WELCOME TO TURN THE TABLES

DEAR HOST,

On behalf of the team at Repair the World, a national nonprofit that mobilizes Jews to volunteer, we want to THANK YOU for joining us in hosting a Turn the Tables Dinner.

We're inspired that your passion moved you to use your time, energy, and dollars to create the space for people to have meaningful conversations. Throughout the month of April, you'll join thousands of people across the country dining together and engaging in important dialogue about the issues impacting their communities.

For this campaign, we're focused on gentrification – the ways that economic, demographic and social changes affect residents of our neighborhoods. Through structured dialogue and meaningful action, we believe that we can come together to build more resilient and inclusive communities.

The resources in this Host Guide will help you facilitate important conversations. We have created many different activities for you to choose from. Please use the ones that resonate most with you and your guests.

Some more observant Jews refrain from writing or watching videos on Shabbat and Jewish holidays. If you are hosting your dinner over a Jewish holiday meal and either you or others at your table are traditionally observant, feel free to use any of the already holiday-friendly activities or adapt the others accordingly.

We hope that you and your guests leave your dinner with a new awareness about the world around you, having had the opportunity to speak up about complex issues surrounding gentrification, and feel inspired to take action and become better neighbors.

It's because of leaders like you that the world can change: table by table and city by city. Thanks again for all you do – and all you did to make this dinner possible!

Repair the World
weRepair.org

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HOST GUIDE

Thank you again for hosting a Turn the Tables Dinner to discuss the transitions that many of our communities are experiencing. This program has several ingredients: a tasty meal, some meaty conversation about important issues, and an opportunity to get involved.

GETTING STARTED

Read through the Host Guide

Review the TALKING ABOUT GENTRIFICATION tip sheet about how you can facilitate a respectful discourse about a touchy subject with which we come in contact everyday.

WHET YOUR APPETITE

Appetizer: Opening Activity

We believe in setting intentions by imagining the world as it should be, to then meet it where it is. With our A NEIGHBORHOOD IS... activity, we ask you to start off the dinner by leading your guests in reflecting on what a neighborhood means to them.

Choose your discussion entrée

Decide which conversation guide you’d like to chew on.

- Discussion Entrée Option 1: Jewish Perspectives on Being a Newcomer
- Discussion Entrée Option 2: A Tale of Too Many Cities: A Gentrification Game
- Discussion Entrée Option 3: “Bushwick, Brooklyn”: A Saturday Night Live Digital Short
- Discussion Entrée Option 4: Gentrification: “It’s not about race…”
- Discussion Entrée Option 5: Street Art and its Role in Gentrification
- Discussion Entrée Option 6: Choose Your Own!

SIMMER, DO NOT BOIL.

Productive Discomfort is encouraged.

Feeling uncomfortable can generate learning and growth. Keep your At a Glance: Tips for Facilitating a Respectful Discussion on hand during the meal so you can have a filling conversation that makes everyone feel just a bit uncomfortable—and at ease.

TAKE ACTION!

Join us in weekly Better Neighbor Challenges leading up to May 6, Lag B’omer, a holiday that’s celebrated 33 days after the first day of Passover by visiting www.turn-the-tables.org/take-action/. All over the world, Jews celebrate Lag B’omer in outdoor spaces as communities, often around bonfires. This year, we are moved to build community in the streets and stoops of our neighborhoods by intentionally contributing positively to the environments where we live. Don’t forget to tell us how it goes! Email us at danielle@werepair.org. Or connect with us on Facebook, Twitter or Instagram @RepairtheWorld, #TurntheTables!

IF YOU NEED SUPPORT

While we can’t help you prepare the dinner, we hope to help you prepare for the discussion. If you have questions contact danielle@werepair.org.

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TALKING ABOUT GENTRIFICATION

The first step to building inclusive communities is to talk open and honestly, which you’re about to do – so, BRAVO! Talking about gentrification is challenging. There is a reason why this section about how to hold the conversation is much longer than the actual discussion questions! Know that being uncomfortable isn't always a bad thing, as long as everyone's voices are heard, listened to, and respected.

Your goal as the host should be to create a safe space where individuals can express their opinions honestly, ask difficult questions (inspired by our Passover traditions), and where the feelings of the group are valued and protected.

The ultimate measure of a man is not where he stands in moments of comfort and convenience, but where he stands in times of challenge and controversy. – Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.

