

My Final Project is a series of ten paper houses. Each house is constructed by hand-colored, hard ground and aquatint copper etchings. Every house is unique in its coloring and the combination of prints that make up its walls. I chose to take intaglio prints into the third dimension because it marries my curiosity for printmaking with my love for sculpture. The images that adorn each house depict my study of gentrification.

Gentrification is the act of wealthier classes moving to and living in areas that already have a community of less wealthy people. As the presence of the wealthier increases, the cost of living in that area increases as well. Businesses and industry adjust to make profit and support the demands of this new demographic. This means the original businesses and inhabitants of the neighborhood can no longer afford to compete with the incoming people and are pushed to move. Consequently, many are forced to relocate to neighborhoods with environmental health concerns, because they offer the cheapest real estate.

I illustrate these themes here, showing people involved in the process of being dislocated—the physicality of their homes and the environments these residents potentially face. In instances of gentrification, not only does the demographic of an area change, but the landscape changes as well. The imagery on each house represents the cycle between an area's gentrified and affordable states.

Ezri

Silver bracelets jingle each time the white haired woman raises a spoonful of gelato to her lips. Between bites, she talks in a Southern accent about the house she's renting just a few blocks from the Plaza where she's sitting now. Next to her on the green bench is a handcrafted leather purse, and two plastic bags emblazoned with the logos of the nearby storefronts in the adjacent hotel. Wafts of chile aroma and cooking food filter out the open windows of the surrounding restaurants. Each of them are packed with the out-of-towners who can afford the up-scaled prices on the menus. A violinist busks on the corner under the streetlamp, smiling at the passing tourists and encouraging generosity from their pockets. Under the portal, Natives sell handmade art to the fascinated patrons. They devour the crafts and jewelry, hungry to have souvenirs of the rustic Southwest to show friends when they return home. Many are impressed by Santa Fe's demographic and rich culture, a mixture of native and Hispanic tradition preserved in the capital of New Mexico. This sought after "flavor" resulted from a series of colonization over the course of hundreds of years, yet the word "colonization," meaning "to move into and live in (a place) as a new type of plant or animal"<sup>1</sup> is usually associated as being a thing of the past. Then what is it that can be observed in the other parts of town, where people move into neighborhoods and uproot the locals there?

Gentrification accounts for these modern day examples of colonization. PBS program, *Flag Wars*, defines gentrification as "the arrival of wealthier people in an existing urban district, a related increase in rents and property values, and changes in the district's character and culture."<sup>2</sup> This means that Santa Fe demonstrates this action, from the wealthy tourists crowding the local attractions, back to the settlement and surges of people brought by the railroad. While gentrification redirects the diversity of a place, it causes overall problems for the people who were there originally. *Flag Wars* also suggests "the term is often used negatively, suggesting the displacement of poor communities by rich outsiders"<sup>3</sup> Gentrification makes areas too expensive for those of a lower class to afford living costs. This means people are often forced to find cheaper housing in environments that are hazardous to their health. Air and water pollution, mining, and general waste are some of these damaging factors. Typically, those who are forced to move, are from minority groups, since people of color usually make less money in the United States.<sup>4</sup> In other words, gentrifying an area re-enforces environmental racism. Environmental Racism is "racial disparities... including but not limited to the increased likelihood of being exposed to environmental hazards [and] disproportionate negative impacts of environmental processes."<sup>5</sup> Gentrification also displaces people from their jobs, meaning they have to find usually less desirable work that yields less income, or making it more difficult. This essay will address three communities that have been affected by these conditions.

Santa Fe, New Mexico was inhabited by the Tewa people until Spanish expeditions in the mid-1500s began claiming the land for the King.<sup>6</sup> Now, it is a home to "The Jicarilla Apache Nation and the Mescalero Apache Reservation [and] a portion of the Navajo Nation."<sup>7</sup> This portion will address the Navajo Nation's colonization that led to unfair environmental hazards imposed on its people as the Southwest was gentrified. In 1853, New Mexico became part of the United States.<sup>8</sup> Just over 10 years later, in 1864, the Long Walk led by Kit Carson forced over 10,000 Navajos from their homes in Arizona to a barren land in New Mexico that could not yield a sustainable life.<sup>9</sup> Before 1838, 46,000 Natives had been relocated from their homelands.<sup>10</sup> The history, sacredness, and traditions of their land have been destroyed to supply a richer class with more profit and opportunities. Many of these relocated tribes could never return to their homelands, and their place of origin was left to the questionable justice of the area's next land grab, or today, the next urban planner. Those who returned home faced a new challenge of living

safely, like the Navajo did when they went back to their ancestral homeland in the four corners area.<sup>11</sup> The 2010 Census reported that the Navajo Nation's average household income, "is approximately half that of the State of Arizona," making a typical home earn \$27,389 a year.<sup>12</sup> Environmental issues plague the reservations in the United States: "It is estimated that almost 1 in 10 American Indian homes are without safe and reliable water."<sup>13</sup> Unemployment is rampant as well. Today, their original land is now being mined for profit, even though legal rights to the land belong to the Navajo, and much of the economy in the Navajo nation has been based on the mining of natural resources such as coal and uranium.<sup>14</sup> "From 1944 to 1986, nearly four million tons of uranium ore were extracted from Navajo lands under leases with the Navajo Nation. Many Navajo people worked the mines, often living and raising families in close proximity to the mines and mill."<sup>15</sup> In order to combat poverty so the Navajo Nation can survive in the United States, the Navajo are forced to take jobs that severely infringe on their health. "Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) has identified 15,000 abandoned uranium mine locations with uranium occurrence in 14 western states with about 75% of those on federal and tribal lands." Worst of all, the workers were never informed about the harmful effects of radioactivity, or even that radioactivity existed.<sup>16</sup> As a result, entire communities were affected. In the case of Ship Rock New Mexico, 133 out of 150 Navajo uranium miners died from lung related diseases or cancers.<sup>17</sup> These preventable deaths have devastated many, and though the causes are recognized, the Navajo still deal with the effects of mining today.

