



From Redlining to Resilience Gentrification

InSite Research Review



Brief overview of current literature examining the links between historical redlining, green gentrification, and resilience gentrification.

In the last decade, cities across the globe have sought to transform their municipalities through climate adaptable land use and zoning coupled with innovative infrastructure mitigation. While the desire to combat the rapid deleterious impact of climate change is laudable and well-intentioned, growing literature addressing climate-based gentrification makes visible the unintended consequence of continued displacement of marginalized communities. As cities continue to adopt urban greening strategies in response to climate and livability concerns, green gentrification will become an increasingly urgent topic of research. Without proper considerations for the adverse socio-spatial changes potentially elicited by urban greening, the displacement and alienation of historically marginalized residents will remain a prominent threat.¹

There is a clear link between the green gentrification process of today and historical housing disenfranchisement due to redlining and other discriminatory housing practices de jure. The reasons for these disproportionate impacts can be linked to housing policies from the past and present. For example, a 2020 study² found that historically redlined neighborhoods are nearly 5 degrees Fahrenheit warmer compared to non-redlined neighborhoods. Similarly urban heat islands tend to correlate with areas of cities that have been historically redlined and not invested in. These disparities reflect decades of disinvestment and the disproportionate climate impacts underserved communities face when compared to wealthier and non-redlined areas.³

The concept of green gentrification grows out of the literature on environmental injustice. This literature provides ample evidence to show that the environmental “bads” in society, such as toxic pollutants and “locally unwanted land uses” (LULUs) and their consequent public health hazards, are disproportionately found in politically disenfranchised minority and poor neighborhoods. The term “environmental racism” was coined specifically to describe race-based discrimination in the siting of hazardous facilities and the remediation of environmental hazards in the United States. Numerous studies have indicated that in the United States, race is a strong predictor of where environmentally hazardous facilities will be located. The flip side of environmental injustice looks at who gets the environmental “goods,” such as parks, clean air and water, and access to waterfront resources.

¹ Daniel L. Sax, Lorien Nesbitt, Jessica Quinton, *Improvement, not displacement: A framework for urban green gentrification research and practice*, *Environmental Science & Policy*, Volume 137, 2022, Pages 373-383

² Hoffman JS, Shandas V, Pendleton N. The Effects of Historical Housing Policies on Resident Exposure to Intra-Urban Heat: A Study of 108 US Urban Areas. *Climate*. 2020; 8(1):12. <https://doi.org/10.3390/cli8010012>

³Enterprise Community Partners, Inc. The Link Between Historic redline and Current Climate Risks. 08/05/2021. <https://www.enterprisecommunity.org/blog/link-between-historic-redlining-and-current-climate-risks>. Accessed: Dec. 2, 2023.

Historical processes matter in the siting of both environmental hazards and amenities. At each end of the spectrum, the consequences for communities of such sightings tend to exacerbate social and economic inequality. Inequitable distribution of environmental goods and bads occurs, in part, because of segregation in housing. Thus, the term green gentrification is used to describe a subset of urban gentrification. The process of green gentrification is started by greening initiatives that create or restore environmental amenities. Environmental amenities draw in wealthier groups of residents and push out lower-income residents, thus creating gentrification.⁴