A FEW TIPS ON FACILITATING HONEST AND RESPECTFUL DISCOURSE AT YOUR EVENT:

APPOINT A FACILITATOR. Before your meal, decide among your guests who should lead the discussion. As the host, the best leader is likely you, but if you're not comfortable in that role, ask a friend. A discussion leader guides the discussion – s/he doesn't dominate it. If things get out of hand, or if voices are being blocked out, the facilitator intervenes.

ACKNOWLEDGE THAT THIS MIGHT BE UNCOMFORTABLE FOR YOUR GUESTS TO TALK ABOUT. It’s sort of the elephant in the room, but in many cases, it helps to say out loud what others are feeling: “I know we don’t usually talk about gentrification at the dinner table, and it might make you or others feel uncomfortable, and that’s ok.”

SET GROUP GROUND RULES. Collectively, decide on a set of rules for your discussion. These could be formal, such as “whoever holds the spoon speaks,” or “if you agree, wave jazz hands.” These rules could also be more informal, including “whatever is said in this room, stays in this room.”

DO NOT TOKENIZE PEOPLE. Individuals can only speak to their own experiences, and it puts unfair pressure on your guests to ask them to represent their cultural identity. Do not look to others to speak on behalf of their race, gender, or ethnicity. For example, there is a great deal of diversity within the Jewish experience, and not one single individual can speak to its totality.

ENSURE THAT EVERYONE WHO WANTS TO, GETS A CHANCE TO SPEAK. Very frequently, individuals who are most comfortable expressing their opinions can dominate conversations like these. Being verbal about one’s opinions isn’t necessarily an indicator of how strong those opinions are. Make sure the facilitator respectfully asks for the opinions of others if a few voices begin to dominate the conversation.

BE RESPECTFUL OF INTROVERTS – AND OF SILENCE. Make sure the facilitator is noticing who is not speaking. Encourage those individuals to contribute, but do not force them. Similarly, if the conversation reaches a point of silence, do not push people to speak. Be respectful of reflection.

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TALKING ABOUT GENTRIFICATION

A FEW “NEXT STEPS” IN THE EVENT THAT THE DISCUSSION BECOMES HEATED OR UNCOMFORTABLE:

AVOID “RIGHT” AND “WRONG.” While some opinions are commonly accepted as “right,” it is unproductive to cast someone’s statements or beliefs as “wrong.”

IF YOU’RE OFFENDED, SHARE – DON’T BLAME. Ignorance is not animosity. Use the “I felt....when you...” format to discuss how someone's statement was perceived by you personally. For example, you could say, “I felt offended when you said that your grandfather worked himself into the middle class, and therefore anyone could achieve the American dream if they tried hard enough. I felt that you might not have thought about the impact of institutional racism on the outcomes of immigrant, minority families.”

TRY NOT TO USE CHARGED LANGUAGE. If someone says something offensive, assume that they simply do not realize that they have said something hurtful. Calling them a racist is one surefire way to make the situation a lot worse. Use the opportunity to educate.

PROVIDE CONTEXT. Even though it’s difficult, try to explain why you believe what you believe. Provide examples, facts, and stories to illuminate your opinions, and encourage others to do the same.

DON’T GET STUCK IN FACTS. People often claim truth or fact to back up their opinions. Remind people that this is a conversation. Everyone’s personal experience matters. There are a lot of facts and disagreements by experts who study culture, economics, etc. Recommend that people share information to deepen the discussion, not to shut down the conversation.

But these are not the only questions we could ask. Any question is a way in. And every question is an act of freedom. So let us ask new questions, our own questions. – Rabbi Arthur Waskow, The Freedom Seder

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AT A GLANCE: Tips for facilitating a respectful discussion

TIPS FOR FACILITATING A RESPECTFUL DISCUSSION

Acknowledge that this conversation might be uncomfortable for you and your guests.

Set group ground rules.

Productive discomfort is encouraged.

Everyone speaks from their own perspective.

Ensure that everyone who wants to speak, gets to speak.

Be respectful of introverts – and of silence.

Avoid the terms “right” and “wrong.”

Use “I” statements to avoid blame.

Try not to use charged language.

Acknowledge that gentrification is complicated; it’s not just a dirty word.

Provide context.

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APPETIZER: OPENING ACTIVITY

A NEIGHBORHOOD IS...

