultant who worked

⁶⁸ Conquergood talks about a similar strategic approach in Big Red’s gentrification, where an investment in market forces was softened by a moral rhetoric that supposedly championed the public good (133).

with city staffers on the plan described it as a way for the city “to get out in front of market forces” that already have zoned in on the area, and “help mold the character of the development” it wants to encourage along Riverside (Mashood).

Tied to moralistic undertones about how shaping the change would be best for all, aesthetic rationales for development seemed a strategy to discursively mediate the dramatic changes (read: displacement and the obliteration of affordable housing) taking place along the corridor. According to one source, “change is going to come either way. It’s about being proactive or reactive, and it’s a lot easier to be proactive” (Novak and Dinges). Following this rationale, the city’s culpability in the gentrification of the area could be swept under the rug. Instead, the city was simply there to help communicate the community’s vision for how neighborhood development should take shape. According to the city planner in charge of the project, without their oversight, “developers would develop whatever they wanted without necessarily keeping the community’s vision in mind” (Novak, “Funky”). This would seem to indicate that the city was doing the best they could, given the circumstances, to empower the community. A rhetorical style that would suggest what was occurring was natural and inevitable and that the city’s response was just good common sense would even escalate to such a degree that one local housing market analyst would claim “the reality is that gentrification is the sign of a good economy” and “to wish that it doesn’t happen is to wish that the economy slows down or stops” (Novak and Hawkins); you’re either with the gentrifiers or you’re with the terrorists.

Another aspect of a rhetorical style of gentrification is the idea that it touts public opinion and the public good. Gramsci’s theory of hegemony asks the critic to look for moments in culture and everyday life when “public opinion” is relied upon, and there is no shortage of this tactic in the public planning process for the ERC. Obviously razing a

whole neighborhood is a kind of violence, but the evocation of public opinion would have us believe the democratic process that invites people to weigh in on neighborhood change supposedly supplants that violence. From the initial surveys conducted by A. Nelessen Associates, Inc. to community meetings inviting the public to weigh in, “public opinion” was central to both the planning process and the effort to legitimize gentrification in the area.

Starting with the consulting firm hired by the City of Austin, A. Nelessen Associates prides itself on the ability to “translate people’s vision into plans and codes,” “allow citizens, government officials, builders, and all other interested parties to participate in developing a common vision,” and its ability to enable “diverse groups to build this realistic consensus visions for future growth and development [*sic*]” (“About Our Firm”). They suggest that their visual and image-based community surveys and workshops allow “concerned citizens and civic leaders to become designers and draw their community of the future” to develop a “consensus-vision based plan” where “the final result is an accepted and coordinated document consistent with the positive aspirations and economic rationale of all participants” (A. Nelessen, “Vision Planning Process”). The firm highlights the power of this consensus-based model, which is a strategic effort designed to garner buy-in from participants. They write, “participants become the architects and planners of their future town or neighborhood. They will now be the primary supporters of the adoption of the plan and code and support future implementation” (A. Nelessen, “Vision Planning Process”).⁶⁹

The City of Austin also promotes the ideal of public input in the planning process from the earliest surveys and meetings in 2008, to the public meetings conducted in 2011,

⁶⁹ One of the central tenets of hegemony is that it is about leading rather than domination. Here’s a prime example of how this process relies on people’s aspirations and a collective consensus to elicit buy-in and create concordance when it comes to gentrification.

to the final *ERCMP* document that continues to serve as guideline for development today. Inviting participants to share their opinions at a public workshop, a 2011 press release states, “The city wants your help in shaping important elements of these new regulations to help ensure that new development projects are well-designed and contribute to the East Riverside Corridor Vision (City of Austin, “Press Release”). Notice the focus on design and vision and that the city wants community input on “elements” of regulations that have already been put into place, not necessarily new ideas about how development should be happening in the area. Academic and architect Sarah Glynn underscores the universality of this approach to city planning stating that the effect “is to shift public debate away from fundamental questions. Major changes become accepted as somehow inevitable, and debate is restricted to the mechanics of implementation” (176). The focus at ERC meetings hosted by the city was aimed at inviting stakeholders to contribute to the vision for how the neighborhood will develop. The meetings continually emphasized the importance of public input, even empowering attendees by saying they will be experts in planning by the end of the morning, on one occasion (City of Austin, “ERC: Bringing the Vision”).

The *goal* for public participation and the *reality* of those who were able to participate in surveys and attend community meetings were quite disparate. The *ERCMP* details the public participation process noting

Public participation through a visioning process is critical for the future successful implementation of any plan. No one knows a community better than the people who live and work there. By sponsoring this process, the City of Austin provided an opportunity for community residents, visitors, business operators, developers, and land owners to participate in the creation of the future plan for the East Riverside Corridor. This unique process, which utilized a variety of meetings and

two public visioning sessions, had extraordinary civic interest demonstrated by those who participated. (B2)

In service of this *goal*, 600 people participated in the visioning process, but the characteristics of those who participated do not match up with those who would actually be affected by development. The *reality* is only eight percent of the people surveyed were renters and 75 percent were white and college-educated (B25), a stark contrast to the demographic makeup of the actual neighborhood.

While the city plan indicates, “obtaining a community’s input is a hallmark of good planning” (*ERCMP*, B2), many were critical of the planning process saying that it wasn’t inclusive enough.⁷⁰ As the data shows “important segments of the residential community – those most likely to be affected by proposed changes – were simply not present” and “particular interest groups. . . strongly invested in either development or the expansion of public transit were a dominant organized presence in the process” (Mueller and Dooling 211). In response to criticism, the City of Austin worked to make the process more inclusive by getting the opinions of tenants in the neighborhood, but “their participation in the planning process did not change the substantive discussion” (Mueller and Dooling 212). The focus remained on the visual and spatial characteristics desired for the ERC (*ERCMP* B2), rather than the material needs of its residents; everyone may have been invited to the table to share their opinion, but debate was restricted to matters of style.

Clearly, the ideal of democratic participation was not achieved, but community leaders and documents supporting the *ERCMP* continually valorize the community’s role in creating the vision for the ERC, a hegemonic tactic the previous chapter advises to

⁷⁰ See, for example, Novak, “Funky”; Castillo, “New Vision”; Mueller and Dooling 208-212; Ulloa, “Fast-Changing”.

look out for. The Master Plan Brochure cites a year of public input and brochures distributed at a community workshop suggest the plan for the neighborhood was adopted “after many stakeholder and public meetings over the course of more than a year” (City of Austin, “Geek Sheet: ERC”) and highlight the goal to “ensure future development meets the vision established by the community” (“Geek Sheet: City Initiatives”). The final document produced (the *ERCMP*) highlights the significance of public input throughout the process and ensures “Every aspect of the public’s participation was integral to the formation of this plan” (B2). Even though the “public” that participated in the process was quite limited,⁷¹ the rhetorical style of gentrification is employed through the hegemonic trope of public participation and input, put to use to justify the dramatic changes taking place along the ERC.

Inevitably, aesthetic rationales that produce “common sense” responses to complicated issues, and the ideal of public opinion and participation all served to calcify gentrification’s hegemonic status in the case of the ERC. Primarily discursive and performative rhetorics, the next section moves on to discuss the visual rhetorics that were put to use to justify and legitimize gentrification and highlight whom that process ultimately serves. The method described in the previous chapter posits that a rhetorical style of gentrification is displayed in elements beyond discourse and performance and asks the critic to consider the aesthetic and visual. As this next section will attest to, this served as a powerful means of influence.

Demonizing the Present, Envisioning the Future: I See White People

One doesn’t need the gift of a sixth sense to predict what might come as a result of the proposed vision for the East Riverside Corridor. The visioning process invites the

⁷¹ Not to mention totally unrepresentative of the existing community.

critic to glimpse into Zoltar’s crystal ball and the outlook is not good for the ERC’s low-income, predominantly Latino community. From the visual preference survey and questionnaire, to PowerPoint presentations at community meetings, to the final *ERCMP*, visual and aesthetic elements of the rhetorical style of gentrification (in its many visual and imagined forms) played a significant role in the planning process and gentrification of the ERC. How we imagine the present and visualize the future has consequences. This section invites the reader to consider what it means when the future vision of a neighborhood composed of older developments, predominantly low-income Latino/a renters, and businesses that cater to the immigrant community (Figure 3 left), looks like a polished, modern, contemporary development composed of businesses and aesthetics that reflect and attract middle class white identities (Figure 3 right).



Figure 3: Former ERC (left) and vision for new ERC (right).

In her book *Desiring Whiteness*, Seshadri-Crooks argues that visibility is central to whiteness and is ultimately an aesthetic practice or “regime of looking” (19). The supremacy of style in the planning stages for the ERC sets up a particular way of looking, assessing, and understanding city change as strategic characterizations of the present and

the proposed vision for the future of the ERC employ powerful and influential imagery. This section proceeds in two parts. First, I analyze the visuals that compare the existing ERC with the potential future ERC. Second, I look at what it means to visualize the future without considering the present. Side-by-side comparisons of present ERC with potential future development sets up a number of tensions and serves a double purpose: to problematize the ERC at present and to privilege a very particular idea of how the future of East Riverside should take shape. I'll turn to these comparisons for analysis first.

A number of times throughout the ERC's planning process side-by-side comparisons of ERC and what it could potentially look like were used. The Visual Preference Survey (taken by 600 "stakeholders" early on in the planning process) asked respondents to rate images on a scale of -10 to 10 in response to the question, "How appropriate or inappropriate is the image you are seeing now and in the future - for the East Riverside Corridor?" This question was addressed across eleven categories including streets, pedestrian realm, development: commercial, development: residential, parking, signage, plazas, parks, and open space, placemaking, sustainability, and mobility. In total, there were 132 slides/images for survey participants to rank (see Figure 4).



Figure 4: Sample series of slides from the Visual Preference Survey.

Each category had a series of pictures that often progressed from images of the existing ERC to aspirational images of what the neighborhood could eventually look like. According to the *ERCMP*, the results of the survey tell planners “What People Want” as “[t]he intensity of reactions to each image in the VPS and the answers to related questions provides direction for future planning, zoning, development and redevelopment options” (B4). An influential planning tool, the power of the results of the survey cannot be understated as the survey responses “focused the planning and design goals and objectives and helped define the most appropriate, as well as inappropriate, uses and characteristics of the future of the area” (*ERCMP* B4). For example, images of the

existing ERC that ranked poorly became target areas for redevelopment; that is, areas where the positively ranked future images should be built/located (Mueller and Dooling 211). Additionally, of the 132 images used, only 26 of the slides included images of the existing ERC. Just based on those numbers alone, the survey design seems to suggest that change is necessary, that the ERC in its present state requires development and that what is there is sub-par.

Following along as a survey participant would, an observer can get the sense of the repetition employed in each of these categories (category title → image of the existing ERC → image of idealized future ERC).⁷² According to the A. Nelessen Associates Inc. webpage, the survey reveals what the community wants as it helps participants “identify and address areas of specific concern for the community” and the before/after images in the survey “allow the public to truly visualize potentials for their community” (“Vision Planning Process”). Images are often placed in order from current to future and the order of images seems to prime participants to respond in a certain way. The visual progression makes the argument that what is actually there is inappropriate and undesirable, and the contrast with the future image works rhetorically and hegemonically in its appeals to the aspirations and interests of many people (e.g. tree-lined streets, safer pedestrian walkways, shaded marketplaces, affordable transportation options). The visual comparison, thus, functions as a rhetorical strategy to gain consent for the rapid transformation that would take place there. Mueller and Dooling observe that even though the images were purported to center around visual appeal, they essentially “ask participants to choose between residential populations when comparing present and proposed housing” (210).

⁷² Almost all of the categories start with an image of the existing ERC and end with an alternative or idealized image.

The *ERCMP* also featured imagery and descriptive language that paralleled this approach, which denigrated the current ERC. The document suggests the area epitomizes a car-dominated environment, describes it as an unfortunately typical example of the modern landscape, and notes “the current appearance of built features in the area is dominated by a cacophony of commercial signs, blistering parking lot asphalt, and a distinct lack of both quality architecture and landscaping” (City of Austin and A. Nelessen Associates, Inc. 4). This notion was also reinforced in the press. As one article puts it, “East Riverside Drive offers a great cross-town route if you need to cut through the city in a hurry. But wouldn’t it be great if the area were just as accommodating to pedestrians as it is to automobiles?” (Qi). Other articles about the development of the ERC would refer to “older strip malls with yawning asphalt parking lots” (Castillo, “New Vision”), “squat strip malls” (Mashhood), “depressed areas such as East Riverside Drive” (Toohey), “seas of asphalt parking lots” and “an area dotted with strip malls, drive-throughs and decades-old housing” (Novak & Dinges).⁷³ This idea is also reinforced visually and discursively in public workshops where the current neighborhood is described as “barren” and comprised of “oceans of asphalt” where cars are a threat to the safety of people (see Figure 5).

In many cases, the characterization in local print media would follow the same format as the survey and public presentation slides – juxtaposing the actual ERC with what it could become. The neighborhood transformation, these articles suggest, would create “higher-quality mixed-use development to create an urban neighborhood feel” (Novak, “East Riverside”) and “make the area more attractive and safer for pedestrians”

⁷³ In his book *Urban Outcasts*, Loic Wacquant suggests we pay attention to and guard against discourse that evoke “emotive imagery that hides fundamental structural and functional differences, thereby stopping inquiry just where it should get going” (8). While Wacquant is talking about the term “ghetto,” the same could be said for the characterization of barren oceans of asphalt.

(Novak, “Funky”). The plan would “transform East Riverside Drive corridor into a more vibrant, mixed-use neighborhood” that “promotes pedestrian-friendly streets” (Castillo, “New Vision”).

Interestingly, the visual representation of the existing ERC used in the Visual Preference Survey parallels the discursive strategy described in the previous section, where property and style are the focal point and people are removed from the picture (both literally and figuratively). Of the 26 images of the existing ERC, none featured people. As a result, survey participants are then encouraged to view the ERC as a blank, unpopulated space and people don’t factor into the equation when they are thinking about what is appropriate or inappropriate for the neighborhood. The absence of people in images of the existing ERC diminishes the lived experience of those who live there. The bustling flea market, pickup soccer games, walks along Town Lake, the nightclub scene, and well-populated transit stops are not featured. On the contrary, quite a few images that presented an alternative/presumably more desirable future design were populated with bodies walking, shopping, eating, and gathering. The coded imagery of lifestyle and aesthetic sensibilities constructs whiteness as the ideal and as the norm. Whiteness, in the context of these picture progressions and comparisons is articulated to what it is not – it is not barren, it is not unkempt, it is not lifeless, it is not poor. Instead, it is presented as the standard by which the concept of a good community or neighborhood can be measured. The idea of “Bringing the Vision to Life” in combination with images of empty, unpopulated spaces constructed the existing ERC as lifeless and in need of a transformation.