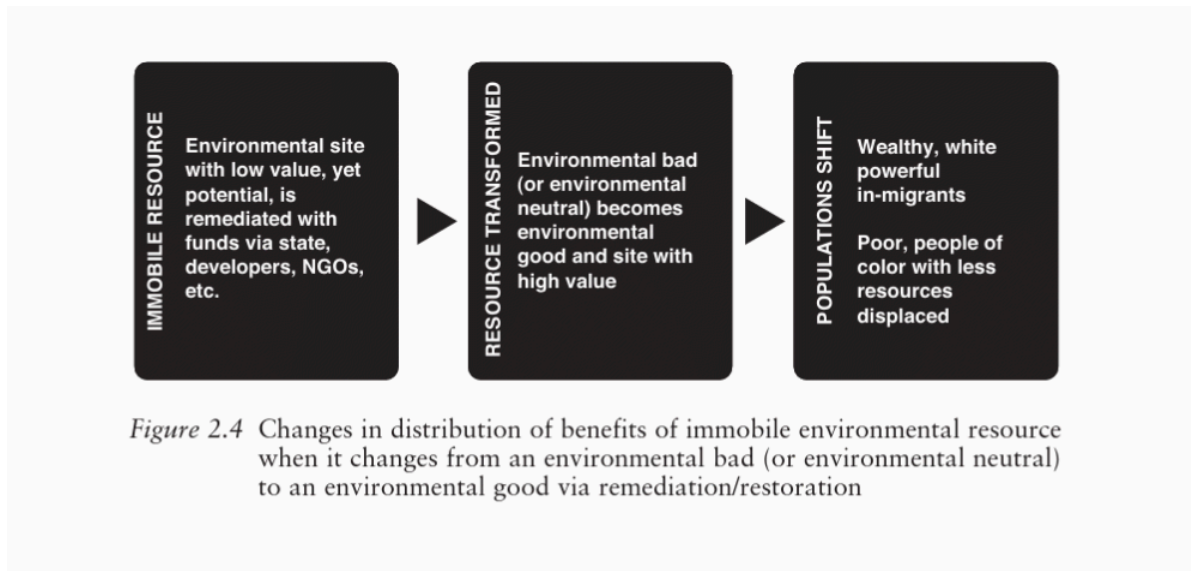
The sociological literature focuses on environmental justice, inequality, gentrification, urban sociology and environmental sociology. We must situate the concept of green gentrification within broad social processes that produce and reproduce inequality in society. Real estate markets that reproduce race and class inequalities in capitalist societies in general also reproduce them in greening urban communities. Similarly, coalitions of elites that promote (and are rewarded by) economic growth initiatives, are rewarded in the same way by green growth initiatives. Thus, while greening may appear to be a benefit to society, as sociologists we persistently ask the question: for whom? Green initiatives tend to reproduce current structures of inequality, benefit those at the top of those structures, and hurt those at the bottom. These processes, however, are not inevitable. Other stakeholders (community groups and social movement actors) can resist these processes, but they are in structurally less powerful positions.

These multifaceted systems of racial inequality produce the landscape of “**residential apartheid**” that is a key factor in allowing the owners of and investors in production and disposal facilities to target communities of color for a disproportionate share of the environmental and public health costs of production. At the same time, the existence of racially segregated housing patterns allows for the environmental protection of white communities, which reap a greater share of the economic benefits of production while shifting the ecological and health costs to communities of color. Underlying the race-based systems of housing distribution is an economic structure that routinely and regularly distributes environmental hazards socioeconomically downward, and environmental amenities socioeconomically upward and health costs to communities of color.⁵ Underlying the race-based systems of housing distribution is an economic structure that routinely and regularly distributes environmental hazards socioeconomically downward, and environmental amenities socioeconomically upward, the means to increase the share of their incomes spent on rent) are forced to abandon their neighborhoods to make room for new, wealthier residents. For

⁴ Gould, Kenneth A., and Tammy L. Lewis. *Green Gentrification : Urban Sustainability and the Struggle for Environmental Justice*, Taylor & Francis Group, 2016. *ProQuest Ebook Central*, <http://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/asulib-ebooks/detail.action?docID=4595177>. Created from asulib-ebooks on 2023-12-06 21:58:19.

⁵ Gould, Kenneth A., and Tammy L. Lewis. *Green Gentrification : Urban Sustainability and the Struggle for Environmental Justice*, Taylor & Francis Group, 2016. *ProQuest Ebook Central*, <http://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/asulib-ebooks/detail.action?docID=4595177>. Created from asulib-ebooks on 2023-12-06 21:50:07.

homeowners, as the market values of homes near a restored environmental amenity rise, the incentive to sell increases, further increasing the likelihood that houses and neighborhoods will be “flipped.” The higher the home value relative to the owner’s wealth, the greater the incentive to sell. (Figure 2.4).⁶



Real estate markets reproduce power inequalities and structure the degree to which communities can resist Markets, left to function on their own without state intervention, will normally distribute goods and services on the basis of wealth. In capitalist societies, wealth is a primary component of power. Those with greater economic power have a greater ability to influence the state, even in ostensibly democratic political systems (Domhoff 1998). People of color are systematically excluded from mechanisms of capital accumulation. Power to control patterns of capital investment, to control the creation and distribution of employment, to finance electoral campaigns, and to purchase mass media time and space provides the wealthy with greater access to, and influence over, public policy decision-makers. While greater political power accrues to those with greater wealth, greater wealth also accrues to those with greater political power. Residential segregation concentrates the politically powerful in specific communities (Domhoff 1998), while simultaneously concentrating the politically less powerful in other communities. The distribution of political power and the distribution of housing location synergistically generate a spatial distribution of power. In theory, it should be possible to map this distribution as a social geography of political power.⁷

“Resilience Gentrification”

There are essentially two ways to respond to climate change: retreat from points of high impact or structurally mitigate. In markets that are “cooler” and less dense, retreat and the resulting climate

⁶ Ibid.