Items Needed:

- “A Neighborhood Is” Name tag stickers (see printing instructions below)
- Pens/markers*

Framing:

We believe in setting intentions by imagining the world as it should be, to then meet it where it is. With our A NEIGHBORHOOD IS… activity, we ask you to begin your dinner by reflecting on what a neighborhood means to you and sharing that with others at your table.

Host Instructions:

In advance of your dinner, print the “A Neighborhood is…” stickers onto 3 ⅓” x 4” white shipping labels (eg. Avery® 8164™ Labels).

At the beginning of the dinner, take a moment to pass out the “A Neighborhood Is…” stickers and pens. Ask guests to write what a neighborhood means to them and wear the sticker.

Once everyone is done writing, go around the table and ask each guest to introduce themselves by sharing their name, what brought them to this dinner, and what they wrote on their sticker.

*NOTE: Some more observant Jews refrain from writing on Shabbat and Jewish holidays. If you are hosting your dinner over a Jewish holiday meal and either you or your guests are traditionally observant, feel free to omit the writing and asking guests to answer the “A Neighborhood is” prompt outloud. Feel free to adapt any of the other activities accordingly.

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DISCUSSION ENTREE OPTION 1

BEIT MIDRASH*: JEWISH PERSPECTIVES ON BEING A NEWCOMER

Items Needed:
Copies of the Beit Midrash*: Jewish Perspectives on Being a Newcomer Source Sheet

Framing:
As a religion focused on obligations, traditional Judaism has a good number of rules about welcoming guests and being a good host (hachnasat orchim). Interestingly, there are far fewer explicit instructions on how to be a good guest than there are on how to be a good host. Similarly, while there are many instructions for how to receive strangers, there are far fewer dictums regarding how to act when you move to a new place.

We will look to the texts that do exist on this topic to help us contextualize and explore the experience of being a newcomer in a neighborhood (or the relationship between newcomer and resident in hanging neighborhoods). Whether or not you observe traditional Jewish law, these traditional sources can offer us an additional perspective to grapple with the challenging questions of gentrification. We hope that these texts push us to place gentrification in the context of Jewish movement and encounters with the new and unfamiliar, and think about how Jewish history and tradition informs the relationship between newcomers and previous residents.

Host Instructions:
Share the framing above with guests and hand out copies of attached sources and Guiding Questions. Ask guests to find a partner and read through the sources together, referring to the Guiding Questions to prompt discussion. Some pairs should start with Source 1 while other pairs should start with Source 2.

Bring the pairs back together at the end to share back and to grapple with the Closing Questions as a full group.

1 Beit Midrash is Hebrew for “house of study,” or place where the students of Jewish Law gather to listen to the discourse or exposition of the Law. Here this term designates a space to engage together in text study.

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SOURCE SHEET

BEIT MIDRASH: JEWISH PERSPECTIVES ON BEING A NEWCOMER

A Note about Guiding Questions: The Guiding Questions listed at the end of the texts are a jump-off point for your conversation. They are not meant to constrain your conversation but to provide a trigger for a deeper, more organic dialogue with a partner.

Beit Midrash Tips: Read each source out loud together with a partner. Spend some time wondering about it out loud together before referring to the guiding questions. Read the guiding questions together. Allow space for each partner have the opportunity to share a response. This is a dialogue and a conversation! Sometimes sources won't make sense. Sometimes they challenge your perspectives. That's ok. Struggle with the sources! It is part of the total experience.

Source 1: Babylonian Talmud

Context: The Babylonian Talmud is a collection of Jewish stories, laws and debates grounded in the Bible and other Jewish texts. It was compiled in the fifth century in modern-day Iraq, but many portions of it are much older.

Here, the Talmud quotes and comments on a passage from a second-century text called the Mishnah. The Mishnah asks, “How long must a person live in a city to be counted among the people of that city?”, and presents the response, “Twelve months. If a person bought a house, he is immediately considered a to be a person of that city.” This prompts the Talmud to dive deeper and to consider what specific communal obligations a person takes on, depending on how long they have lived in the city.

Babylonian Talmud, Tractate Bava Batra 8a

When a person comes to live in a city, in thirty days, that person becomes obligated to contribute to the soup kitchen; in three months, to the communal charity fund; in six months, to the clothing fund; in nine months, to the burial fund; and in twelve months, for contributing to the upkeep of the city walls.