An approach that removes people from the discussion of neighborhood change was also used in the Visioning workshops hosted by the City of Austin. At the ERC Public Workshop, PowerPoint presentations provided a similar visual argument. Despite

involvement in and contributions to the initial planning stages, the visual depictions of the corridor seemed to leave low-income residents of East Riverside out of the plan for “compatible and attractive development that will enhance the neighborhood.” Current residents’ absence from the images seemed to function rhetorically as if to suggest that their presence conflicts with city goals for developing “places [people] want to live near” (City of Austin, “ERC: Bringing the Vision”).

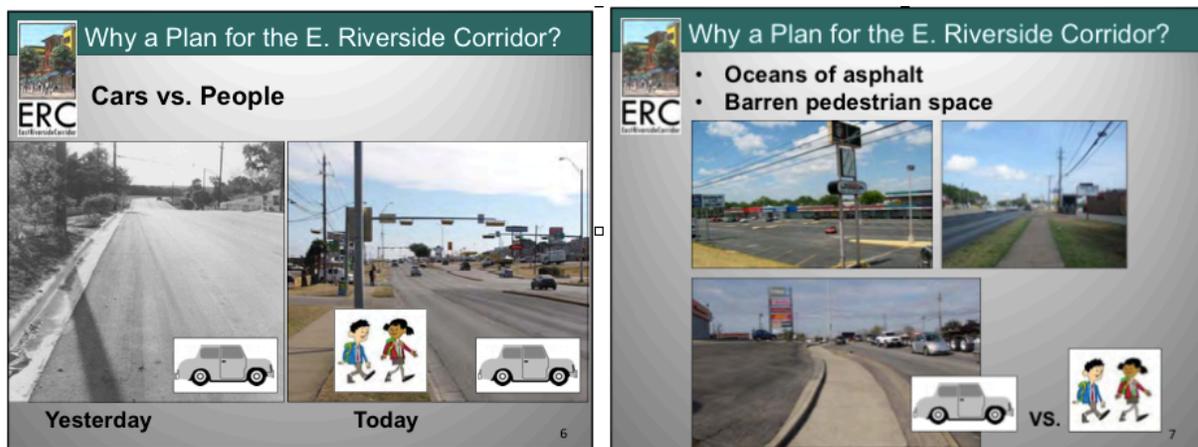


Figure 5: PowerPoint slide from the Public Workshop.

The images themselves are comprised of empty spaces, focusing the viewer’s eye on the road and parking lots. In reality, on a weekend night those parking lots are full of cars and people as the ERC was already quite a vibrant and active community with people everywhere. When the focus is on style and people are excluded from the way we imagine city spaces, aesthetic enhancement seems like the obvious choice. The rhetorical style of gentrification employed here appeals to the aspirations of many groups (both current and future residents) while occluding the reality of what it means to make the proposed changes: displacement. With this rhetorical approach, potential concerns about

people are dulled, decisions and judgments are based on style, and appeals succeed because of their aesthetic value.

Sullivan writes about how the distinction between meaningful place versus empty space operates to perpetuate white privilege in hidden ways that can seem unrelated to race but pop up in the language of development. She argues that the juxtaposition implicitly divides different forms of lived spatiality into opposing categories (e.g. appropriate vs. inappropriate) and “[t]his division paves the way for the ‘civilized’ to invade or otherwise destroy ‘wild’ spaces and their inhabitants, all in the name of improving them” (162). Seshadri-Crooks echoes this assertion stating “what guarantees Whiteness its place as a master signifier is visual difference” (21). Perhaps seemingly innocuous, the images (both descriptive and visual) employed in the visual survey, *ERCMP*, and the public presentations favor a particular aesthetic that privileges whiteness and reproduces and naturalizes existing systems of inequality.⁷⁴

In one of the more obvious before/after images, the ERC Public Workshop compares the existing ERC with the proposed vision for the future. The slide states “How do we get from here to there?” while the meeting facilitator told attendees that we want to “evolve to this kind of image – one that certainly welcomes people” (See Figure 6).

⁷⁴ For example, throughout the planning process certain aspects of the look and feel of the ERC were labeled undesirable, but “the discussion did not include the ways in which those conditions could have emerged historically and in connection with systems and structures that made it that way in the first place” (Mueller and Dooling 212).

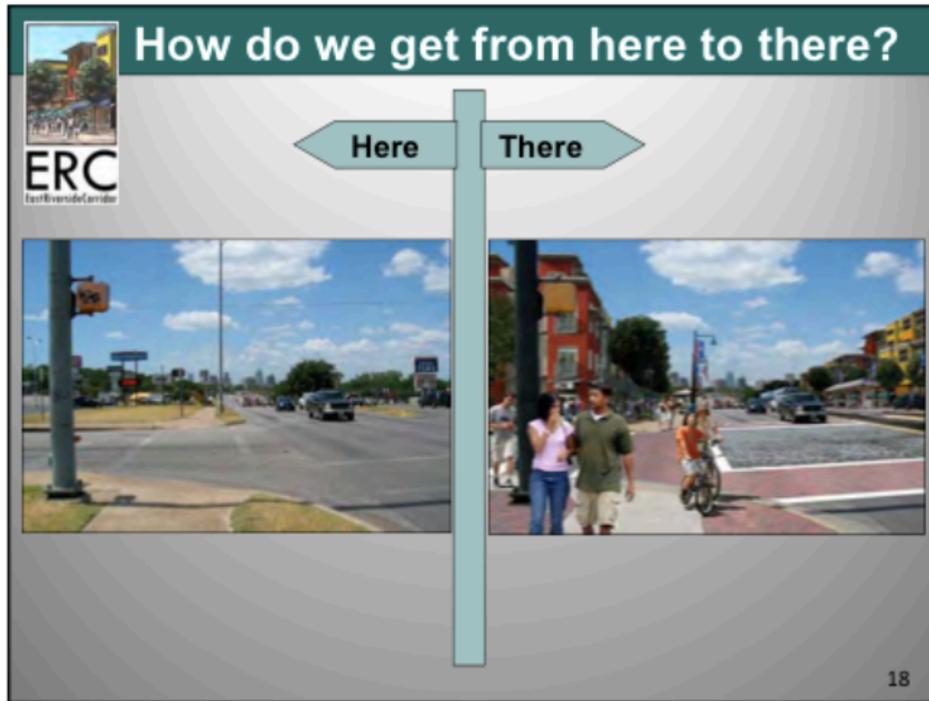


Figure 6: PowerPoint slide from Public Workshop.

This image is highly problematic and highlights some of the issues I've been discussing in regards to the current/future image dichotomy. First, the existing ERC image leaves out current residents, businesses, and activity in the spaces depicted. As a result, they are portrayed as out-of-place both in the current landscape and consequently (via a contrasting image) in the vision for the future of the ERC as well. Second, the juxtaposition of the two images creates a kind of social judgment (something we see time and time again) where poor and low-income neighborhoods are devalued on an aesthetic dimension. The combination of imagery and discourse suggests the area needs to be transformed and frames the area as undesirable and dangerous (e.g. to pedestrians). This functions as a synecdochic extension (Conquergood, "Life in Big Red"), where positive

images are cast against negative, creating symbolic mental shortcuts that serve as powerful signifiers through which people make judgments and, consequently, the existing ERC is indirectly stigmatized.⁷⁵ Concerns about style are often a coded way of referring to the groups who perform or occupy that style. In this comparative model, the existing ERC (as it is presented) presents signs and meanings that don't align with the aspirations, goals, and revitalization discourse of the City of Austin's corridor initiative. As a result, the image employs an aesthetic rationale whereby the existing ERC is presented as a space in need of correction and development. Similar to the Cars vs. People slide (see Figure 5) and the images used in the Visual Preference Survey (see Figure 4), the existing ERC gets equated with decay and danger (e.g. roads that are dangerous to pedestrians), adding a moral imperative to neighborhood transformation and setting up development as a necessity. Third, gentrification is packaged as growth and progress as developers and city officials point to economic and aesthetic revitalization – to style – to justify their actions. Commonplace images, in this case, reflect a desire for whiteness via imagery that portrays white lifestyles and aesthetic tastes.⁷⁶ And finally, this kind of image creates the illusion that we can only have one or the other, a rhetorical move that limits the decisions one can make about the future development of the neighborhood. Choice is framed as a binary.

As this section has demonstrated the comparative technique is a powerful rhetorical tool, so too are the lofty visions for the future of place. In many cases, the

⁷⁵ Using these images, difference gets constructed along the axes of unsafe/safe, unkempt/maintained, rough/polished, empty/active, old/modern, car-centered/people-centered, decaying/decorative, barren/lush, exposed/shaded, tight/spacious, unplanned/planned, obstacle/accessible, useless/useful and, by association, existing residents of the ERC are also imagined along those lines. Consequently, this reproduces a recurring racist practice that privileges whiteness, where people of color are painted as obstacles to progress (see for example Almanza, Herrera, and Almanza 12, 25)

⁷⁶ Read: generic, seen as the norm, invisible because of its presentation as the standard of progress and taste.

vision for the future of the ERC didn't bother to compare at all, and instead operated as if the existing ERC was not there. According to Mueller and Dooling, "The ERCMP process was framed around the desired future outcome of the plan, but was not grounded in the current social and environmental context" (212). The vision for the future of the ERC was articulated discursively and visually throughout the planning stages as well as in the final document the planning produced, the *ERCMP*. The visioning process is persuasive according to Kenneth Kolson, author of *Big Plans: The Allure and Folly of Urban Design*, as images of the future "give expression to the fantasies of their creators and fire the imaginations of those who receive or 'consume,' them" and "rely on appeals that are ultimately aesthetic" (12).

The *ERCMP* begins with a "Vision Statement." Written in a italicized font to convey a future, idealized neighborhood, the future version of the ERC is depicted in vivid detail and accompanied by pleasant images of what the ERC could eventually become. Descriptive vignettes of people enjoying their lunches, milling about, shopping, and socializing paint a picture of an idealized neighborhood where both long-time and new residents are able to enjoy the fruits of the ERC transformation. As the document would have us imagine it, the future ERC is a "*distinct and special place*" that has become "*an example of central city redevelopment that other parts of Austin and other cities desire to emulate*" (City of Austin and A. Nelessen Associates, Inc. v-vi). In contrast to the discourse typical of the planning process up to this point, the vision for the future is populated with people, enjoying the spaces the planning process has so meticulously designed. But who those people are, who gets to enjoy the change in the neighborhood, and whom the future ERC attracts is significant. The *ERCMP* is explicit about the audience it wishes to appeal to in its introduction: "Adoption of the Master Plan will signal to property owners, business owners, the development community, City staff,

and other stakeholders that the City Council embraces the vision outlined in the plan” (City of Austin and A. Nelessen Associates, Inc. 5). This introductory statement places the plan for the ERC squarely in the rhetorical style of market contexts and imaginary communities. The future vision sells a particular ideal and seeks to appeal to an imagined community of buyers, developers, investors, and business people required to fulfill the proposed vision. Renters, the dominant population in the existing area, are not even mentioned. Instead, the plan focuses its efforts on the envisioned future population. If rhetorical style conflates consumers with citizens, it would seem in this context that the only people who count as citizens are those who fit the vision for the future of the ERC. The future ERC is just a text at this point, a text designed to sell a particular vision in order to attract investment and development.

As such, the vision for the future ERC (via the master plan and well as its articulations throughout the planning process) speaks to a particular audience via style. This touches on the rhetorical element of imaginary communities, wherein the audience is produced by rhetoric. In the case of the ERC, the future is imagined and imaged, visually and textually, via style. As previous chapters have illustrated the connections between style and whiteness, the resulting aesthetic is one that ultimately serves white identities. Was this the intention of city planners? Hopefully not, but whiteness isn't always reinforced by conscious, intentional acts, rather, it is embedded in social and cultural processes that occur in everyday life. The images and imaginings of the future ERC are produced by and reproduce whiteness and the privileges it engenders. In the future vision of the ERC, the power and appeal of whiteness are invoked via imagery rather than explicit terminology, but the effects are just as powerful. Certain aesthetics, cultural practices, forms of consumption, and businesses are employed to appeal to this imagined community. Whiteness is equated with a lifestyle through the association

between consumer identities and white identities (Peake 250). In place of the existing community's weekend flea market, a shaded pedestrian retail mall is envisioned; eschewing the nightly soccer game in the park, visions of outdoor amphitheaters, water features, and a slick basketball court are preferred; the local taco truck is not included in the vision which sees bistro-style patio dining as an ideal. These consumption practices and lifestyle elements serve as cultural anchors "highly imbued with specific, albeit subtle references to the desirability and even romance of imagined 'whiteness'" (Shaw 183). Difference is constructed in this future vision and whiteness, an ever-elusive construct that so often presents itself as what is normal, valuable, marketable, or beautiful, is employed to appeal to an imaginary community. This interpretation is consistent with the perspective of advocates from the People Organized for the Defense of Earth and her Resources (PODER) who shine a light on the strategy that equates beautification with benefits for all. They write:

No one race or culture has a patent on what is beautiful. To impose, through public policy, marketing strategies or otherwise, an Anglo-middle-class perception of what is beautiful or aesthetically appealing upon the residents of East Austin is not only anti-democratic but also brazenly Eurocentric. People of color in East Austin are proud of our neighborhoods, we have fought consistently to protect and improve them and to hold government and corporations accountable for their responsibility in this process. We will not permit others to try and pass off as the "norm" their own racially and culturally specific view of what is beautiful and attractive and what is not. (Alamanza, Herrera, and Alamanza 13-14)

An element of the rhetorical style of gentrification, the imagined community that is envisioned in the future of the ERC concomitantly forms a population that fits its vision

while also inviting others to start to see themselves as outsiders. As Day argues, “The design of a space, its uses, and its meanings resonate differently with diverse groups” (90). In addition to the future vision appealing differently to various groups, the vision for the future ERC and its purported benefits to the community ultimately serves whiteness as the people who pay the cost for this vision to come to life are almost exclusively poor people of color.

This case study demonstrates the ways in which seemingly nonracial variables (e.g. style) may play a greater role than we think in the process of gentrification and the privileging of whiteness. According to the *Encyclopedia of Race, Ethnicity, and Society*, “whiteness is able to maintain its power by never having to name itself and therefore fails to be under the scrutiny or criticism of others” (Yee 1398). I hope this chapter has started to bring to light some of the inherent issues across the connections between gentrification, hegemony, whiteness, and style. Whether designing PowerPoint slides or vision surveys, design is consequential. It makes an argument. Buchanan suggests that the designer doesn’t just design or make a thing, but creates an argument, particularly when the product is a means to some end. He writes, “Design is an art of thought directed to practical action through the persuasiveness of objects and, therefore, design involves vivid expression of competing ideas about social life” (7). In the case of the ERC, those competing ideas are expressed visually, discursively, and most importantly rhetorically.

The style outlined in the vision for the ERC (and the style that ultimately came to fruition) reflects and serves very particular interests. The vision is rooted in an investment in whiteness that doesn’t necessarily or consciously articulate itself, but hails a particular kind of community and produces gentrification. From its central investment in style, to hegemonic notions of inevitability and the celebration of “public opinion,” to both comparative and singular visions of the future that reproduce whiteness, the East

Riverside Corridor is a prime example of the rhetorical style of gentrification. East Riverside may have undergone its transformation already, but the lessons learned from this case study can be applied to future development and planning processes. How we plan for and visualize neighborhood change is influential, powerful, and has consequences. The story of the ERC teaches us that style is a powerful tool of hegemony and whiteness and this case study highlights the fact that style is a strategy put to use to justify and legitimize gentrification.