Many miles Northwest of the Navajo Nation, in San Francisco, California, the entire community faces another variation of gentrification that may compromise their health. San Francisco is U.S.A. Travel's "7th largest tourist destination in the United States,"<sup>18</sup> causing the price of living to grow immense amounts. Rent rates increased 14% in the past two years according to KRON 4 News based in San Francisco. This marks the average monthly cost of a one-bedroom-apartment as \$3,500.<sup>19</sup> Part of this change has to do with an issue that has graced the ballots of this year's voters in the city; the amount of vacation rental homes in the San Francisco.<sup>20</sup> The SF Chronicle reports that on websites like the biggest perpetrator, Airbnb, there are 5,459 listings for vacation housing rentals in the area. More than half of the offers are for entire houses. The prices to stay in these listed places spans from around \$40 to \$300 dollars. At maximum cost, the compilation of 31 days of vacation rentals would make the homeowner \$9,300.<sup>21</sup> Rental homes raise the cost by simple supply and demand; the less permanent housing available, the more people are willing to pay for it.

However, most working class citizens cannot expand their housing budget to match the demands of the market. In 2000, "only 17 percent of Bay Area households [could] afford a median-priced home," which suggests that number has significantly dropped 15 years later with the climbing price of rent.<sup>22</sup> So, if people can't compete to find and pay for housing in the neighborhoods they lived in, where do they go?

One of the cheapest neighborhoods to live is Bayview Hunter's Point, which not coincidentally, is also "one of the most toxic sites in San Francisco."<sup>23</sup> The old shipyard area that preceded it was home to the Naval Radiological Defense Laboratory for about twenty years starting in the late forties. This lab tested methods to decontaminate "ships exposed to atomic weapons testing as well as...the effect of radiation on living organisms and the effects of radiation on materials."<sup>24</sup> This left the area a radioactive health concern. These undesirable qualities are reflected in the discount price. The inability of the lower class to find alternative residency forces them to settle. By default, the neighborhood consists heavily of people who would be considered racial minorities in the greater scheme of San Francisco.

In Hunter's Point, 45.3% of the community is black or African-American, while citywide these same groups represent only 7.6% of the population. These figures are very close to being exact inverse in total of white people in these areas. The rates of whites in the city to Hunter's Point are 43.6% to 5.7% and Hispanics see a 2% increase between the two.<sup>25</sup> This illustrates the prevalence of environmental racism stemming from wage disparities between the groups.

Abundance of minorities in cheaper areas can also be observed in Harlem. Harlem is a neighborhood in northern Manhattan. The demographics of this borough are 60.5% black, 29.5% Hispanic, 5% white.<sup>26</sup> Air pollution plagues the west side of the area due to the general bad quality in the city, in addition to the direct pollutant of methane coming from the North River sewage treatment plant. The off-gassing of this plant has been recorded by a publication *Roots of Health Inequity* as "foul enough to choke." Not only are the fumes disgusting, but they are also dangerous. Since the installment of the plant, "symptoms often related to asthma and other respiratory ailments" have become more common amongst citizens of this area. The project, started in 1972, cleared away many people to build the plant that takes up 28 acres of land. The same study states "enforced slum clearance and relocation segregates New Yorkers by race and income, and creates new slums to replace the old."<sup>27</sup> In this situation, it appears that the state developed project is the gentry, forcing change in an area, meanwhile, removing locals.

In Harlem's case, not just the development that caused health hazards is what is imposing on way of life.<sup>28</sup> Like San Francisco, New York is constantly growing, and the prices to live there are climbing. In areas like Brooklyn, non-minorities who are simply middle-class cannot afford to live there. So, they are also moving to neighborhoods like Harlem, furthering the displacement of locals there. "From 2000 to 2005, 32,500 blacks moved out and some 22,800 whites moved into the Harlem district"; their presence increases the price of living there as well.<sup>29</sup> Since 2011, New York has seen growing rates of homelessness than ever before, peaking at over 60,000 people in shelters in 2015.<sup>30</sup> This suggests that there is a correlation between rapid gentrification and having a place to live.

The economy makes the cost of living grow steadily more expensive, making it so fewer can continue their lifestyle, or achieve a comfortable one. Affordability prompts migration for people of all classes, but has disproportionate effect on impoverished peoples, since initially, they already are at a disadvantage. Many low-income people in the United States are minorities. This means they are already in competition with each other to find places they can afford to live, many of which are in hazardous environments. However, now that typical middle-class areas are too expensive for the middle-class, they also seek out the cheaper parts of town. Here the cycle starts again. The minorities are pushed out of their claimed areas, because the middle-class is still at a monetary advantage over them when they start to move in. Prices begin to rise again; options for the original community are slim. This results in increases in homelessness, resorting to dangerous jobs, and further environmental racism that moves people to even worse conditions.

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