Guiding Questions:

- This text envisions newcomers slowly easing their way into communal obligations. Why might this be so?
- Do you agree with the list of obligations outlined here? What would you add or subtract from this list?
- What do you understand to be the rationale behind the prioritization of needs outlined in this text? Why do you think that new residents might take on these responsibilities in this order?
- Given these obligations, at what point in time does a newcomer move from being a newcomer to a “resident”? Do you agree with this timeline?
- What else does it take to become a member of the community besides contributing in the ways outlined in this text? Is contributing to these funds sufficient?

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Source 2: Jewish Encyclopedia

*Jewish Encyclopedia, “Hospitality: Duty of Guest” (citations omitted and formatting adjusted)*

The guest [in Jewish tradition] was [instructed] to show his gratitude to the host in various ways. . . .:

- While the host was to break bread first, the guest was expected to pronounce grace after the meal, in which he included a special blessing for the host…
- The guest was expected to leave some of the food on his dish, to show that he had more than enough. If, however, the host asked him to finish his portion, it was not necessary for him to leave any.
- It was the duty of the guest to comply with all the requests of the host.
- He might not give of his meal to the son or to the daughter or to the servant of the host without the host’s permission.

Guiding Questions:

- What responsibilities does this text put on guests? What other responsibilities do you think guests have in general?
- The phrase “being hospitable” most often refers to a host’s responsibilities. How does it feel to put parallel responsibilities on the guest?
- When you’re serving as a host, what makes for an ideal guest? What makes someone a bad guest?
- To what extent are people moving into a new neighborhood “guests”?
- How might the traditional Jewish responsibilities of guests be similar to or different from the responsibilities of someone moving into a new community?
- Does it matter how long a newcomer intends to live in the neighborhood? Does it matter if they’re renting or if they’ve bought a place to live?

Closing Questions (for the full group):

- What came up for you and your partner while reading these sources?
- When a person moves to a new neighborhood, for how long are they a “guest”? Can they ever fully become a “host”?
- What types of communal obligations does a guest/newcomer have? What types of communal obligations does a host/resident have?
- What are the steps of stages of transitions from guest to host, newcomer to resident, if the shift is even possible?

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A Tale of Too Many Cities: A Gentrification Game

Items Needed:

- Copies of game rules
- Copies of character cards (five character cards and one mediator instructions, per set)
- Copies of character scorecards (there are five scorecards in a set, one per character)
- Copies of Debrief Questions
- Pens
- Optional: Envelopes for character descriptions and scoreboards
- Optional: Props for each character (suggested props are listed on the character cards)

Framing:

The arts of role play and negotiation can be powerful tools when discussing complex issues such as gentrification and changing neighborhoods. This interactive game brings to life many of the key stakeholders in a neighborhood, explores their interests, and sheds light on how difficult it can be to reach consensus on these issues.

Host Instructions:

Before your dinner:

Read through the rules of the game and become well acquainted with each character, their interests and the mediator’s instructions. Print out copies of the rules, score cards and character descriptions according to the number of guests attending your meal.

Note: there are six roles represented in this game: five characters and one mediator. You will need to have at least six people at your dinner (including yourself) to play this game. Should you have more than six people, it will be up to you to decide whether to run simultaneous games or to have teams of people play one character together. Running simultaneous games can be interesting because it allows groups to achieve different possible outcomes.

Set your table in a way that guests will be able to play the game in groups of six (or six teams). Give each person a copy of the rules, a character/role description, and a score card.

To start the game:

Read the framing out loud and ask one of your guests to read through the rules of the game. Proceed according to the following rules (a link to the printable version is in the “Items Needed” section):

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OBJECTIVE

Together, with fellow stakeholders, you will develop a multi-use building in your neighborhood. You’ll want to factor in everyone’s needs and expectations, including your own, which you’ll find on your character card. To do this, you and the five other players will discuss the possible building uses: independent business, chain stores, market-rate housing, job training center, affordable housing and negotiate how many units will go toward each space use. In the end, everyone will try to arrive at a consensus of how to allocate 40 building units. If consensus is unattainable, a negotiated plan may pass by majority vote. Do NOT vote for a plan in which you get fewer than 40 points.

SCORING

You want to get as many points as you can. To get points: allocate building units towards each space use (see scorecard) and multiply by the numbers listed on your character card, noting the [+ ] and [−] signs.

IMPORTANT NOTE

The numbers in the “Your Position” section indicate your priorities, but remember: the conversation you have while deciding what to allocate is the most valuable part of the game. If at any point the game becomes just about the numbers, it is no longer a valuable activity.