Chapter 5: 11th and 12th Street Corridor Case Study

“First house that I saw, I wrote house upon the door; told the people who lived there, they had to get out, ‘cause my reality is realer than yours.” – Father John Misty

Just lines in a song, but made particularly meaningful in the context of gentrification, the audacity with which gentrification is taking over historic neighborhoods is captured in this brief lyric. A community, a rich history, shared livelihoods are diminished as if to suggest that one reality (that of whiteness, “progress,” and development) is more real, more important, more significant. This lyric resonates when couched within the context of Austin’s 11th and 12th Street Corridor. Somewhat different than the mode of gentrification described in the previous chapter (a rapid, developer-driven, sweeping mode of displacement), gentrification along 11th and 12th Streets has taken place over a longer period of time. City neglect, evictions, and claims of eminent domain in combination with renovations of attractive and historic single family homes and, most recently, a city- and developer-led urban revitalization effort to expand Austin’s downtown and transportation corridors have prompted change throughout the neighborhood since the nineties. But the story of gentrification in Austin’s historically African American neighborhood doesn’t just begin there. It is rooted deep in Austin’s history, a history that is shared by many urban areas in the United States, and one that explicitly, indubitably connects gentrification to race.

And yet, the rhetoric that posits gentrification is a rising tide that lifts all ships, that older residents ultimately benefit from gentrification, and that gentrification produces many positive results persists. We watch a population being depleted from a neighborhood (and, as a result, a city) and bemoan the loss of the culture that attracted us

here in the first place, but simultaneously enjoy the cheaper rents, the new restaurants and businesses, the improved services and resources, and the historic charm that the neighborhood provides. Certainly, there are benefits to gentrification, but who benefits from gentrification is made particularly clear when we examine gentrification in Austin's 11th and 12th Street Corridor. As was the case along East Riverside Corridor, some familiar narratives about gentrification reverberate in the discourse. This chapter will argue that hegemony, whiteness, and style intersect and are put to use to justify, legitimize, and naturalize gentrification in the area. The purpose of this chapter is to examine the role rhetoric has played in this process and demonstrate the ways in which a rhetorical style of gentrification has been employed as a means to this end.

In the page that follow, I'll first set up the case study by offering some background on the history of the neighborhood and then provide a description of the Corridor today. From there, the chapter will move to analysis, which explores how the rhetorical style of gentrification operates, paying particular attention to public planning and its connection to private interests as well as the ways in which race is both indivisible from and made invisible by gentrification. To start, we examine the case in context to get a better sense of Austin's East 11th and 12th Street Corridor.

CASE IN CONTEXT

On 11th Street, just east of Interstate 35 sits the Victory Grill. An Austin fixture since 1945, the Victory Grill has seen Austin's East side through its multiple iterations. From bustling African American hub of business to poverty stricken landscape to epicenter of gentrification, 11th street has embodied multiple identities over the past century. The Victory Grill today stands out as one of the few older buildings left on this strip of road, and is the only building on the block that houses a business that has seen

this area through all its ups and downs. Much of the street now features new development, lending weighty meaning to the mural on the side of the Victory Grill which declares, “Still Standing” (Figure 7).



Figure 7: “Still Standing” mural on 11th Street.

“Still Standing” is a phrase that captures the imagination on a number of levels. Amidst rapid new development and an onslaught of new businesses taking over the area, the Victory Grill is still standing. In a historically African American community with an increasing white and middle-class population, this African American-owned business is still standing. On a street where most businesses are brand new, the Victory Grill has been around for 75 years and is still standing. In an area where property taxes have risen exponentially, the Victory Grill is still standing. The mural declaration warrants mention because, sadly, it is one of the few “Still Standing.” The historic Victory Grill stands in

contrast to the dominant aesthetic of this rapidly changing area (Figure 8). The Victory Grill’s website calls out the aesthetic contrast stating “The Victory Grill indeed looks as if it has changed little in the past 50 years, but interestingly, the 11th Street block has undergone dramatic gentrification. Does that mean the Victory Grill is threatened by the prospects of demolition? . . . This ugly cinderblock building is here to stay” (“Talk About”). While the neighborhood’s new aesthetic may reflect “revitalization,” it also functions to hide a reality characterized by displacement, the fracturing of community, and rising property taxes.



Figure 8: The Victory Grill and its newer, more modern neighbors.

East Austin’s 11th and 12th Street Corridor offer a perfect locale from which to examine the intersection between gentrification, race, and style in order to illustrate how power and advantage are acquired by and stripped from particular identities via a rhetorical style of gentrification. To best understand this proposition, it is important to look back in time and provide some context for how we got to where we are today.

A Tale of Two Cities: Austin’s Historic Racial Divide

“You could find everything you needed there On a typical Friday and Saturday night, *everyone was out and ready to have fun.*” – Minnie Mann, former East Austin resident and beauty salon owner on E. 12th⁷⁷

“The Eastside ain’t got nothing no more Y’all got it and you’re happy about it but y’all ran us out. That ain’t cute. *That ain’t no fun for us.*” – Michael Cash, Midtown Live Owner⁷⁸

From the early settlement of freed slaves, to the country’s first public housing project for African Americans, to an area encompassing the 11th and 12th Street Corridor known as the African American Cultural Heritage District, African Americans have been embedded in the fabric of Austin since its early history. After the Civil War, Austin was a prime destination for ex-slaves to relocate and in those early years the proportion of African Americans in Austin had reached one in three (Humphrey and Crawford 178). Freedmen communities popped up all over Austin and established community through founding churches, starting businesses, purchasing land, and establishing families (Humphrey and Crawford; see also Chusid; Spearman). By 1860 twenty-eight percent of Austin’s population was black (Spearman) and in the mid-1800s the first freedman’s town was established on the east side of Austin,⁷⁹ an area long-considered to be the heart of Austin’s African American community (Van Ryzin; see also Zehr, “Austin’s History”). Austin was segregated, but African American communities had formed all

⁷⁷ See “Can City”

⁷⁸ See Hoffberger; Midtown Live is a sports bar long-popular in Austin’s black community. It burned down in 2005, sparking controversy when Austin Police officers were caught messaging “Burn baby burn” and “I got some extra gasoline if you need it” in response to the flames (Dinges). As a result of this incident, among other Austin tensions, the African-American Quality of Life Initiative was commissioned.

⁷⁹ At the time, this area was known as Robertson Hill.

over the city (from Clarksville to Robertson Hill) with the largest concentration on the Eastside.

In 1917, the U.S. Supreme Court ruled that cities couldn't use zoning to racially segregate, so planners and developers had to look for alternative means to isolate and relocate minorities (Zehr, "Austin's History"). The ruling of segregation through zoning as unconstitutional created what city planners termed a "race segregation problem" and Austin's solution came in the form of the 1928 *City Plan for Austin, Texas* (Koch & Fowler Consulting Engineers 57). The plan called for the establishment of a designated "Negro District," an area in which services for African American households would be restricted "as an incentive to draw the negro population to this area" (Koch & Fowler Consulting Engineers 57). According to an Austin case study on concentrated poverty, African Americans were forced to move to the district through measures like moving their churches to the area and cutting off utilities if you lived in some other Austin neighborhood (United States Federal Reserve System 92). If you didn't live in the designated negro district, you would not have access to public services like water, schools, parks, libraries, sewage, electricity, and trash collection (*Austin Revealed*; Alamanza, Herrera, and Alamanza 8; Emery; Humphrey and Crawford 174). As a result of this policy, which essentially left them with only one viable option, the bulk of Austin's African American community was consolidated on the Eastside within two years (Donahue). The plan also called for the weakest zoning restrictions in the negro district, resulting in the area being designated as the location for industrial and other undesirable purposes (e.g. garbage dumps and power plants) (Alamanza, Herrera, and Alamanza 5; *Austin Revealed*; Busch; Zehr, "History...in Maps"). While racial zoning may have been declared unconstitutional, "this policy accomplished the same thing. By 1940, most black Austinites were living between Seventh and Twelfth Streets" (Texas

Monthly Staff and Cecelia Ballí). The plan accomplished two objectives. It relegated black residents to the Eastside, reinforcing the “perception that East Austin is black Austin – synonymous to some with the wrong side of the tracks” and boxed in the political agency of communities of color in Austin, the consequences of which have been longstanding (Spearman).

Constraints placed on African Americans would be furthered by the 1934 National Housing Act, a New Deal policy that formalized racial boundaries through the practice of redlining. The federal policy was an effort to build wealth through homeownership during the Great Depression, but left out minority communities by barring these neighborhoods from government-backed loans. Additionally, nonwhites were denied access to credit for homeownership (Spearman). African Americans were effectively denied access what would turn out to be one of the largest wealth-builders in U.S. history and Koch and Fowler’s “negro district” was the largest redlined zone in Austin (Zehr, “Austin’s History”).

With Austin’s African American population concentrated around the area known today as 11th and 12th Street Corridor, a vibrant community formed. The area became the nexus of black cultural life. The community thrived around the black business district. By the late 1940s, there were over one hundred black-owned businesses in Austin, more than thirty churches, and two black colleges (Tillotson and Samuel Huston – now merged as Huston-Tillotson) on the Eastside (Humphrey and Crawford). As Dr. Charles Urdy, former Huston-Tillotson professor and city council member described it,

East 11th and East 12th Street were the heart and soul of East Austin. Practically everything we needed or wanted was either on those streets or near to those streets. It was sort of the business hub for East Austin. And it is where most

people spent most of their time outside of work. Most people only left East Austin to go to work. (Emery)

Black owned stores, beauty salons, clubs, music venues, and eateries along the corridor helped foster a strong sense of community (Feit). During this period, the corridor found itself at the heart of Austin's Chitlin' Circuit – a term used to describe a network of music venues across the country that welcomed African American patrons and performers.⁸⁰ Austin hosted jazz and blues legends at places like the Victory Grill among others, making Austin's 11th Street a “street scene of dreams” during the era (“Can City”). It had become a destination for African American music acts and enthusiasts alike and by the late fifties, “the unlikely benefit of segregation was the tightly knit black community that thrived in East Austin” (Moser).

While Austin's African American community thrived around this central business and entertainment district, it was still very much a segregated city and the mobility of people of color was greatly limited (Tretter; Busch; Humphrey and Crawford 201).⁸¹ Denied access to businesses, restaurants, venues, parks, and schools reserved for whites, black Austinites formed the enclave out of necessity. Austin's racial divide would soon be punctuated by a physical divide as well – the construction of Interstate 35 in the late fifties and early sixties. If black Austinites were relegated to the Eastside before, now the physical and visual barrier would isolate them even further, enhanced by a freeway that served as a giant wall between white Austin and people of color (Barnes; Feit; Livesley-O'Neill; Moser; Winkie).

⁸⁰ See, for example, Hoffberger; Tuma; Ulloa, “Residents”.

⁸¹ Integration initially started as UT students started to frequent the East Austin jook joints. African Americans were not granted the same courtesy, should they be interested in patronizing a restaurant or music venue frequented by white folks.

Increased integration in the sixties ironically led to (some suggest even hastened) the decline of the African American business district and businesses in the area started to suffer as black Austinites started to patronize other parts of town (“Can City”; Moser; Schwartz; J. Smith). As explained in the *Statesman*, “More affluent African Americans could leave the community for goods and entertainment...And when original business owners died, newer entrepreneurs couldn’t get loans from the banks to start new ones” (Schwartz), the result was that “the old neighborhood began to lose cohesion” (J. Smith). By the seventies and eighties, the middle class was moving out of cities across the country and African Americans who could afford to move out of East Austin in search of better schools and opportunities left behind mostly low- and moderate-income households (United States Federal Reserve System 92). Austin’s racial segregation policies and physical/geographic divide helped set the stage for an ever-increasing economic divide as well (Zehr, “History...in Maps”). With the middle-class moving out of the city, Austin’s eastside was even further neglected. In sum, “While other neighborhoods were fed, East Austin was starved” (“City Section”).

Today’s 11th and 12th Street Corridor is at the heart of Austin revitalization efforts, but this isn’t the first time that the area was the focus of urban renewal programs. Traces of these programs remain as empty lots are scattered throughout the neighborhood as reminders of previous (failed) efforts at revitalization. In the sixties, urban renewal programs condemned and destroyed minority neighborhoods in “slum clearance” efforts (Alamanza, Herrera and Librado 6). When East Austin homeowners couldn’t afford to make the necessary improvements to bring their houses up to program standards, eminent domain was enforced and, as the rest of the city grew, “Austin’s black community was restricted, restrained, and systematically excluded” (Busch; see also Spearman). In the seventies and eighties, the University of Texas started to impinge on the neighborhood,

building a baseball field and maintenance facilities on the eastside (Livesley).⁸² In the nineties Austin's Urban Renewal Agency bought lots and decrepit buildings⁸³ with the intention of sparking redevelopment along 11th and 12th, but many of those lots were left undeveloped into the early 2000s, adding an additional, unsightly burden to businesses that remained in the area ("Can City"). Residents were evicted, buildings, were torn down and boarded up, and they remained that way for nearly a decade (Ulloa, "Residents"; Barrios). As Linda Connor, former president of the 12th Street business owners, recalled in the short documentary *Austin Revealed*, "One of the ways the city took over East Austin was to declare it blight and using urban renewal tore down houses and some churches." Style was cited as a reason to condemn the houses in the area and the aftermath (vacant houses and undeveloped lots) would later be highlighted as the impetus for redevelopment. Despite efforts at revitalization, the Eastside left much to be desired in terms of typical services and community needs. Even as new restaurants and businesses started to move in, access to grocery stores and health care were limited in the area (United States Federal Reserve). Additionally, simple amenities that were commonplace on the West side of I-35 (e.g. well-kept parks and sidewalks and safe street and road conditions) were still scarce ("City Section").

Tracing the history of Austin's East side, and the African American experience more specifically, gives us a sense of how today's 11th and 12th Street Corridor came to be and how policies and planning of previous decades primed the area for gentrification today. As noted in a recent article in *Texas Monthly*, "A long-standing east-west

⁸² Almanza, Herrera, and Almanza write that the university, "despite all its rhetoric in support of cultural diversity, was a key agent of this gentrification process and continues to pose a threat to the African American community" (8).

⁸³ Some call into question the city's valuation of those lots and suggest residents were forced to sell for prices well below a fair market rate (S. Smith, "Fair Shakes").

geographic rift shapes race and class relations in the capital to this day” (Texas Monthly Staff and Cecelia Ballí) and inextricably links race and gentrification in this study. With a better idea of the history that got us here, we turn to the focal point of this case study – the changing, gentrifying, and struggled over site of today’s East 11th and 12th Street Corridor.