⁷ Ibid.

gentrification is likely to occur. But in “hot,” dense markets that are bound by flood, fire, or drought, structural mitigation makes market sense due to high and growing economic demand and geographically limited supply. Structural mitigation is the strengthening of residential structures to resist waves, fire, drought, and the raising of residential spaces and mechanical equipment above expected dire levels. Structural mitigation raises building costs, and passes those costs on to sustainability class gentrifiers. A structural mitigation approach to addressing climate change threats leads to resilience gentrification.⁸ In a critical analysis of the concept of disaster resilience, sociologist Kathleen Tierney describes both “sustainability” and “resilience” as “boundary objects” which “enable communication across disciplines and that can smooth the way for collaboration”. However, on the flip side, she argues that these terms “can be used to legitimize the activities of groups with very different interests,” which can in turn obscure tensions and power relations.⁹

The concept of resilience gentrification demonstrates the (mostly) unintended outcomes of (mostly) well-intentioned plans to build it back better/greener/more resilient. We argue that the most common path to recovery—namely, rebuilding with structural mitigation—leads to resilience gentrification. This parallels the process of green gentrification in terms of its (mostly) unintended effects: greening urban areas, while positive in an environmental sense, has had the consequence of exacerbating environmental inequality. In this case, building it back “better” and more “resilient,” also has the consequence of exacerbating environmental inequality and housing inequality. When building it back better and more resilient (structural mitigation) is prioritized in recovery, it leads to resilience gentrification. Resilience gentrification is the result of natural disaster recovery processes that prioritize policies promoting structural mitigation. Structural mitigation costs further bifurcate the haves and have nots, leading to a recovery in which “resilience” is by default defined by wealth. Structural mitigation inflates housing costs. Access to housing is distributed by wealth in capitalist economies. As rebuilt, structurally mitigated, housing is distributed upward to the wealthy, resilient housing becomes a form of environmental privilege. Resilience gentrification is a subset of green gentrification processes stemming from resilient construction as structural mitigation. Coastal resilience efforts thereby become engines of green gentrification.

In essence, then, there is a doubly regressive effect of greening the city coupled with dealing with climate change. The first effect is that greening the city, which fuels green gentrification, limits who can afford proximity to real estate. The second effect is that the costs of structural mitigation to resist climate change increase the costs of living t, thus further limiting access to urban green amenities. Through this dual process of urban greening and structural mitigation of climate change

⁸ Ibid.

⁹ Galia Shokry, Isabelle Anguelovski, James J. T. Connolly, Andrew Maroko & Hamil Pearsall (2022) “They Didn’t See It Coming”: Green Resilience Planning and Vulnerability to Future Climate Gentrification, *Housing Policy Debate*, 32:1, 211-245, DOI: [10.1080/10511482.2021.1944269](https://doi.org/10.1080/10511482.2021.1944269)

threats, resilience is equated with wealth, and the sustainability class emerges as the new urban elite.¹⁰

In one telling example, geographers examine the concept of resilience in light of the post-hurricane context in the Caribbean. They note, “The twin watchwords for this paradigm [of disaster preparedness and response] are ‘resilience’ (as a form of preparedness) and ‘building back better’ (as a means of response)...Ironically, the imperative to ‘build back better’ relies to a certain extent upon a normalization of climate disasters; its logic contains a built-in assumption that house-by-house, island-by-island, existing forms of infrastructure and the lives and communities that they bind together, must be destroyed in order for true resilience to be imported from abroad”. Understood in that way, “building back better” is a neocolonial project.¹¹ Researchers focus on how the recovery efforts affect housing equity of affected communities. Both cases represent explicit attempts to build it back “better” and in specific, to build it back in more “resilient” ways. **However, the resilience is built into the actual physical structures rather than the communities and the outcome is that even building it back “better” comes at the cost of exacerbating existing housing inequality.** Public-private partnerships, a sign of the neoliberal times, are key agents in producing and reproducing inequality in these sites.¹²

Access to housing is distributed by wealth in capitalist economies. As rebuilt, structurally mitigated, housing is distributed upward to the wealthy, resilient housing becomes a form of environmental privilege. Resilience gentrification is a subset of green gentrification processes stemming from resilient construction as structural mitigation. Whether these efforts focus on heat, drought, or sea-level rise, resilience efforts thereby become engines of green gentrification.