GAME PLAY

1. Read through your character background and use the props to embody your role.
2. The mediator asks each character to introduce themselves before the game begins.
3. Using your character background and position, start to advocate for your needs and make your case. Remember to always stay in character.
4. Do not share your point values with anyone in your group.
5. You may not confer with anyone outside of your group.
6. Listen actively to the other people in your group.
7. Reach an agreement by consensus. If consensus is unattainable, you can pass a plan with a majority vote.
8. The mediator will guide the conversation and will initiate and close each negotiation round.

Game Play Suggestions:

● If you are serving multiple courses, it can be helpful to break up the game negotiation according to course. For example, before serving the main course, have guests read their character descriptions and then begin discussing their first interest: independent business. While serving the main course have guests discuss their interests around chain stores and then market rate housing. While serving salad, have them discuss job training centers and affordable housing, followed by full rounds of allocation negotiations (bringing in all interests at once) over dessert.

● Before the game begins, and throughout the meal, it can be helpful to check in with the mediator(s) to provide

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guidance and clarification.

- If you are playing the game with younger guests or don’t feel comfortable asking guests to do the math (arithmetic) over dinner, feel free to ignore the point values and just have guests just discuss their interests qualitatively. That said, most people who play this game find that the point values add a lot to their discussion and to the game.

**After all guests have either reached consensus, passed a majority vote or you have run out of time/energy:**

Pass out copies of the debrief questions below (a link to the printable version is in the “Items Needed” section) and facilitate a closing discussion.

**Debrief Questions:**

1. What felt most difficult about your negotiations? What felt too simple? What felt most like real life? What didn’t feel accurate?
2. Are there additional stakeholders that should have been at the table that weren’t?
3. What do you think about using games and simulations to teach about gentrification? What are the benefits and what are the risks of doing so?
4. Did any new complexities and/or nuances come up during the game that you haven’t explored before? What are you left thinking about?

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“BUSHWICK, BROOKLYN”: A SATURDAY NIGHT LIVE DIGITAL SHORT

Items Needed:

- Screen and speakers to play the SNL digital short*
- Copies of the "Bushwick, Brooklyn": A Saturday Night Live Digital Short Source Sheet

Framing:

On January 17, 2015, Saturday Night Live aired a digital short entitled “Bushwick, Brooklyn” that raises issues of gentrification in Bushwick, Brooklyn in a light-hearted way. This video clip is ripe for conversation and discussion.

Host Instructions:

Gather guests around a screen and play the SNL Digital Short “Bushwick, Brooklyn.” Use the Guiding Questions below to facilitate conversation about the video clip. Then ask guests to find a partner, read Source 2 (a response to the SNL digital short) and use the Guiding Questions to prompt discussion.

Bring the group back together to share pieces of what they discussed and their general reactions.

*Please be advised: “Bushwick, Brooklyn” contains some references to violence and may not be suitable for all audiences.

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“BUSHWICK, BROOKLYN”: A SATURDAY NIGHT LIVE DIGITAL SHORT

Source 1: Saturday Night Live

“Bushwick, Brooklyn,” featuring Kevin Hart, Kenan Thompson and Jay Pharoah, aired on NBC’s SNL on January 17, 2015.

Video Link: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wAsBta25OGQ

Guiding Questions:

● What are your reactions to the video?
● Did anything make you laugh? Did anything make you cringe?
● How accurate of a portrayal is it of the realities of gentrification?
● What do you think the benefits are of using pop culture and humor to raise issues of gentrification? What are the risks?

Source 2: The FADER

Excerpts from “Social Anxiety: What SNL’s Bushwick Skit Gets Wrong About Gentrification” by Emilie Friedlander, posted on January 23, 2015 on The FADER.

...This past Sunday, I was at home poking around the internet when I noticed a skit from SNL popping up everywhere on my Facebook feed. It’s titled “Bushwick, Brooklyn,” and as of this writing, the YouTube video has over 1.5 million plays. In it, last week’s special guest—comedian Kevin Hart—is standing around on a street corner with SNL cast members Kenan Thompson and Jay Pharoah, just kind of shooting the [breeze]. "Yo, it's getting crazy out here," Thompson says. You get the sense that they spend a lot of time at this very spot, trading war stories about their respective hustles, only as soon as the conversation gets going, they start saying things that make you do a double-take.