Today’s 11th and 12th Street Corridor

“While there are certainly negative components (displacement and loss of authenticity), at its core gentrification can be a good thing. It presumably is *investment in a community*.” – Anonymous⁸⁴

“It’s important . . . to look at the things that drove the population out. From our point of view, stop the cultural genocide, and then we’ll have a place to have a conversation. Stop knocking down or selling off; stop all the policies from redevelopment to gentrification, all those policies that have *literally destroyed this community*.” – Lisa Byrd, Executive Director Austin’s African American Cultural Heritage District⁸⁵

Described as “Austin’s gentrification ground zero” (Solomon), the East 11th and 12th Street Corridor is a site of struggle. From one angle, some view gentrification as a positive force of progress in a neighborhood formerly characterized by blight and neglect. They see new development, old boarded up houses being refurbished or replaced with new builds. Gentrification, in this frame has brought much-needed resources and improvement to a formerly neglected neighborhood. From another perspective, gentrification and the policies that preceded it have wreaked havoc on the community,

⁸⁴ See Ghana ThinkTank

⁸⁵ See Widner.

destroying the networks of close bonds that once made this neighborhood a haven for Austin's African American community. The tensions between development and destruction, diversification and displacement, and the visibility and invisibility of the neighborhood's black community can be found throughout discourses surrounding the neighborhood.

Today's East 11th and 12th Street Corridor looks dramatically different than it did in its previous heyday. Those changes are readily displayed in the businesses, architecture, and look and feel of the neighborhood. Explosive growth in the neighborhood is evidenced by the rows of new mixed-use buildings that line 11th Street (See Figure 9).



Figure 9: The new look and feel of 11th Street.

New and refurbished homes and apartment complexes also surround the business and retail area on the main arteries of the corridor. New borders, barriers and divides are erected through a new style in the area prevalent in new builds and renovated homes in the area (See Figure 10). The previous businesses that served the African American community have been replaced by businesses that cater to a white, middle class clientele as the famed barber and beauty shops were traded for expensive waxing salons and yoga

studios. One author describes the change on Austin’s Eastside as the universal story of gentrification, one that is evidenced by “shops or restaurants geared not for the residents of the last half-century but for those of the last six months” (Zavos; see also Coppola, “Facility”). The once neglected neighborhood is now faced with overwhelming and rapid change; “the ebbing tide [of gentrification] has become a near avalanche” (Emery). The corridor looks much different than it did 50 years ago, 15 years ago, and even as recently as 5 years ago thanks to nearly \$20 million in funds invested by the City of Austin to help jumpstart redevelopment and attract investment in the area (Widner; see also Staley).



Figure 10: Homes around 11th and 12th Street Corridor

Unfortunately, a result of all of this new investment is increased cost of living and escalating property taxes and housing prices. The growing tax burden makes it harder to stay in the neighborhood and has thus driven out many of the low income, predominantly

minority homeowners in East Austin (Livesley; Zehr, “The Price”).⁸⁶ The price for a home in East Austin rose 53 percent between July 2002 and 2007 (Flynn), doubled between 2005 and 2010 (Semuals), and property values in the area have more than tripled since 2010 as more recent stats indicate the median home price is now around \$350,000 in the area (Solomon). In 2000, the East Austin Census tract that includes the 11th and 12th Street Corridor was at the bottom 40 percent of median household income and home value for the Austin Metro Area, now it finds itself in the top third (Livesley-O’Neill). Between 2000 and 2010, the average per capita income rose by 64 percent in the E. 11th and 12th Street Corridor area (EPS, Inc. 25).⁸⁷ These dramatic changes in the Corridor impact both homeowners and renters in the area. Property taxes have increased dramatically in the past decade-plus and rise exponentially with each year.

It isn’t just renters and homeowners that have felt the impact of economic shifts in the area, but businesses have also struggled to ride the wave of gentrification. In a 2008 report from the United States Federal Reserve, the median value of commercial property rose more than 50 percent in the corridor between 2000 and 2005, causing rents to soar.⁸⁸ Since then, rental costs have only increased forcing many of the remaining businesses to close or move elsewhere.⁸⁹

⁸⁶ The escalating property taxes make Linda Connor’s story in the PBS short *Austin Revealed* all the more gutting. She tells the story of a community meeting for 11th and 12th Street Corridor residents and business owners where they invited the Housing Authority. The community told the Housing Authority representative, “You will not take this land by eminent domain” and her response was “Don’t worry, we’ll get it by taxes.” Connor then laments in retrospect, “And that’s exactly what has happened.”

⁸⁷ It is important to note that these rising values do not result from increased population in the area. The total population itself only grew by 2.5 percent in the area between 2000 and 2010. This is all a reflection of a changing demographic in the area (EPS, Inc. 25).

⁸⁸ It wasn’t just rising rents that caused African American owned businesses to move, but some businesses (like Doudou Faye’s pest control business) were forcibly moved, evicted by the city to make way for revitalization and new development (Barrios).

⁸⁹ African American residents and business owners have moved in large numbers out to Austin’s broader metro area. Suburbs like Pflugerville and Round Rock are seeing unprecedented growth in their African American and low-income populations and Austin’s metro area has one of the highest rates of income segregation in the country (Zehr, “History”; see also United States Federal Reserve System). Austin

In a 2015 *Austin Chronicle* article, Lisa Byrd, director of Austin’s African American Cultural Heritage District comments on the look and feel, “In terms of the built environment, there’s little to nothing left” (Widner). The look and shape of the neighborhood has certainly shifted with the influx of new rental properties, homes, and businesses, but perhaps the most striking contrast is that the once-center of African American life in Austin (and what is today considered the African American Cultural Heritage District) is now majority white. Like the built environment, only a small portion of the African American community that established this neighborhood is left.

In the 78702 zip code, an area that includes the 11th and 12th Street Corridor and recently ranked the fifth fastest gentrifying neighborhood in the country, the white population has more than doubled. In the year 2000, the white population constituted 23.4 percent and jumped to 56.3 percent in 2010 (Friel). A look around the neighborhood makes those statistics obvious, “a younger, wealthier, mostly Anglo population is moving in” (Zehr, “Austin’s History”). Connected to the influx of white residents is the striking exodus of African Americans from the neighborhood; in short, the City is “hemorrhaging its black residents” (Spearman).

A recent study conducted by Eric Tang at the University of Texas at Austin revealed that Austin is the only fast-growing city of its kind that has seen an absolute loss in its African American population (Tang). In 2014, African Americans comprised only 7% of the total population (City of Austin, “Race and Ethnicity, 2014”), a massive change and especially notable since Austin has grown so dramatically over the last decade. East Austin in particular has borne witness to this shocking shift. As recently as

schools are also being heavily impacted. East Austin elementary schools are preparing to experience a loss between 12 and 43 percent of students in the next decade, a change the AISD attributes directly to gentrification (Editorial Board). Suburban schools surrounding Austin face new challenges with a growing population of low-income students. For example, last year Elgin School District identified 700 unvaccinated students (Vock).

the year 2000, East Austin was 51 percent black (United States Federal Reserve System); it wasn't rare to find census blocks with an 80 percent African American population in Central East Austin, but those kinds of concentrations have since disappeared (Castillo, "City Effort"). By the 2010 Census, African Americans comprised only 24 percent of the population in Central East Austin (Coppola, "Facility"). Even that number might be somewhat misleading, Tang notes, as students at Huston-Tillotson University likely make up the densest population of African Americans in the area (Hoffberger).

The results of the 2010 Census and Tang's study may have been surprising to some, but for folks who have lived in the neighborhood the data just confirmed what they already knew. According to one long-time resident "[White people] don't bother me, but they are taking over. There's not but a few black families left" (quoted in Flynn); another resident notes, "Now it's like every other house is white" (quoted in Castillo, "Census Data"). Another long-time resident who grew up in the area recalled coming home to care for her mother and upon seeing some white people had moved in thought, "Oh my god, there goes the neighborhood" (quoted in Zehr, "Austin's History"). Today her house is the only residential structure on her block. Everything else is commercial. As redevelopment continues, another resident expressed concern about his community, "As far as 12th Street goes, if 12th Street looked like 11th does now, there would be no minorities on 12th Street" (quoted in Dunbar). At a community meeting about redeveloping the 11th and 12th Street Corridor, a resident who has lived in the area since 1954 commented, "I don't see any familiar faces. This is gentrification pure and simple. Our Neighborhood doesn't look like our neighborhood anymore. People look at me like, 'Where did you come from?'" (City of Austin, "Meeting #4"). In an ironic turn, African Americans are increasingly alienated in the neighborhood they were forced to move to just decades before. Tang doesn't tiptoe around the root causes of the decline of African

Americans in East Austin charging the combination of segregation and gentrification as the source of African-American displacement⁹⁰ (Tang; MacLaggan; Ricke).

THE RHETORICAL STYLE OF GENTRIFICATION ON THE 11TH AND 12TH STREET CORRIDOR

The 11th and 12th Street Corridor gives us a unique site for study because it is quite different from the gentrification along the East Riverside Corridor, discussed in the previous chapter. While the East Riverside Corridor was comprised of mostly low-income, Hispanic immigrant renters and gentrification was a rapid process, the gentrification in Central East Austin and concentrated near East 11th and 12th Street looks quite different. The area has a rich history and is a designated African American Cultural Heritage District, is comprised of both renters and homeowners, and many of the families who live there have roots in the area generations deep. Instead of rapid gentrification that occurred seemingly overnight on East Riverside, the community that calls the area around the 11th and 12th Street Corridor home has been fighting neglect and gentrification for decades. Though the two case studies are quite different in terms of how the process of gentrification rolled out, the following section will demonstrate that they share many parallels when it comes to the way in which the rhetorical style of gentrification operates. As with the East Riverside Corridor, the rhetorical style of gentrification in this case study functions at the intersection of hegemony, whiteness, and style. The rest of the chapter will illustrate the ways in which the rhetorical style of gentrification has been employed in order to justify and legitimize gentrification. First, I look at the style employed in public planning to benefit private interests. In the final section I turn to a closer look at race and argue it is indivisible from gentrification through an analysis of

⁹⁰ In his study, Tang highlights these two factors as the main sources of displacement, but also notes that policing, poor performing schools, and the job market are also issues that drove many African Americans out of East Austin (Donahue and Brown).

how a rhetorical style of gentrification attempts to both erase race and simultaneously mark and market blackness.

Public Planning, Private Interests

The public planning process is something we see over and over again in gentrifying neighborhoods. Change is happening and inevitable, we are to believe, so one way to gain agency and have a say in our shifting neighborhoods is through participation in the discussions that supposedly determine how that change will take shape. The following section looks at three central elements of how the rhetorical style of gentrification operated during the planning process for the 11th and 12th Street Corridor. First, I examine the hegemonic power of the illusion of participation. Second, I explore how a focus on style dominates the discourse. And third, I explain how the centrality of market contexts influences the privileging of whiteness.

Illusion of Participation

As you'll recall from the earlier chapter on method, two of the main things to look for when examining the rhetorical style of gentrification are moments when public opinion is touted or relied upon or when we see appeals to the interests and aspirations of multiple groups in order to gain consent. In the planning process for the 11th and 12th Street Corridor, these two elements played a significant role. Robert Hariman argues "our political experience is styled" and this section suggests that these emphases are paired as a rhetorical strategy to meet particular political ends. Style is employed in a performative and discursive sense through a focus on public opinion, but also in a visual capacity, through using elements of style (e.g. design, aesthetics, etc) to appeal to a range of people. These function as rhetorical enactments of style and are two strategies in a constellation of effective techniques that constitute the rhetorical style of gentrification.

Emphasis on public opinion was a prevalent theme throughout the most recent planning process for 11th and 12th Street.⁹¹ The flier for the first development strategy meeting in September 2011 emphasizes “neighborhood-focused development” and says that the development strategy will invite “input from the broader community” (City of Austin, “E. 11th and 12th”). That first meeting on September 21st, 2011 made community input seem like a priority as one of the items on the agenda was to “hear from you about issues and priorities.” The presentation slide focused on strategy goals listed “Foster community consensus around shared values/vision” as one of five main goals for the project. Meeting facilitators highlighted their approach to the development strategy in meeting slides noting “stakeholder input” through surveys,⁹² interviews,⁹³ and community meetings as central to their approach and indicated public input would lead to the strategy the city takes (City of Austin, “Meeting #1”).⁹⁴

So what did people bring up during the portion of the agenda that invited community comments? Many residents commented on the hope for the neighborhood development to not lose sight of the population that the neighborhood serves. One resident noted, “In other communities you have African American business districts. We

⁹¹ I emphasize “most recent” here because there were also planning initiatives in the late nineties and early aughts. These earlier meetings were also mentioned in the meetings that took place in 2011 and 2012 to emphasize community participation and “public opinion.”

⁹² One survey was handed out at the community meeting, while another survey was posted online for ten days in December 2011. The consulting team said the online survey “was part of the great community engagement process” there were 130 respondents (EPS, Inc. et al. 218). Of those surveyed 14% did not live in Central East Austin, 31.1% had lived there for 5 years or less, and only 16.3% of those surveyed had lived there for 20 years or more. Additionally, only 16.8% of survey participants identified as Black or African American (EPS, Inc. et al. 218-238).

⁹³ It should be noted that the *East 11th and 12th Street Development Strategy* indicates only twenty interviews total were conducted (EPS, Inc. et al. 211).

⁹⁴ One meeting attendee was skeptical of the process noting, “We need to see who you talk to to add some legitimacy to this process” (City of Austin, “Meeting #1”). The flier for the meeting gives us a sense of who was valued as stakeholders and participants in the surveys as “brokers, realtors, property owners, and community development organizations” appeared to be central to the process and “community members within the corridor will also be surveyed” seemed a more minor focus (City of Austin, “E. 11th & 12th”).

want preservation of black business districts.” A property owner on 12th Street who grew up in East Austin offered, “One of my concerns is don’t forget the people in the area . . . Most of what I’ve heard tonight is commercial-owned and development,” but, she questioned, “For all of the people or some of the people?” Another resident’s sentiments are worth quoting at length:

Fifty, sixty years ago this was a black area. Until you address the fact this is a racist policy . . . These people are human beings. Treat folks the right way. Black people pushed out to Pflugerville....Need to enhance, enrich, and support culture. It’s a human rights issue. Be fair, conscious of social equity and treat folks right. We’re not inferior and [are] treated as second-class citizens. (City of Austin, “Meeting #1)

One resident born-and-raised in East Austin shared those concerns, “We cannot drive people out like myself. I support the idea of a black business district. Me on 11th Street, I’m gonna face racism. I have to be careful. That’s what I fear – my biggest fear is racism. Businesses try to conform because they fight racism” (City of Austin, “Meeting #1”). Another community member spoke of his frustrations with a process that emphasizes community input but doesn’t actually take it into account: “We’ve had this before . . . We were all talking about the same thing ten years ago . . . pacifies us and lets us think something will go on.” He went on to note what was essential: “We need electricity, funding, sewage!” (City of Austin, “Meeting #1”)

At the end of the meeting, facilitators invited participants to fill out a community survey as part of the “community engagement process” which read “your input and ideas are critical to help us arrive at development strategies that can create successful development within the corridor” and noted that the City “want[s] to understand what is important to you as it relates to future development within the E. 11th and 12th Street

Corridors” (City of Austin, “Community Survey”). The initial flier advertising the development strategy meeting also places emphasis on community participation noting, “Several opportunities for community input are an integrated part of the Development Strategy process. Four community meetings serve to share how the project is moving forward and to gather input and perspectives” (City of Austin, “E. 11th & 12th”).