Neo-Settler Colonialism

From a broader political economy perspective, cities’ green adaptation practices have been linked to a neoliberal governance agenda through urban regeneration arrangements, including privatization, entrepreneurialism, and financializing nature, which commodify and marketize urban resilience

¹⁰ Gould, K. A., & Lewis, T. L. (2018). From Green Gentrification to Resilience Gentrification: An Example from Brooklyn. *City & Community*, 17(1), 12-15. <https://doi.org/10.1111/cico.12283>

¹¹ We can extend the practice of “build back better” to the RECI project, which utilizes the same logic but in reverse. Instead of build back better, the RECI project anticipates climate destruction and aims to get ahead of it by preparing. Perhaps a slogan to reflect “build better before.” Either way, the practice is the same neo-colonial model whether preemptive or reactive.

¹² Galia Shokry, Isabelle Anguelovski, James J. T. Connolly, Andrew Maroko & Hamil Pearsall (2022) “They Didn’t See It Coming”: Green Resilience Planning and Vulnerability to Future Climate Gentrification, *Housing Policy Debate*, 32:1, 211-245, DOI: [10.1080/10511482.2021.1944269](https://doi.org/10.1080/10511482.2021.1944269)

interventions. As cities go green, they also develop a green city branding and nature-based solutions discourse as a key instrument of neoliberal governance strategies for attracting local and global capital and wealth to centrally disinvested neighborhoods, eventually stimulating economic growth.

Furthermore, by variously employing the discourses of sustainability, resilience, and the smart city, municipalities justify new green infrastructure, as a win-win or no-regrets solution for climate adaptation, and evade questions of equity and inclusion by framing benefits as inherently good for all. This depoliticized promotion of green and resilient solutions—presented as a kind of “sustainability fix”—may especially overlook historical and ongoing racialized inequalities, justifying its approach by capitalizing on collective anxiety about a climate-changed future rather than reinvesting in longtime residents’ protection. Injustices therefore may be reproduced and aggravated by what Hardy and colleagues call “colorblind adaptation planning” when interventions do not take account of social vulnerability or make social justice an explicit goal.

Critical urban scholars have examined the role of urban transformation (i.e., regeneration, revitalization, renewal, and redevelopment) in capital accumulation and dispossession of the urban poor and more recently identified a process of “accumulation by green dispossession”. Resembling the location of toxic industries in working-class, Black and Brown neighborhoods (using the promise of jobs), in this case, it is green infrastructure that is pushed and sited despite its relationship with gentrification and displacement. By hinging greening and resilience efforts on business-as-usual growth-driven agendas, they perpetuate settler colonial practices together with racialized displacement and dispossession.

Therefore, the greening of cities paired with climate adaptation actions may actually undermine the long-term security and livelihoods of the most vulnerable residents. Global Reporting Initiative (GRI) like other amenities associated with urban regeneration and capital accumulation, is an ingredient in climate gentrification, potentially putting vulnerable residents at risk of displacement while possibly creating private intraurban competitive regimes of resilience. Recent research in Philadelphia uniquely shows that GRI has tended to be sited in already gentrifying neighborhoods, followed by more gentrification, and that Black and Latinx residents are moving to hotter, more impervious areas with little to no climate protection.

In sum, whereas some scholars and practitioners view resilience as a necessary step to a deeper, more structural and systemic transformation of social-ecological relations, green resilience measures as practiced may, paradoxically, be aligning adaptation with private real estate interests and urban renewal strategies that hazardously reinscribe and reconfigure existing risks and inequalities across the city. In such circumstances, resilience scholars have recently argued, resilience should be reduced rather than enhanced because an “abrupt transformation” is desired. Rather than responding to the intersectional vulnerabilities, traumas, and precarity of working-class

and minoritized residents, as would be the case with an approach like “abolitionist climate justice”, green adaptation that disregards its normative implications and muddles toward a vague resilience goal might create greater injustice and residential vulnerability over space and time.

One of the leading approaches to ensuring that green, sustainable and resilient improvements to our communities benefit all residents is to center affordable housing in the conversation about climate action. This is critically important for city leaders who wish to center equity and justice in their climate planning. Below are three examples of local resilience and sustainability efforts that prioritize housing affordability in their effort to build a healthy and safe future for all.¹³

Key Practices & Policy Recommendations

- Affordable housing set at the cost of income must be a priority;
- Policies preventing landlords and private equity developers from transferring cost burden onto tenants;
- Robust and consistent engagement with residents and low-income, people of color, women to ensure participation and knowledge;
- Organizing with tenant-rights/unions;
- Educating state and municipal representatives about the stakes.

¹³ Jones, Siler Peyton. Green Gentrification and the Role of Housing Resilience. 01/10/23. <https://www.nlc.org/article/2023/01/10/green-gentrification-and-the-role-of-housing-in-resilience/>. Accessed: Dec. 3, 2023

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