...I laughed the first couple times I watched it, riveted by its acknowledgement of what is one of the more cringe-worthy aspects of the neighborhood’s evolution. In the four years since I left the neighborhood, Bushwick has gone from the kind of place where you can land a room for $450 to the kind of place where you invest in a million-dollar condo. It doesn’t have a dedicated mayonnaise shop yet (the one pictured in the SNL skit is actually in Prospect Heights), but it is home to no small number of laughably frou-frou businesses, including a puppy daycare called Brooklyn Bow Wow, a combination bike shop and hipster barbershop, and a hybrid

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knitting supply and cupcake store. According a Brooklyn Rental Market Report by a brokerage firm, the average price of a one bedroom apartment rental in Bushwick shot up to $2,647 this past August, in a 29.76% increase from July ($2,040).

The joke of "Bushwick, Brooklyn" is that the neighborhood is turning into a haven for a new generation of yuppies with a lot of discretionary income and needlessly specific tastes. Still, in telling that story through the eyes of a three men seemingly involved in illegal behavior (they scatter when the police siren goes off at the end), the skit also plays on a predictable middle class fear, which is that Bushwick is gentrifying faster than it is becoming safe. In September of last year, responding to a recent spike in shootings in North Brooklyn, the New York Post reported that while crime in general fell by 4% in 2014, there was a 9.5% increase in shooting victims, many of them linked to gang activity in the Bushwick and Bed-Stuy areas. When we chuckle at the inevitable gluten joke mid-way through (Thompson: "You acting like someone put gluten in your muffin or something"), it's because we're intuiting the disjunct between the comically trivial concerns of the transplant population and those of a pre-existing local community, one for whom the struggle to survive day-to-day makes worrying about gluten sensitivity seem ridiculous.

...Casting three black men as archetypal Bushwick natives seems a little bit off-color on SNL's part, though then again, what "Bushwick, Brooklyn" is really talking about is white privilege. Not all Brooklyn gentrifiers are white—in real life, or in the SNL version of it—but the skit's rapid-fire tally of stereotypical hipster pastimes certainly wouldn't be at all out of place on the blog Stuff White People Like. Still, SNL's casting choices seem to say, "This is funny because we don't normally expect black people hanging around on street corners to care about the stuff that white people like." Comedy all too often hinges on starkly reductive contrasts, and "Bushwick, Brooklyn" presents an egregiously reductive view of black identity, even as it contradicts that view with a portrayal of three African-American men enjoying the fruits of white privilege.

When you scratch the surface, probably the most frightening thing about this narrative of gentrification is its suggestion of a one-way cultural tide. White gentrifiers aren't just moving in and causing the rents go up, it seems to say; they're also bringing their CrossFit class and their twee folk music salons along with them, importing a cultural sensibility that threatens to infiltrate, and supplant, all pre-existing cultures in its path. Indeed, there's a strange lack of specificity to the skit's protagonists. All the particularizing details about the Kevin Hart character stem from the gentrified culture that he's absorbed, and if you take those details away, you're left with little more than a rough police sketch: a young black man who shot another man at close range...

Guiding Questions:

- Do you agree with the author's reaction to the digital short? Why or why not?
- What do you think of the notion that gentrification is a “one-way cultural tide?” In your experience, is this an accurate narrative of gentrification?
- After reading this piece, has your reaction to the digital short changed? Why or why not?

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DISCUSSION ENTREE OPTION 4

GENTRIFICATION: “IT'S NOT ABOUT RACE…”

Items Needed:

● Copies of the Gentrification: “It’s Not About Race…” Source Sheet

● Optional: A screen and speaker to show the video (linked to in the framing)

Framing:

Since August 2014, reporters and producers from the Wealth and Poverty Desk of the Los Angeles-based National Public Radio program Marketplace have been reporting from the intersection of York and Fig. Their focus is gentrification and that particular intersection is at the heart of a demographic shift occurring in downtown Los Angeles, emblematic of neighborhood shifts happening all over the country.

In addition to collecting and telling neighborhood stories, Marketplace reporters have been sharing different perspectives on gentrification on the air and through their online blog:

> People tend to have “this obsessive focus on who is moving in and who is moving out,” says Elvin Wyly, a geographer at the University of British Columbia. “It becomes a question of who are the gentrifiers? Are they nice people? Do they have good intentions? And that’s not what matters. Gentrifiers can be nice or not nice. That’s less important than the process.”

Learn more about the York and Fig project [here](#) and [here](#) (video).