By Community Meeting #4, the concerns brought up by commenters in the first meeting were not addressed. A focus on black businesses was shifted to an emphasis on “local businesses,” a stylized response, I’ll offer, to the true concerns of community members. In this sense, the style of the “local” is invoked to shift our attention away from (and ultimately erase) the discussion of bigger issues of race, racism, and displacement, which were nowhere to be found on the agenda. As will be discussed in the next section, the focus for the meeting kept style (i.e. the look and feel of the neighborhood) as a focal point. And yet public opinion and commentary was cited as a significant contributor in the final technical report prepared for the City of Austin (the *East 11th and 12th Street Development Strategy*) by a collection of consultants. The report noted that the Development Strategy looks to fulfill “the community’s goals,” consulted “numerous stakeholders” and is intended to advance the “community’s vision for these corridors” (Economic & Planning Systems, Inc.,⁹⁵ et al. 4). Later, the document suggests the strategy for the study area meets “the community’s preferred vision for future development” and is consistent with previously-constructed planning documents and “extensive public input over several decades” (EPS, Inc. et al. 10). The term “community” and the emphasis on community appears to carry a lot of weight in the planning process, but appears to be a hegemonic element of the rhetorical style of

⁹⁵ I will refer to this as EPS, Inc. moving forward.

gentrification, put to use as a way to gain consent and offer the illusion that public opinion is heavily relied upon.

Another aspect of the rhetorical style of gentrification connected to the idea of hegemony is the appeal to interests of multiple groups. Style, in this case, is employed as a means to get buy-in from residents and generate consensus. With this in mind, the critic can explore what interests and aspirations are relied upon in order to develop consent and concordance with an audience. This element is a heavy aspect of the rhetorical style of gentrification used in the development strategy of the East 11th and 12th Street Corridor because after decades of neglect, people wanted their neighborhood to get the same aesthetic attention other neighborhoods across Austin had received, not to mention basic necessities (“electricity, funding, sewage!”). Meetings focused on important issues like undeveloped sites, adequate infrastructure, and public safety concerns, to name a few; all issues that are connected to style in a visual and material sense and all elements that would appeal to long-time and new residents alike.

Undeveloped sites, left there by the city after previous tear-downs of areas identified as blight, were unsightly and impacted the general quality of life in the area. Some long-time residents looked at development as enhancing the quality of life in the area arguing, “luxury apartments are better than ‘shanties on a barren hill’” (quoted in Flynn). An *Austin American-Statesman* article from 2001 noted, “No one would complain if the vacant lots on East 11th disappeared today” (S. Smith, “Worlds Collide”). Infrastructure was something this long-neglected area sought – from buried power lines to paved roads and sidewalks – these represented concerns residents had been bringing up with the city for quite some time. Residents brought up the fact that this was a huge issue for them at the first community meeting regarding development strategy: “When you talk about infrastructure the city should have done that years ago. This area is neglected . . . I

would like to see some development.” Another long-time resident and business owner added, “What do we want? What we had. We’re human. We want all the human comforts that anyone else would want. You go to West Austin, South Austin, nobody has the problems that we have open to see!” Concerns about infrastructure were an issue and development priority for long-time and new residents alike, but only got attention when gentrification and demographic changes signified a shift in the area. Of course, crime was also a problem high on the list for many resident groups. Whether a new or decades-long resident, “No one in East Austin is pleased that crime is excessive and economic prosperity scarce” (Zavos).

In the case of 11th and 12th Street, the focus on appealing to the interests and aspirations of multiple groups functioned hegemonically and was employed through a rhetorical style of gentrification. Collective buy-in to changing some of the major issues in the area shouldn’t signify consent to gentrification or consensus on a development strategy that catalyzes gentrification, but like the element of community input, helps create the illusion of participation and community consent to policies and plans that ultimately amplify gentrification. The illusion of participation and shared goals is a large part of the strategy to generate consent among community members, but not the only one. Another key element of gentrified rhetorical style is an overwhelming focus on style. The next section will examine how in discussions of 11th and 12th Street development, the topic of style dominates the discourse.

Focus on Style Dominates Discourse

If we had to identify one central focus for the development strategy of East 11th and 12th Street, it would unequivocally be style. While the 11th and 12th Street Corridor had all sorts of issues worthy of discussion in relation to the development strategy (a

history of segregation, the city's neglect, racism, displacement, the dwindling African American population, etc.), the foci of the meetings, community survey, and final development strategy indicates style is paramount. As has been argued throughout this dissertation, style doesn't exist in a vacuum or operate independently from the lives that encounter, are attracted to, feel alienation from, or live in, and among it, but the way it is discussed in the development process would have us think otherwise. This section will look at the rhetorical style of gentrification in East Austin through the ways in which a focus on style operates rhetorically, privileges whiteness, and works hegemonically to produce common sense understandings of gentrification.

First, the flier that offers an overview of the development strategy is clear about its purpose, which was to provide “recommendations on how to best develop retail, entertainment, office space and housing, including recommendations and solutions to address barriers to redevelopment, financing methods, and an approach to future project implementation” (City of Austin, “E. 11th & 12th”). The community survey distributed at the first community meeting also prioritizes elements of style in asking participants to identify their top priorities for improvements or initiatives in the corridor. The selections include: Gateway to Austin, Public Transportation, Sidewalk Improvements, Restaurant/Entertainment Destination, Infrastructure Upgrades Improvements, Mixed Use Projects (commercial, retail, residential), Market Rate Housing (rental or ownership), Affordable Housing (rental or ownership), Neighborhood Serving Businesses, Beautification of Blighted Parcels, Historical Preservation, and Small Business/Local Business Establishment – all elements that focus on the physical space and look and feel of the area. For example, the restaurant/entertainment destination, mixed-use projects, market rate housing, beautification, and historical preservation all focus on the built environment and how the neighborhood will eventually take shape. The centrality of style

in the survey ensures that choices and decisions are based on style and concerns about people are ignored. The survey does include one mention of people with the final element for consideration: Attract People from other parts of Austin (City of Austin, “Community Survey”). The community survey conducted online by city consultants shared the same questions and style-driven focus (EPS, Inc. et al 218-244). In both cases, style is employed to first, create a distinction between the current community and the community planners wish to attract and second, associate (white) bodies from “other parts of Austin” with design goals, a representation of the good, and an attribution of value added (more on this in a minute).

Beyond the flier and survey, style is also central in community meetings. East 11th and 12th Streets’ streetscapes and land use are the focus of discussion. Slides during public presentations focus on infrastructure noting that the “E. 12th Street Streetscape is not pedestrian-friendly” and requires “significant improvement” (See Figure 11). In another slide (See Figure 12), an image of the street’s cluster of poles and power lines serves as evidence that the area is “clearly not up to snuff,” particularly because this focus on style is “not just a beautification project, [it’s] about incentivizing development” (City of Austin, “Meeting #4”). Concerns about the streetscape dominate and ultimately displace discussion of people (even after people were central to concerns brought up in public commentary). This kind of focus on style attempts to render race as insignificant and serves to mask racial hierarchies.



Figure 11: Streetscape slides from Community Meeting #4.



Figure 12: Overhead utilities slides from Community Meeting #4.

During the 4th community meeting, when community residents called out the effects of style (one suggesting people expect changes to her home to meet the look and feel of the revitalized neighborhood, another saying the shape the neighborhood is taking makes them feel unwelcome), the meeting facilitator and consultant brought the discussion back to style as if it was vacant of meaning. “We’re [just] talking about buildings,” he said. He went on to explain that the main focus for shaping the neighborhood is form based code, noting it is “based on [the] look, features of building,

and how it addresses the street . . . governs streetscapes and building envelopes . . . [form code is] about look and feel. About what it looks like when you're walking down the street, *not who's inside* [italics added]" (City of Austin, "Meeting #4"). The singular focus on style and the focus on style as if it were void of substance is one of the central problems of a rhetorical style of gentrification because style cannot be divorced from the meanings, representations, identifications, and effects it produces. The conceptualization of form code, look and feel, and style as racially neutral is complicit with white privilege and can contribute to racial division and produce racial/racist geographies.⁹⁶ Additionally, the focus on style effectively shuts down debate about other issues, rendering residents politically unresponsive since no one will contest the fact that the long-neglected area needs and deserves improvements. The centrality of style limits what we can talk and debate about in regards to gentrification.

Another element that emerges from analysis of this case study is that aesthetic rationales abound. You'll recall from the method chapter that critics should look for examples of the ways in which aesthetic rationales are employed to achieve particular goals and stay alert to incidents when judgments and decisions are limited to aesthetic criteria. The paragraphs above have already demonstrated the ways in which discussion and decisions are limited to matters of style, but the rhetorical force of aesthetic rationales for achieving particular goals are also significant to the planning and development of the East 11th and 12th Street Corridor. Similarly to the East Riverside Corridor, aesthetic rationales operate by first constructing the neighborhood as aesthetically undesirable in order to justify gentrification, which in turn produces the

⁹⁶ See Sullivan for an extended explanation of the ways in which discussion of space as racially neutral produces white privilege and perpetuations systems of white domination (143).

hegemonic idea⁹⁷ that gentrification is an inevitable and benevolent force, and ultimately privileges whiteness. Style, in this case, is presented as both the problem and solution to neighborhood ills.

The focus on style produces a negative picture of the case study area (and its residents, by association) and effectively eliminates positive aspects of the community (e.g. its history, its people, etc.). The combination of news and magazine articles, community discussions, and eventual strategic development plan designates East 11th and 12th as aesthetically undesirable. In popular press outlets, the area is described as “the ghetto” (S. Smith, “Worlds Collide”), “depressed” (Martinson), “regarded for years as one of the most crime-ridden and undesirable sections of town” (Swiatecki, “Austin’s Tattooed”), “blighted” (Barrios, “New Life”), “dilapidated . . . places where transients slept and drug dealers loitered” (Ulloa, “Residents Near”), and a place where “ailing, vacant homes and empty lots . . . tend to dominate the landscape” (quoted in A. Smith, “Loss of Homes”).

Community meetings and the report those meetings eventually produced offered damning descriptions and aesthetic rationales that set up the neighborhood as ripe for improvement. According to the *East 11th and 12th Street Development Strategy*, produced by consultants hired by the City, the area is in need of “significant revitalization” (EPS, Inc. et al. 1), an enhanced physical environment (EPS, Inc. et al. 6), and “improve[d] ‘look and feel’ to attract new businesses and other community activity” (EPS, Inc. et al. 5). The report paints affordable housing in the area as an “issue” and in bold letters brazenly proclaims “The Study Area neighborhoods have more than their “fair share” of subsidized housing” (EPS, Inc. et al. 26). The document argues “corridors remain

⁹⁷ I describe this as a hegemonic idea because the transition from blight to better constructs a common sense understanding of gentrification of a benevolent force.

underutilized, with numerous vacant parcels, underperforming businesses, and other indicators of unfulfilled potential” (EPS, Inc. et al. 1) and suggests development on underutilized, unused, and vacant lots “perpetuate negative images of disinvestment” and represent opportunities to “catalyze desirable development” (EPS, Inc. et al. 30). The report offers aesthetic rationales throughout and suggests that making aesthetic changes will “make the difference between achieving redevelopment and maintaining the status quo” (EPS, Inc. et al. 16). If the area wants to fulfill its “potential as a mixed-use urban community”(EPS, Inc. et al. 1), investment in style is necessary and will “[signal] to the development industry that the Study Area is receiving attention from the City” (EPS, Inc. et al. 6).

The rationale that the only way to fix the structural, systemic, often city-caused problems (aesthetically materialized in the form of utter neglect and vacant lots, for example) is through style appears to be a widespread belief. A 2002 *Austin American-Statesman* article suggested “The only way to preserve things, improve things was to . . . make it a more attractive place” (T. Green). In their summary of the online survey conducted in December 2011, consultants highlight that residents want the Corridor to “become a safer, more walkable and livelier place” and “generally believe this will be achieved by...improving the streetscape” (EPS, Inc. et al. 218-19).⁹⁸ The material reality of long-time residents are reduced to a matter of style, muting the violence of how those lots became vacant and the City’s long history of neglect that produced these aesthetically undesirable spaces in the first place. With the aesthetic rationale in place,

⁹⁸ Streetscape and sidewalk improvements was listed as the most important priority for 84 percent of respondents (99/118 chose it as a top priority).

gentrification is imagined as a benevolent force that helps revitalize a place in need of much improvement.⁹⁹

Gentrification in the area thus gets equated with transformation (Castillo, “Census Data”), renewal, redevelopment (Castillo, “Planned Demolitions”; Martinson), revitalization (City of Austin, “E 11th & 12th”; Moser), and is celebrated as a force that’s “been a long time coming” and something that might “breathe life back into East Austin” (Ludwig). As a result of this mindset, the changing corridor is animated and described as “transforming from caterpillar back to butterfly” (S. Smith, “Worlds Collide”) as a result of gentrification. Gentrification’s physical transformations create common sense understandings that suggest the shift in the built space “will contribute to the area turning the corner” (Staley), “mean the start of good things for East Austin,” (Barrios) and imply that new multi-million dollar buildings will offer “a sign of hope ahead” and aesthetic transformations- “evident in refurbished buildings, construction, and a cleaner look to the area” - will serve as “a bellwether of new hopes and old dreams” (Moser).

In addition to producing an understanding of gentrification as benevolent, these types of aesthetic rationales also invite gentrifiers to think of themselves as pioneering neighborhood assets who benefit the neighborhood overall. Articles from Austin publications distribute this shared understanding widely. People who move there are viewed and view themselves as urban pioneers (Oppel; S. Smith; Swiatecki, “Turnarounds”) and settlers (Oppel). Articles purport that gentrifiers are “part of the solution,” can help to stabilize neighborhoods (S. Smith, “Worlds Collide”; Swiatecki, “Turnarounds”), prime the area for growth, bring a sense of community to the area, and

⁹⁹ Even in scenarios when gentrification isn’t seen as development, it is seen as the lesser of two evils. According to one respondent in the online community survey, “Any and all development is better than the current situation. Any day of the week, I’d prefer vacant and secured 12-story condominium complex or any legal business to a run down, derelict property teeming with squatters and criminals” (EPS, Inc. et al. 244-245).

bring in more prosperity for all (Swiatecki, “Austin’s Tattooed”). Gentrifiers are even lauded for their instrumental role in “keeping too much tear-down from happening and too much yuppie invasion” or for saving historic buildings and restoring them (quoted in Green). In the PBS documentary, *Austin Revealed*, Linda Connor shares her story of experiencing the mindset that gentrification is a positive force:

I had a neighbor recently say to me, “You people resent us being here because you don’t like us.” And I looked at him and I said, “It’s not a matter of not liking you, it’s because you don’t respect us.” These are people who are liberal. When you have somebody walk across the street and say to your face, “*We saved this neighborhood,*” that’s like me walking in your house and saying to you I don’t like your drapes. It hurts! [italics added]

As a result of aesthetic rationales, gentrification is justified and gentrifiers glorified. By comparison and in contrast, entire neighborhoods and their longtime residents are denigrated and seen as problems or elements in need of fixing. The focus on style is a highly problematic element of the rhetorical style of gentrification and fits broader urban trends where “the city seems to everywhere sacrifice its rich ecology of social possibilities for simply looking good” (Sorkin 293). Another element the method asks critics to look for has to do with style’s connection to market contexts. The emphasis on market contexts has already been hinted at above, but we’ll take a closer look at this element of style and its influence in the following section.