Host Instructions:

Share the framing with guests and ask guests to break off into small groups (pairs, triads or quads) to read through the source sheet below, using the Guiding Questions to prompt discussion. Bring groups back together after they discuss to share the highlights of their conversations.

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GENTRIFICATION: “IT’S NOT ABOUT RACE…”

“Gentrification: It’s not about race…” by Lindsay Foster Thomas, posted on the York and Fig blog on January 6, 2015.

There’s no doubt about it. I am a gentrifier. So, why don’t I feel like one? Maybe no one really does, but if I may be honest, I think it’s because I’m African-American. Does that mean I get some kind of free pass to gentrify without it weighing on my conscience? Not even a little bit. I think about it a lot. I experience guilt over paying exorbitant rent prices that I complain about, but can afford with an awareness that my presence and ability to live in the country’s “hottest” neighborhoods means someone else can’t.

But here’s what race has to do with it. First of all, when middle and upper middle class people seek out more affordable housing options, the most budget-friendly places to turn to are communities that have been historically ignored by developers, retailers, elected officials, etc. The populations of these neighborhoods are often black and brown people who aren’t necessarily poor or even struggling. In fact, if houses and buildings have been well-maintained, that’s an attractive foundation to envision a community that feels like home to many more kinds of people. This is why many folks who decry gentrification define it as a process in which “rich white people” come in and take over everything. Property is cheaper in predominately African-American and Latino neighborhoods and so these areas are frequently ripe for development, investment and economic change — all courtesy of wealthier people taking an interest. When I move into such communities, I am perhaps in many ways not like the “old timers” there, but I look a lot more like them than white people and there’s a good chance I share some cultural connections with the neighbors that don’t feel forced.

The second point I’d like to make is inspired by a conversation I had with Georgetown journalism lecturer and author Natalie Hopkinson. Hopkinson, a longtime D.C. resident, is African-American, a wife, a mother and a scholar who has witnessed many changes to communities within the urban landscape of our nation’s capitol. She has a career and the financial means to live in almost any neighborhood she’d like. But, “I don’t have that white privilege,” she says, recognizing the main difference between herself and some of the newcomers to the community where she lives. “They can come onto the same block and just through the sheer fact of their whiteness, they can raise the value.”

Hopkinson continues, “Right off the bat, your calls are going to get answered. People are going to respond to you more. People will value the place more. People will invest more.” She’s quick to point out that she’s not “anti-gentrification” —Hopkinson and her family enjoy the restaurants, green spaces, school improvement and other benefits that have materialized along with neighborhood change. But, she confesses that it’s hard to feel good about it all the time.

“It’s hurtful when you realize that if millions of people who looked like me moved in, there wouldn’t be the

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same sort of response. There wouldn't be the same outcome,” says Hopkinson. “I don’t have as much power or agency as people who are white. That’s not white people’s fault. That’s just sort of the way that it works and that drives some of the tensions that are around gentrification.” She adds that often, wealthy, white gentrifiers “have a personal stake in having black people gone because race is so closely tied to socioeconomic status so it’s impossible to separate those two.”

So, whose investment matters more? The people and families who have created strong communities in spite of disinvestment or the new members of the neighborhood who are able to drop a million dollars for a renovated row house? There’s no easy answer. But, I agree with Hopkinson about the role race plays in gentrifying neighborhoods.

When we began this project in Highland Park, the Wealth & Poverty team encountered many people eager to discuss their ideas about gentrification — even if shy about using “the G-word,” or admittedly confused about its meaning. Several local residents (all white, I have to point out) have declared confidently to me that what is happening here is “not about race.” A high school teacher in the area pointed out that not just white people are coming to majority-Latino Highland Park. Young Latinos are also part of the change, something known as “gente-fication.” One woman said “White, black or brown doesn’t matter — gentrification only sees one color and that’s green.”

They’re not entirely wrong. The many drivers of gentrification are complex and they are what our team came to Highland Park to uncover. While we work to better understand these drivers, I think it’s important to acknowledge that race is a major factor in how gentrification plays out in America’s cities. I wouldn’t shy away from saying so while working on this project. At the same time, I continue to consider how my own money influences change in the neighborhoods I move to. So, before quickly dismissing race as a part of the larger conversation, listen to, learn from and think about who occupied the spaces you call home before you and who new businesses appear to be catering to in rapidly changing neighborhoods. That’s how I’ve been operating as a gentrifier all these years.

Guiding Questions:

- Lindsay Foster Thomas makes the case that “race is a major factor in how gentrification plays out in America’s cities.” Which aspects of her perspective resonate with you? Which don’t?

- Some neighborhoods undergoing gentrification have significant white populations, with parts of Kensington and Port Richmond in Philadelphia being one example. How does this affect what Thomas presents?

- How did her perspective change or nuance your thoughts on gentrification?

- In what ways have you experienced race as a factor of gentrification? Or does this perspective contradict your experiences?

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DISCUSSION ENTREE OPTION 5

STREET ART AND ITS ROLE IN GENTRIFICATION

Items Needed:

- Copies of the Street Art and Its Role in Gentrification Source Sheet (including art pieces and interview excerpts)*

Framing:

John Criscitello is a street artist living in Seattle, Washington. He is most recently known for being “the guy who’s covered Capitol Hill in all the smart-ass street art about gentrification.”

Host Instructions:

Share copies of John Criscitello’s posters and interview excerpts with guests. Use the Guiding Questions that follow to prompt conversation.

*Please be advised: John Criscitello’s art pieces and interview excerpts contain strong language that may not be suitable for all audiences.

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SOURCE SHEET

STREET ART AND ITS ROLE IN GENTRIFICATION


Caption: "This comes from the sentiment that we just don’t need this gayborhood anymore. The idea that gays are totally liberated, and now can go anywhere, and can also get married? Bullshit. Try to go kiss your same-sex partner in Spokane, and lemme know what happens."

by John Criscitello

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by John Criscitello

Caption: “Anyone who lives or works on these few blocks remembers the woman who lived in that doorway. She was obviously mentally ill, and her circumstances were dire, and she was there for a long time, long enough for very expensive apartments to be built around her. Then one day she was gone, so there was a vacancy.”

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WE CAME HERE TO GET AWAY FROM YOU.

by John Criscitello

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John Criscitello: “I think the most interesting story would be to ask some of the new people who live in these expensive new apartments how THEY see the neighborhood. Why did they choose to live here? How was it pitched to them? Was it the nightlife? Was it that it was queer-friendly? Because if you can afford a $2,300 apartment, you could easily afford to live anywhere in Seattle—you could live in Queen Anne, Ballard, downtown, you could rent a beautiful house in the CD with a yard and everything. So what was their attraction to Capitol Hill? A lot of those new buildings are microcosms unto themselves—they have parking underneath, so a person could leave their apartment, go down to their car, and go off to their job or wherever they go without ever setting foot on the actual street. A person could get AmazonFresh to deliver their food, and they never have to go inside a local store. These people aren’t leaving any sort of footprint in the neighborhood. They’re never actually the person on the street. That’s not what a city is about—a city like New York is about the streets. What’s happening here is a suburban enclave happening on top of an urban core. People want all the amenities of living in a suburb in the ground floor of their condo—a Panera, a coffee shop, a boutique gym, a dry cleaner, a Bank of America. But they’re not participating, they’re not giving anything back. They underestimate urban living.”

Guiding Questions:

- What are your reactions to John Criscitello’s posters?
- How does Criscitello use street art to prompt dialogue and conversation? Do you think it’s effective? Why or why not?
- What role does street art have within the process of gentrification? In what ways might street art both positively and negatively contribute?
- Do you agree with Criscitello’s assertion that newcomers to these neighborhoods “aren’t leaving any sort of footprint. They’re never actually the person on the street. That’s not what a city is about… they’re not participating, they’re not giving back”?
- What do you think he means when he says: “They underestimate urban living”?

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DISCUSSION ENTREE OPTION 6

CREATE YOUR OWN!

Have you come across an engaging video, article or piece that you want to use as a prompt for discussion with your guests? Interested in facilitating a conversation without a source? Want to ask your guests to each bring interesting sources that they've come across with them to the dinner and use those to prompt discussion? Go for it!

We recommend creating Guiding Questions beforehand, or asking guests to bring Guiding Questions with them, and then wrapping up your discussion with the Closing Activity.

If you do choose this route, please share your resources and customized activities with us - post using @RepairtheWorld #TurntheTables or email us at danielle@werepair.org.

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CLOSING ACTIVITY

After your discussion, we encourage you and your guests to reflect on the experience and process information presented in your discussion.

We recommend the Triangle-Square-Circle method, which asks participants to share either:

- 3 points they took away from this discussion (Triangle)
- Anything that “squares” with their thinking or anything they agree with (Square)
- Something that’s still circling around in their head (Circle)

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