Market Contexts and the Privileging of Whiteness

In his theory of style, Brummett suggests that rhetoric today takes place in market contexts and can result in the conflation of consumers and citizens. Because rhetorical style is situated in market contexts, it becomes an easily recognizable global style and can

result in the conflation of consumers and citizens. As suggested in the theory chapter, in the context of gentrification, this connection also lends itself to the possibility that if one cannot consume or display a certain aesthetic style consistent with the desired market context, there's a danger they may not be viewed as citizens at all. This section will discuss the fact that the market and market investment is a priority for the development of the 11th and 12th Street Corridor and argue that style is a tool employed to attract that investment, a move that ultimately privileges whiteness.

The centrality of the market and a focus on market investment is prevalent throughout the development strategy for the area. From community meetings to the proposed *East 11th and 12th Street Development Strategy*, the market is king. Community meeting slides that focused on development strategy goals listed “reduce impediments to market-supported development” and “direct public resources toward most effective investments” as two of the main goals (City of Austin, “Meeting #1”; “Meeting #4”). What was categorized as impediments and effective investments were structured around style. Empty lots and dilapidated homes were seen as impediments and worthy investments were focused on improving built space rather than investing in the current community (City of Austin, “Meeting #1”). The area was often described in terms of its position in the market with meeting facilitators noting that the area is “competitively positioned” and “has a lot of potential from a market standpoint” (City of Austin, “Meeting #4”). The *East 11th and 12th Street Development Strategy* also reflected the centrality of the market as the desire to attract private investment in order to “more fully capitalize on its great potential as a vibrant and urban neighborhood in Austin” was often mentioned throughout the 266 page document (EPS, Inc. et al. 9). Within the market context of the East 11th and 12th Street Corridor, the concentration of affordable housing in the area was identified as an “issue” (City of Austin, “Meeting #4”; EPS, Inc. et al. 25)

that threatened the viability of private investment in the area. Increasing the supply of market-rate housing in order to “dilute” the concentration of affordable housing was seen as the solution to this problem with the goal of “improving ‘look and feel’ to attract new businesses and other development and activity . . . [and] improve the feasibility of new development and attract private investment” (EPS, Inc. et al. 5-6). Within market contexts, gentrification is constructed as the solution to social ills. Consequently, the market functions to sell texts (through style) and attract imaginary communities. The rhetorical style of gentrification in the development strategy for the Corridor uses style within this market context to catalyze gentrification and incentivize developers. Style is employed as a rhetorical strategy to signal to the imaginary community of developers, businesses, middle-class homebuyers, and private investors that the neighborhood is transforming, prime for investment, and that the City is paying attention to this long-neglected area.

The connection between style and market contexts in the context of gentrification has a variety of consequences when we look at it through the lens of the rhetorical style of gentrification. It connects the privileging of whiteness to impersonal market forces while helping to a) produce the desirability of whiteness, b) position “prime real estate” as white space, and c) create benefits for those with privilege while targeting those with the least privilege.

The focus on the market and market investment is a rhetorical tactic rooted in style. In his book, *Colored Property*, David Freund studies the narratives that promote the idea that urban outcomes result solely from impersonal market forces. Though he’s writing about an era of housing discrimination before World War II, the frame still applies today; it is “this story about market-driven growth . . . that enabled countless white people to insist that their support for exclusion was not a racist act” (8). The focus

on what people view as non-racial variables – driving the market, protecting and attracting investment, developing market-rate housing, and reducing impediments to investment through style – share this narrative and work to privilege whiteness and justify gentrification. This market-driven discourse also links consumers and citizens through the rhetorical style of gentrification. Leslie Martin’s work discusses the ways in which gentrifiers call on culturally resonant frames in order to make claims about their legitimacy as occupants of the neighborhood and gain sympathy for their views. A focus on style in market contexts makes it so that gentrifiers and city planners “don’t [have] argue for the removal of neighbors they find less than desirable, but rather . . . express concern about specific conditions in the community” (344). For the 11th and 12th Street Corridor and gentrifying neighborhoods everywhere, the culturally resonant frame is style and is often conjured via the market.

This orientation to the market produces whiteness as a desirable feature of neighborhood development that will attract investment. One report on gentrification in East Austin describes it as follows, “White families and businesses are becoming downright popular” (Emery). According to Pulido, “The full exploitation of white privilege requires the production of places with a very high proportion of white people. ‘Too many’ people of color might reduce the neighborhood’s status, property value, or general level of comfort for white people” (16). The value of whiteness as a strategy for development is not-so-subtly described in the *East 11th and 12th Street Corridor Development Strategy*. It reads, “The local demographic change – combined with the strength of the Austin market generally and the Study Area’s advantages of proximity to the region’s employment, cultural, political, and educational centers – suggests that the area is poised for growth in the retail and office sectors” (EPS, Inc. et al. 20). Prime real-estate is another element that gets evoked in discourses of gentrification in the area. The

Corridor's proximity to downtown, description as a gateway to Austin, and views of downtown and the capital are often mentioned to emphasize the desirability of the location, but also seems to construct prime real estate as white space. It reflects an attitude of "ontological expansiveness" wherein "white people consider all spaces as rightfully available for their inhabitation of them" (Sullivan 144). The style displayed in the area, this logic would suggest, doesn't capitalize on the location or live up to its full market potential. On the first page of the *East 11th and 12th Street Development Strategy*, it's prime location is emphasized in order to highlight its "unfulfilled potential" (EPS, Inc. et al. 1). It's positionality within the market context as a space of prime real estate invites claims of rightful and appropriate use of the space, which is linked to whiteness through style.

A final product of the focus on style and its connection to market contexts is that it privileges whiteness, producing benefits for those who enjoy that privilege while targeting those who don't. In the case of E. 11th and 12th Street (and like many other neighborhoods like it), the area was targeted for redevelopment and received funding because it was a largely underserved and neglected area that needed more investment, infrastructure, and improvements. Once those investments come, however, some suggest the existing community rarely benefits from the added improvements (Almanza, Herrera, and Almanza 6). Developers are incentivized to build in the area through style; the City focuses on the streetscape, for example, and takes on some of those costs in order to attract private investment. Development bonus programs are often cited as ways in which new development produces benefits for the existing community. For example, a developer may be offered increased zoning entitlements (e.g. building higher or more) in exchange for public benefits (e.g. by developing parklets or installing bike racks, public art, or attractive landscaping to improve the neighborhood look and feel). In these

scenarios the developers benefit most; their “projects get approved, and the community gets ‘chump change’” (quoted in Novak, “Market Forces”). In the meantime, the residents of the community targeted for investment don’t often get to enjoy these minor benefits, since the new real estate is often the source that prices them out of the neighborhood.

During the fourth community meeting for the development strategy, consultants displayed a slide titled “Housing and Gentrification” and discussed the fact that there’s still need for affordable housing in the area. A meeting participant asked about housing and whether it would be possible to make sure low income and affordable housing would be included in new developments. The facilitator’s response indicated that developers would be offered incentives to include low-income and affordable housing units in their developments. When pressed further to see if the city would ensure developers wouldn’t have the option to “buy out” of those requirements or offer alternative community benefits instead, the facilitator responded by saying they “would have to weigh what benefits the community most” (City of Austin, Meeting #4). Development, according to the development strategy is a way to “enhance opportunity for desirable community benefits” (EPS, Inc. et al. 6), but those benefits appear to be centered on a style that ultimately privileges whiteness. Mandy DeMayo, executive director of HousingWorks Austin, a nonprofit that advocates for affordable housing argues that if left to market forces “Austin most certainly will divide itself into ‘a city of the incredibly rich and the incredibly poor’” (quoted in Novak, “Market Forces”). An analysis of the development strategy through the lens of a rhetorical style of gentrification also suggests that Austin will divide itself along racial lines as well. The illusion of participation, the focus on style that dominates the discourse, and the links between market contexts and the privileging of whiteness are all displayed in the rhetorical style of gentrification. In the next section

we move from the linkage of public planning with private interests to make an even more explicit connection to race, an element indivisible from gentrification.

In(di)visible: The Black Experience of Gentrification in East Austin's 11th and 12th Street Corridor

As has been argued throughout this dissertation, gentrification and race in the United States are inextricably linked. The experience of gentrification around East Austin's 11th and 12th Street Corridor deeply impacts the lives of its historic African American community. Today, the area is also a part of the African American Cultural Heritage District and yet the numbers of African Americans who live there has shifted significantly in recent years. The method used in this dissertation invites critics to explore how race is ignored, the ways race might be seen through the register of style, and examine the ways in which whiteness is made invisible via the rhetorical style of gentrification. In the final section of this chapter, I'll examine both race's erasure and the ways in which blackness is marked and marketed in the discourses about gentrification in Austin's East 11th and 12th Street Corridor.

Race's Erasure

The erasure of race and repression of discourses that explicitly include race is a significant element in the rhetorical style of gentrification employed in the development strategy meetings and plans for the 11th and 12th Street Corridor. Black bodies and much of the black experience of change in the area is made invisible as discussions of race are actively repressed both in community meetings and the *E. 11th and 12th Street Development Strategy*. Black voices and experiences are also often silenced or absent from the narrative while whiteness and its privileges are made invisible. Invisibility in the

rhetorical style of gentrification works to the detriment of people of color and benefits whiteness.

African Americans and their experiences of gentrification are significant to gentrification in the neighborhood, but glaringly absent from official discourses. In the first development strategy meeting held in September of 2011, the City of Austin (and the consultants hired to facilitate the meeting/conduct studies of the area) did not once address the fact that the Corridor was a historically (and even recently) African American neighborhood. Many of the people who spoke up during the comments portion of the meeting were African American residents who brought up concerns about demographic change and expressed desire for the focus of development to return the corridor to its heritage as a black business district. Local residents explicitly made race a part of the discourse during the community comment portion of the meeting, but when their desires were echoed back to them in the meeting wrap-up, the facilitator erased race from the record and noted, “So I’m getting this clearly, you want to protect local businesses” (City of Austin, “Meeting #1”). The community focus on “black” and “African-American” was notably shifted to “local” and is reflected in the final community meeting months later, when consultants presented the draft for the East 11th and 12th Street Development Strategy. Again, in this final meeting there was no direct mention of race, even though community participants brought up race in the previous meeting (and in community surveys as well). The erasure of the African American and black experience of the changing neighborhood was prevalent throughout as presentation slides described the background of the study area as “historically a culturally diverse, mixed income community” and the study area today as “demographically dynamic.” When the focus turned to retail and community development, the presentation slide highlighted “concerns about future displacement of existing retailers” as an issue and the strategic response was

to “encourage locally owned businesses.” Later in the presentation “housing opportunities and gentrification” was listed as a key community issue, but there was still no mention of race despite the fact that people expressed concerns about what was happening to the black community in earlier meetings.¹⁰⁰ In a particularly unsettling moment during the final community meeting a black resident stood up to comment on the neglect of 12th Street and began to approach the front of the room as she spoke. She was promptly told “We’re not gonna give a speech” and escorted back to her seat by the community engagement facilitator (City of Austin, “Meeting #4”). The erasure of race in this meeting was glaringly blatant and an unfortunate reflection of the development strategy as a whole. The *East 11th and 12th Street Development Strategy* also employs a rhetorical style of gentrification that ignores race. The forty-two page plan makes mention of “Blacks” only once, in brief reference to demographic changes in the area. The African-American Cultural Heritage Facility, which is located on 11th Street, is mentioned several times, but simply as a property and area attraction/landmark, its relation to the community itself made void (EPS, Inc. et al.).

The meetings and eventual strategy effectively dismissed African American resident concerns and references to race more generally. This feeling of erasure is also reflected in broader discourses about gentrification in the area, as African Americans feel both unheard and erased from the narrative of Austin (Ankrum). The African American community had long-lobbied for improvements in the area and felt their advocacy fell on deaf ears. According to one report “There’s a sense that is instilled in longtime residents that the city is not there to serve you” (U.S. Federal Reserve System). Participants in the online survey about the development strategy shared this sense noting “Promises for over

¹⁰⁰ It is also worth noting that the Housing and Gentrification slide noted the high concentration of affordable housing in the area as an issue (City of Austin, “Meeting #4”).

20 years have not come true” and “We residents have been asking for the same things from the City for 15 years” (EPS, Inc. et al. 243-4). In regards to efforts to address crime at 12th and Chicon, a resident of over sixty years expressed the widely-shared frustration with the lack of attention from the City: “The real truth is that I don’t feel like they . . . care that much” (quoted in J. Smith). The fact is that many in the African American community have “felt left out of the city’s economic and cultural picture” (Castillo, “City Effort”). Recent headlines reflect this sentiment with titles like “Feeling ‘Invisible,’ Black Residents Leave Austin” (MacLaggan), and “We’re Still Here: Assessing the Continuing Black Austin Experience” (Spearman). But when it comes to development and, in this case, gentrification, “We’re [just] talking about buildings” (City of Austin, “Meeting #1”).

While African American experiences and concerns are rendered invisible, whiteness gets to enjoy a different kind of invisibility in which the privileges it enjoys are made invisible or seem to appear neutral or natural in some way. In the face of the very obvious fact that “The advantages gained by the white majority and the disadvantages visited on the African-American minority in the past have only accumulated through the generations” in Austin’s history (Zehr, “Austin’s History”), the rhetorical style of gentrification works hard to erase race, rendering the privileges of whiteness invisible. The active erasure of race from community planning strategies and discourses is one rhetorical strategy employed in the gentrification of East 11th and 12th Street Corridor, but the method delineated in Chapter 3 also invites the critic to look for ways in which race is employed as a style, through the aestheticization and commodification of otherness. Joshunda Sanders captures the duality of the black Austinite in her December 2013 *Austin American-Statesman* opinion piece: “We experience a hypervisible invisibility here, where our presence is interpreted as an achievement for equality, but the realities

we live are replete with class assumptions and the relentless feeling that we do not belong here.” We turn now to that other end of the spectrum, from invisibility to hypervisibility.

Mark(et)ed Blackness¹⁰¹

In the context of the East 11th and 12th Street Corridor, the rhetorical style of gentrification functions by simultaneously marking and marketing blackness. Black bodies are marked through discourses about the area being blighted, dangerous, and in need of change, they are marked when made to feel unwelcome or out of place in an increasingly white neighborhood, and they are marked in the context of the neighborhood being designated as an African American Cultural Heritage District.

The construction of the Corridor as blighted and in need of change was already described above, but it is worth bringing it up again because of the ways in which people become associated with blighted places. As was discussed in the previous chapter, concerns about style are often a coded way of referring to the groups who perform or occupy that style. The underlying message of turning the neighborhood around then serves to naturalize black/white distinctions and prompts a move to whiteness. This association between style and bodies is made apparent across multiple discourses of change in the Corridor. First, neighborhood conditions and styles become associated with the residents who occupy that space. Vacant lots, blight, and dilapidated homes become a reflection of the community that lives there instead of a reflection of racist public policies and private forces that created those conditions. If only residents took pride in the place they live, this logic would have us believe, the Corridor would be a better, safer place. According to an *Austin American-Statesman* article, “The idea is straightforward: Weed out negative elements and seed in positive ones. If residents take pride in their

¹⁰¹ I use this term purposefully here to capture not just black bodies, but African American cultural heritage as well.

neighborhood, the criminal element will move on down the road” (Schwartz). A commenter in the development strategy’s online survey shares a similar perspective: “While affordable housing is important. Those that own their homes should take pride in their property and neighborhood. Affordable housing should not mean cheap housing that attracts individuals and families that do not care about where they live or their surroundings. Race only matters to racists” (EPS, Inc. et al. 240).

In addition to making associations between people and style, bodies are marked as a deterrent to development. This takes place both in terms of blighted neighborhoods interrupting the narrative of progress and development in Austin (thus establishing the need for the City to “signal” to developers that they’ve taken an interest in the area) as well as in terms of anticipation of a struggle over style. Sanders highlights this element of marked hypervisibility in her opinion piece noting “We are widely regarded as the most vocal minority here, probably because we have no way of blending in.” According to one developer “If you’re downtown where everyone agrees there should be development, that’s one thing . . . If you are (farther east) and...you believe the neighbors might fight you, it could be discouraging. No one wants to swim upstream in the real estate development world” (quoted in “Can City”).¹⁰²

Another sense in which blackness is marked in the Corridor is through the feeling of being out-of-place and unwelcome in an increasingly white neighborhood. This feeling of markedness is new in a neighborhood that was previously mostly black and where black people could move comfortably. As previously expressed in earlier sections of this chapter, the neighborhood doesn’t look familiar anymore and that limits and constrains

¹⁰² A unique way one Austin neighborhood fighting gentrification has used this to their advantage is through posting signs outside low-income homes. The idea is that people who don’t want to live near low-income people won’t move there and the hope is the signage will work to “poison blocks for gentrification” (Livesley-O’Neill).

the ways in which the African-American community experiences this place.¹⁰³ The once familiar becomes foreign as new developments and businesses are perfectly tailored to meet the needs and desires of an imaginary community that does not include them.

A final way in which the African American community is marked is through the area's designation as the African American Cultural Heritage District (AACHD).¹⁰⁴ In the case of the AACHD, African Americans are marked in the sense that the area memorializes African American history, but at the same time reduces African Americans to a style. The district offers visibility by marking the space on a map and preserving the history of the African American experience in the area, but doesn't function to preserve the people who made this neighborhood what it is. When reduced to a style, the people, political struggles, and history of the area are "detached from the political and social contexts that give them meaning" (Sullivan 126). As a result, new residents and tourists are able to revel in the cultural and historical gifts of African American culture without coupling them to the people who have been displaced and disparaged by the City's policies and planning. The *East 11th and 12th Street Development Strategy* also marks African American culture in this same way. African American *people* are only mentioned once in the report, while the cultural heritage facility and district designation is mentioned several times throughout the document and only in relationship to the building. The focus on style, however, and the ways in which new projects can provide synergies with the facility such as "public art components, performances space, non-profit office space, restaurants or retail for event attendees to patronize, etc." (EPS, Inc. et

¹⁰³ For example: "I walked into a small café that has been here forever, and a bunch of young white people looked at me as if to say 'what are you doing here?'" (Ghana ThinkTank).

¹⁰⁴ The AACHD is the result of the African American Quality of Life Initiative that the City launched to "address the disparities between black and white Austinites experience the city." The cultural heritage designation was part of a statewide district and cultural program designed to drive economic development and cultural tourism (Widner).

al. 30-1). This reduction to style is even present in the way developers characterize their contribution to the historic and cultural corridor wherein they concomitantly celebrate the neighborhood's heritage while displacing its heritage families. For example, the press release for a new luxury development on 11th Street reads:

Eleven is positioned to become one of the cornerstones of this authentic and vibrant urban corridor. To demonstrate commitment to the local community, the development team announced today the donation of \$25,000 to the Austin Revitalization Authority towards the historic preservation of the Herman Schieffer House,¹⁰⁵ and icon in East Austin's history. (Forestar Group, Inc and Canyon-Johnson Urban Fund)

We are *just* talking about buildings!

The AACHD captures the two sides of how hypervisibility functions as a tactic of the rhetorical style of gentrification in the corridor as it embodies both the elements of marked and marketed blackness. In the context of rhetorical style, the idea that blackness is marketed takes on several meanings. By using the term "marketed," I mean to suggest that blackness is inserted into market contexts through a rhetoric of style and African Americans become both commodified and (are rhetorically constructed as) consumers.

The commodification of blackness is often connected to the expressed desire for diversity and "nowhere is the racist pattern of non-white commodification more prevalent than in the contemporary phenomenon of gentrification" (Sullivan 126). In the context of gentrifying East 11th and 12th Street, a new luxury apartment complex in the Corridor is celebrated as "a unique urban project that recognizes the importance of community and

¹⁰⁵ Built in 1895, this was home to Herman and Anne Schieffer, pillars in the Austin's African American community. After their deaths, the home served as the Travis County Negro Agricultural Extension Service and as "a gathering place for 'movers and shakers' in African American politics in the 1960s" (City of Austin, "Community Celebrates").

cultural heritage” (quoted in Forestar Group, Inc. and Canyon-Johnson Urban Fund) and infrastructure improvements are seen as “contributing to the preservation or vitality of cultural or historical assets, sense of place, or neighborhood character” (EPS, Inc. et al. 16). African American cultural heritage is a commodity that is marketed to encourage tourism and generate development and the Corridor gets marketed as the hip home to Austin’s original blues scene in an effort to promote Austin as an authentic city with soul, music capital of the world, and progressive haven in big red state. While the desire for diversity is expressed, acceptable diversity is contingent on its ability to be consumed, according to Kaltmeier, who argues “in the postmodern urban economy, ethnicity must sell in order to gain the right of recognition” (15).

Even if consciously experienced as a sincere desire for diversity, a rhetorical style of gentrification that commodifies blackness also only accepts it within particular parameters that serve to contain and control difference. Sanders speaks to the rhetorical nature of this effort noting that Austin “redefines progressive sentiment and fantasies as equal to thoughts and action. But desiring inclusion is not the same as actively creating it, which is what makes Austin exhausting for black people.” This, she explains, is the reason, a lot of black people are leaving Austin, but even that sobering fact gets marketed as a narrative about diversity that serves the interests of whiteness.

The second element of marketed blackness rhetorically shapes Austin’s African Americans into consumers, moving out to the suburbs to pursue the American dream. The alarming rate at which African Americans are moving out of Central East Austin doesn’t jive with the City’s progressive identity, so the narrative is framed in a way that turns displacement into a tale of integration, and gentrification into a profitable mode of development that benefits all. In an undated list of the “Top Ten Demographic Trends in Austin, Texas” on the City of Austin website, the decline of African Americans is

referred to as a “shallow slide” and “dispersion and flight to the suburbs.” The City is careful to note that “the level of residential segregation for African Americans has dropped significantly as their level of spatial concentration has diminished” (Robinson). Sure, we’re seeing the numbers drop, but at the same time, reports the *Austin American-Statesman*, “black families have moved into middle-class neighborhoods across the city, becoming more integrated” (Castillo, “City Effort”).

As reports about Austin’s shifting demographics emerged, many local news sources and City boosters were quick to show the silver lining. When 78702 (E 11th and 12th Street Corridor’s zip code) was identified in 2013 as one of the fastest gentrifying neighborhoods in the country, *Texas Monthly* noted some might think of the demographic change optimistically quoting education researcher Michael J. Petrilli who argued that “gentrification – for all of its downsides – is providing a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity to integrate some of our schools” (Cohen). In another response to this study, a local newsblog, *Austinist*, shared a similar sentiment noting it “could be an incredible opportunity to achieve actual diversity” for the long-segregated city (Friel). In an article in the *Austin American-Statesman*, state demographer Lloyd Potter equated the move of African Americans to Austin’s suburbs with common sense calling it “logical as more blacks were able to move into middle- and upper-middle-class homes.” The article goes on to note, “Demographers say the call of the suburbs transcends race” (Castillo, “Census Shows”).¹⁰⁶ Here hegemonic and racial aspects of the rhetorical style of gentrification come into play as race is undermined or ignored and narratives actively work to produce common sense understandings of what is taking place.

¹⁰⁶ The article goes on to profile a couple who moved their family from Austin to Pflugerville, noting that the family still have their hearts in Austin, but their desire for better schools and more affordable living was the reason behind their move.

When UT professor, Eric Tang's *Washington Post* op-ed on the "absolute loss" of African-Americans in Austin came out in late 2014, Nate Silver's *FiveThirtyEight* political website called the numbers into question. Author Kirk Goldsberry suggested the reported decline of Austin's African American population is largely inflated if we move beyond the city limits and expand to the metro area and describes the report as "overly simplified" and "irresponsible," arguing "Not everyone defecting from East Austin is a victim." The shift from the characterization of victimhood and displacement to consumers is also reflected in the city demographer's rhetoric who says gentrification is not the cause of black flight to the suburbs, but "the main reason for the decline is a marked improvement in the African-American community's economic standing in the Austin Area They are voluntarily leaving as they enter the middle class to move to the suburbs for better schooling systems and more house for the value" (quoted in Ricke).

This narrative suggests that people want to move and emphasizes the ways in which long-time residents can profit off home sales. While homeowners wealth on paper may increase with the values of their properties and "[s]ome homeowners view the rising property values as a windfall . . . [that] represents the chance to send a child to college, buy a new home in a different neighborhood, or simply feel that you have enough to retire" (Zavos), moving isn't always ideal and African Americans still feel pushed out. Contrary to the City's stance on the matter, "not all black Austin-area residents who've moved to the suburbs are doing so because they've long dreamed of living in Pflugerville" (Solomon). Stories that frame the move to the burbs as a choice (either to pursue better schools, or cheaper rent, or to "cash out" on property) instead of a necessity abound in articles about gentrification in Central East Austin (Flynn; Goldsberry; Ricke; Robertson, S. Smith, "Fair Shakes"; Solomon; Spearman; United States Federal Reserve System; Zavos). Not only does this narrative frame the move as a choice but as a

profitable one, perpetuating the idea that gentrification is a rising tide that lifts all ships and everyone benefits.

Considering this framing using whiteness as a theoretical lens, we are reminded of the ways in which this narrative privileges and perpetuates whiteness. White bodies moving into spaces are framed in the positive, essentially making the case that whiteness is a valuable commodity. A headline in the *Austin American-Statesman* that reads “Census Data Depict Increasingly Diverse Austin Neighborhoods: ‘Profound’ Desegregation Seen in Black Community” only serves to perpetuate this idea. The narrative that speaks to the financial success of African Americans who sell homes at a large profit also seems to frame success in largely white terms, which “testifies to the triumph of a racialized system wherein such individual attitudes and successes are merely incidental to advancing the interests of whites” (Berger 174). While African Americans moving out of the Corridor may profit through home sales, they still have to leave their neighborhoods and the community they’ve formed there and, in many cases, those who purchased their home or land profit at a much higher degree (Spearman). Peake sums up the connection between whiteness and hegemony in this strategy well,

Processes of suburbanization and decentralization are instances of white privilege, revealing how the virtually total freedom of movement of white people is predicated on the spatial entrapment of non-white people. This differential mobility can be . . . naturalized, as in journeys to work or to homes in the suburbs, producing spatialities through which whiteness and white privilege are maintained and rendered as natural. (251)

Visibility, the rhetorical style of gentrification teaches us, is only employed when it suits the interests of whiteness. Marking and marketing blackness are two of the ways in which

we see it put to use in the discourses about gentrification in the East 11th and 12th Street Corridor.

This case study demonstrates the ways in which race cannot and should not be divorced from the concept of gentrification. Through the intersection of hegemony, whiteness, and style, we are able to expose some of the ways in which gentrification is justified, legitimized, and made to appear like a natural, and even benevolent force. The rhetorical style of gentrification points out some of the ways in which the idea of public opinion and the appeal to the interests of multiple groups are relied upon to generate consent and produce hegemonic understandings of gentrification. This chapter also exposes some of the ways in which a focus on style and the use of aesthetic rationales in development strategies might privilege particular groups and put others at a disadvantage. The East 11th and 12th Street Corridor's association with market contexts also speaks to some of the ways in which style connects consumption and citizenship ensuring claims about the right to the city are legitimized through the market, rather than any other measure. Finally, this chapter focused on the ways in which visibility and the production of invisibility operate in gentrifying neighborhoods. The marking and marketing of blackness combined with the supposedly non-racial variable of style work to ensure whiteness and the privileges it produces are rendered invisible in the context of the gentrifying city.

Chapter 6: Conclusion

When I started focusing on gentrification in my research, most people who asked about my work didn't know what the word gentrification meant. Today, gentrification is so ubiquitous across the country and around the world that I rarely have to explain to anyone what gentrification is anymore. Despite the fact that it may look quite different from city to city and neighborhood to neighborhood, gentrification is accompanied by a style that is increasingly familiar to most of us. The visual, discursive, and performative elements of gentrification's style are easily recognizable and have come to represent a rhetorical style of gentrification.

As the culmination of this dissertation, this chapter will offer a summary of the manuscript and some key takeaways from my research, I'll move on to broader implications and end by discussing some of the limitations of my research as well as consider what future research might explore.

SUMMARY

At the start of this dissertation I posed three research questions: How has gentrification achieved such powerful hegemonic status? What is the rhetoric that maintains this hegemony and, more specifically, how is the hegemony of gentrification perpetuated through visual, material, and discursive rhetorics? And what strategies are put to use in order to justify and legitimize gentrification? The simple answer to these questions is style. Style has been put to use to help gentrification achieve such powerful hegemonic status. Style is the rhetoric that maintains this hegemony. And style is employed to justify and legitimize gentrification.

To answer my research questions chapter two developed a theoretical lens for exploring gentrification at the intersection of theories of hegemony, whiteness, and style.

This theoretical approach invited me to think about style's connection to gentrification in two ways. First, it invited me to examine how style (in the material and visual sense) is employed in gentrification discourses in order to garner support. Second, this approach also allowed me to explore gentrification as a rhetorical style itself, wherein elements of hegemony and whiteness are expressed through style to perpetuate particular perspectives on gentrification. That is to say, this theoretical approach allowed me to examine how style, talk-about-style, and politically styled discourses are employed to achieve particular ends.¹⁰⁷ As previously mentioned, much of the gentrification research looks at the causes or results of gentrification, but there has been little research on discourses of gentrification. This manuscript sought to fill that gap and has demonstrated the ways in which communication (and more specifically the rhetorical style of gentrification) plays a significant role in the production and maintenance of gentrification in our changing urban landscapes.

In chapter three I developed a method for exploring a rhetorical style of gentrification and delineated what to look for and what questions to ask when examining this phenomenon. When approaching my case studies and artifacts, I looked for the elements of rhetorical style (aesthetic rationales, market contexts, primacy of texts, imaginary communities, and stylistic homologies) and explored ways in which discourses involved struggle over style or seemed to be dominated by style. This methodological approach also asked me to consider how “public opinion,” appeals to multiple groups through style, and “common sense” understandings of gentrification were employed to generate consent. And because a focus on race was such an important factor in this research, I also examined the ways in which whiteness was privileged, race was ignored

¹⁰⁷ This echoes Brummett's assertion that a rhetoric of style exists in politics which feature both the manipulation of style (e.g. visualizations of the future neighborhood) and commentary on style (e.g. community meetings that focus on style) (“Introduction”).

or made invisible, and how race was sometimes commodified or aestheticized via a rhetorical style of gentrification. To apply this method I looked at a range of artifacts and texts from community meetings, to slide presentations, architectural renderings, community surveys, articles in local publications, and neighborhood planning strategies.

Austin's East Riverside Drive and 11th and 12th Street Corridors served as the case studies in chapters four and five. Throughout this dissertation I argued that a rhetorical style of gentrification serves to justify, legitimize, naturalize, and drive gentrification and both case studies highlighted the power of style in shaping discourses, opinions, the articulation of problems and solutions, and public sentiment about our gentrifying cities. In the East Riverside Corridor case study, I argued that the planning process was flawed from the start and questioned the widely accepted style of city planning (with its focus on style, "community" input, and visioning processes). My analysis in this chapter allowed me to argue that a) a focus on style privileges property over people, b) the "community-driven" process operates within a hegemonic framework and centers on the future community rather than the existing one, and c) a style-focused visioning process privileges whiteness. In the 11th and 12th Street Corridor case study, race and who benefits from gentrification were put at the forefront. The analysis in this chapter, gave us a closer look at how the rhetorical style of gentrification operates in political contexts, allowing us to identify the ways in which public planning gets connected to private interests and argue that race is both indivisible from and made invisible by gentrification. This chapter illuminated the ways in which the rhetorical style of gentrification helps construct a) gentrification and gentrifiers as a benevolent force, b) desire for neighborhood change and improvement as consent to gentrification, and c) displacement as diversity.

Though the two gentrifying neighborhoods are quite different, they both speak to the power of the rhetorical style of gentrification. Both case studies point to the fact that

the community planning process fails to live up to its social promise to address the needs of current residents and that failure, in part, can be attributed to the overwhelming focus on style. The case studies teach us that the centrality of style in discourses of gentrifying neighborhoods diverts our attention from other issues and functions to depoliticize the otherwise serious issues that accompany neighborhood “revitalization.” Style, in both case studies, is the mechanism through which place is problematized and serves as the solution to problems neighborhoods face. The supremacy of style sets up a particular way of looking, assessing, and understanding city change and ultimately reproduces and naturalizes existing systems of inequality. All of these elements speak to gentrification as a rhetorical style, and importantly highlight the fact that gentrification is a hegemonic force that serves and ultimately privileges whiteness. This contention thus breaks down some of the common arguments in support of gentrification.

The idea that gentrification is natural and inevitable is questioned in these case studies, which point to the fact that gentrification occurs by design. Historic policies and modes of development, planning and participation, and the construction of spaces through style all play a part in the production of gentrification. The case studies also push back against the assumption that gentrification is a rising tide that lifts all ships. Both case studies point to the fact that gentrification overwhelmingly produces privileges for new, white, middle-class residents while long-time residents of color are disproportionately disadvantaged, often in the name of style. Both case studies also problematize the argument that when we talk about neighborhood revitalization and redevelopment we are *just* talking about style or *just* talking about buildings. The rhetorical style of gentrification demonstrates the fact that style is substantive and when we talk about buildings we are also talking about who is inside.

IMPLICATIONS, CONTRIBUTIONS, AND RECOMMENDATIONS

At the outset of this dissertation, I took both an analytical and interventionist stance. I hoped my analysis would provide some insights into the ways in which gentrification had come to achieve such hegemonic status as well as to unearth some of the rhetorical tactics employed in the production and maintenance of gentrification. Thinking about gentrification as a rhetorical style was a useful tool for analyzing the power of gentrification discourses, style, hegemony, and whiteness. This manuscript has demonstrated why it is productive to think of gentrification as a rhetorical style as style is so often dissociated from meaningful and influential elements of discourse. Barbara Biesecker writes, “At some point, in the midst of our weaving a disciplinary self, style was situated on the bias. It became the ‘odd term in our relations of power,’ that part of ourselves that was constituted as non-sense, as insignificant – as that which lures but does not teach, delights but does not move” (362). I hope this work has illuminated some of the ways style is connected to power, sense-making, and is significant. The rhetorical style of gentrification both lures and teaches, delights and moves, and thus is consequential and deserves our attention. While sometimes the “facts” and statistical evidence presented in analyses of gentrification can point to positive city change, conceptualizing gentrification as a rhetorical style offers a more well-rounded picture of gentrification and its discourses. It is productive to think about gentrification as a rhetorical style because it lets us interrogate the rhetoric of growth and progress, lets us shine a light on the ways in which gentrification privileges particular identities, and contributes a critical perspective to interdisciplinary dialogue and mediates some of the scholarly debates about gentrification.

This work contributes to the gaps in the literature on gentrification in a number of ways. The call to examine discourses of gentrification was answered in the research

conducted for this manuscript and moves beyond the empirical and theoretical to a discursive domain that has proven quite influential in gentrifying neighborhoods - style. Another issue highlighted in the literature suggests contemporary mainstream gentrification scholarship is not critical. This work is critical, analytical, and interventionist and seeks to provide some insights into the ways in which power and privilege are unevenly distributed via gentrification. One problem evident in much of the gentrification research is that class is often prioritized and the link between gentrification and race are too often ignored. Examining gentrification as a rhetorical style allowed this research to underscore the importance of race in studies of gentrification. The rhetorical style of gentrification helped us look at gentrification as a rhetorical practice that negatively impacts people of color and privileges whiteness and puts a spotlight on some of the racist disparities that gentrification perpetuates. The research conducted here also contributes to the literature on style and highlights some of the intended and unintended effects that style may produce in political and cultural spheres. Regarding rhetorical studies of style, Bradford Vivian writes, "Delineating rhetorical enactments of style . . . enhances previous research on the ever proliferating significance of style as a formative cultural, political, and aesthetic dimension of late modernity . . . this inherently elastic phenomenon requires an equally malleable set of theoretical and critical resources with which to fully apprehend its contemporary significance" ("The Problems" xiii). The theorization of a rhetorical style of gentrification offers one such resource for understanding how style operates in contemporary culture.

Based on the research conducted in this dissertation, there are several ways in which the findings of this study can be applied. First, this research speaks to the fact that style matters and discourse that focuses on style warrants our further interrogation. The seemingly non-racial variable of style plays a significant role in the process of

gentrification. Style is powerful tool of whiteness and hegemony and can unconsciously and unintentionally produce and protect privileges for particular groups while putting others at a disadvantage. The consequences of this are lasting and we need to build a better awareness of how we use style to talk about city change. Second, this research implores planners, advocates, academics, and cities to re-people the discourse. Style is substantive, so when we talk about style we *are* talking about people and need to become more explicit about that. We need to put people first when it comes to matters of city change and gentrification and that means taking a critical approach. Sarah Glynn laments the evacuation of critical perspectives in research arguing it “has allowed those displaced by gentrification to become invisible, so that writers talk about ‘re-urbanisation’ as though all who used to live or work in pre-gentrified city centres were not also people” (166). So much of the discourse about gentrification is disembodied and we need to tie it back to people. Race is one of the ways in which we can start to have a discussion about discourse that is tied to people. This leads to the third application, which is to suggest that we need to include race and displacement in our definitions of gentrification in order to continue to make visible the privileges it engenders. The organization People Organized for the Defense of Earth and her Resources (PODER) speak to the importance of defining gentrification in a way that includes race “because if you begin to analyze gentrification with a faulty conceptual definition the policy proposals that result from such analysis will necessarily be inadequate” (Almanza, Herrero, and Almanza 9). If we continue to act as if style is inconsequential, avoid talking about people when we discuss the places they live in, and ignore race when it plays such a significant role in gentrification we limit our understanding of gentrification, the rhetorics that sustain it, and the possibilities for better approaches to city change.

LIMITATIONS AND SUGGESTIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

Gentrification is a phenomenon affecting neighborhoods around the world. From cities to rural areas, London to Austin, East Riverside to 11th and 12th Streets, gentrification occurs in a variety of contexts. Despite the variability with which gentrification takes shape, this dissertation argues that the rhetorical style of gentrification is a powerful and influential tool that can be identified across multiple gentrifying contexts. A challenging site for rhetorical analysis (even when focusing on the same city but different neighborhoods), I've done my best to capture some of the more prevalent elements that connect gentrification with hegemony, whiteness, and style, but some limitations remain.

One limitation of this study has to do with the fact it was situated in Austin, Texas. This is a limitation for a number of reasons. First, I lived in Austin while much of the data collection was taking place. I'm connected to the town and to the neighborhoods I was studying, which could impact my take on the situation. I witnessed entire communities being razed to make way for luxury developments, which certainly had an impact on my anti-gentrification stance. Another issue with this study taking place in Austin has to do with the fact that I moved away in the middle of the project. Though I was able to come back to Austin several times to conduct research, I was unable to witness gentrification on the ground as well as I could have if I actually still lived in the city. The focus on Austin also limits the scope of this dissertation to just one city, but as I have already argued, what is happening in Austin is happening in places across the country and the case studies I evaluated are similar to neighborhoods experiencing gentrification in a variety of places. Future research might employ the rhetorical style of gentrification in other places. In my own experience of studying gentrification while living in San Francisco I see many of the same patterns being played out in my new city.

Looking at the power of style in different contexts would help build a case for being more critical of discourses focused on style.

A second limitation is that the insights this research produces come from one perspective. As was mentioned in chapter three, my role as researcher, privileged person, and community member impact the ways in which I perform rhetorical criticism. My standpoint as a white woman using critical whiteness theory in her research might offer different results than an immigrant studying gentrification on East Riverside or an African American studying the gentrification of the 11th and 12th Street Corridor, which would both provide invaluable and unique perspectives on the problem of gentrification in Austin, Texas. Though I tried to incorporate multiple perspectives through articles, op-eds, documentaries, and observation of discussions at community meetings, future research might incorporate interviews to get a different look at how style influences the way we view gentrification and city change.

A third limitation has to do with my area of expertise. Confident in my expertise as a rhetorical critic, the study of gentrification took me into uncharted territory. The disciplines of geography, urban planning, architecture, and sociology have often contributed to studies of gentrification and are areas I do not consider myself an expert. I did my best to understand these disciplines' vocabulary for talking about gentrification and to get a stronger sense of how people have examined gentrification from these perspectives in the past. I also had to familiarize myself with the history, terms, and processes typical of city planning in order to have a firm grasp on the politics of gentrification in Austin, Texas. I ultimately rely on my expertise in rhetorical criticism to conduct my analyses throughout this dissertation and focus on how rhetoric is employed in gentrification discourses to better understand it. Discourse can influence the emergence of gentrification in the first place, impact our perceptions of gentrification, and is an

important factor to consider as we seek to understand how gentrification operates, who it empowers, and who it impacts. Communication is a big piece of gentrification discourse so I'm hopeful future studies of gentrification will emerge from our own discipline as communication and rhetorical scholars can offer a critical intervention.

A final consideration has to do with the criteria I used to evaluate gentrification in my case studies. Having attended multiple community meetings and witnessed gentrification in my neighborhood, style stood out as an early contender when thinking about how gentrification is justified and legitimized. I focused my lens on style in my theoretical and methodological approach, but the application of different evaluative criteria may have led other critics to come to different conclusions. Regardless, this dissertation has shown style plays a significant role in gentrification so future studies might explore style to an even greater degree. Earlier in this work I argued that style might operate within a hegemonic structure but could be potentially used to shift it. If style is the dominant rhetoric by which gentrification is legitimized, future research might explore how style also might be an avenue that opens up the possibilities of critique and resistance.

CONCLUDING THOUGHTS

East Austin may be one of the fastest-gentrifying neighborhoods in the country (Berg "Fastest-Gentrifying"), but Austin is also a city that *Forbes* named "The Fastest-Growing City in the Nation," the "Best City for Jobs," and has become a popular destination for those seeking a slice of the city's carefully cultivated image of a progressive, young, and creative lifestyle. The cultivation of a city's style is inherently communicative and rhetorical as cities send strategic messages that speak to particular audiences in a "determined effort" to shape perceptions of our cities and city spaces

(Gibson and Lowes, 4). In other city accolades, East Austin was voted seventh on *Forbes'* list of "America's Hippest Hipster Neighborhoods" (Brennan). Austin's path towards growth is fast and furious and such labels promote the idea that change is good for all, suffocate debate, and seem to require that any public deliberation about the change Austin is experiencing take place on the level of style. Austin is just one example of a larger pattern that characterizes urban change and gentrification in cities everywhere.

Throughout this dissertation I have argued that gentrification is a rhetorical style made up of a range of visual, material, and performative discursive texts. When it comes to gentrification, style is a political instrument with the power to organize our social world. It has been put to use to legitimize displacement and wholesale redevelopment, can perpetuate inequalities, and has a lasting impact. Style is far more meaningful and powerful than we give it credit for. And because it seems that any form of public deliberation about city change take place in the register of style (e.g. form based code, regulating plans, visions of future city spaces), then it is towards style we must turn to see how power and advantage are acquired by and stripped from particular identities via the rhetorical style of gentrification.

This dissertation has operated within the hegemonic category of style to critique some of the ways it has been employed as a tool to serve empowered interests. The way we talk about style and the style we use to talk about places has real, lived consequences. Loic Wacquant attests that the "mission of critical thought . . . [is] to perpetually question the obviousness and the very frames of civic debate so as to give ourselves a chance to think the world, rather than being thought by it, to take apart and understand its mechanisms, and thus to reappropriate it intellectually and materially" ("Constellations"). I hope this dissertation has delivered a critical perspective on gentrification that invites us to think about gentrification and style in a new way, to question the common assumptions

about gentrification in the city, and to dismantle some of the mechanisms employed in justifying gentrification when so many are negatively affected by it.

I love Austin, I miss living there, and its natural and cultural gifts abound. When I tell people I lived in Austin I'm met with questions about this amazing city, its vibrant cultural scene, and liberal politics, but this research reveals a dark side to the city. According to Joshunda Saunders, who wrote about her experience being black in Austin, "so many people are invested in believing that Austin is the best that they refuse to see its flaws in order to change them." The goal of this dissertation has been to shed light on some of those flaws so that we might address them, and ultimately create cities, towns and neighborhoods that are great places to live, equitable places to live, and maybe even a little weird too.

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