

Article

“They’re Not Building It for Us”: Displacement Pressure, Unwelcomeness, and Protesting Neighborhood Investment

Stephen Danley ^{1,*} and Rasheda Weaver ²

¹ Rutgers-Camden University, Camden, NJ 08102, USA

² Iona College, New Rochelle, NY 10801, USA; rweaver@iona.edu

* Correspondence: Stephen.danley@rutgers.edu; Tel.: +1-856-225-6343

Received: 16 July 2018; Accepted: 30 August 2018; Published: 4 September 2018



Abstract: In some of Camden, NJ’s most underdeveloped neighborhoods, new investment is perceived as a catch-22. Such investment is badly needed, but residents fear gentrification and the creation of white spaces. Our study examines that puzzle, that residents protest badly needed investment, using ethnographic and interview data from residents and Camden, NJ, as a case study for examining community understanding of gentrification. In doing so, we draw upon gentrification literature that focuses on displacement pressure and exclusionary displacement, but argue that the Camden case points towards a different dimension of gentrification. Our findings show how (1) exclusion and “unwelcomeness” created by the development of white spaces is conceptualized by residents as being distinct from the impact such exclusion has on future displacement and (2) that residents internalize that exclusion from white spaces, dampening their support and increasing their resistance for new development. Our findings represent a contribution to the discussion on displacement pressure, which focuses primarily on exclusion through financial and economic pressure on residents, and shows that racialized exclusion is, itself, a fundamental element of residential fear of gentrification. We point to an opportunity to address fears of gentrification not only through economic means but also by focusing on issues of access and exclusion in urban space as a direct response to such residential fears.

Keywords: gentrification; displacement; exclusion; urban social movements; neighborhoods; community

1. Introduction

A curious thing is happening in Camden, New Jersey, a small post-industrial city bordering Philadelphia, PA. The city has seen little demographic change or traditional gentrification. Yet its residents have sharp fears about potential gentrification in the city, so much so that they are protesting long overdue neighborhood investments in communities traditionally left out of the city’s downtown-centric development history. That puzzle is central to the discussion of displacement pressure, a concept that looks not just at displacement caused by gentrification, but at burgeoning signs that demographic and economic changes may be coming to an urban neighborhood. Our research shows that these predictive components of gentrification intersect with resident fears of exclusion and what we call “unwelcomeness”. Residents fear gentrification in part because they have been physically excluded from development.

We discuss this puzzle in the context of the thriving debate over gentrification and displacement pressure. There is a normative debate about gentrification with nodes in the public sphere [1] and amongst researchers. Slater [2] and Hamnett [3] debate the usefulness of critical perspectives in

gentrification research, and notably conflict in their assessments of community impact in gentrifying communities. Much of the early work on gentrification focuses on displacement [4] and Slater [5] calls for a return to this focus. Little research has focused on the perspectives of residents in communities undergoing gentrification, with the notable exception of Freeman [6]. There are sharp distinctions within this literature: Slater and Hamnett emphasize class struggle, while Freeman emphasizes race; Hamnett focuses on urban revitalization while Slater focuses on displacement; and Freeman highlights improved services and the coexistence of “cynical” perspectives alongside gratefulness for improved services and the intersection of all of this with racial politics.

Our research echoes many of those perspectives, and uses the case of Camden, New Jersey, to examine how residents view gentrification. In doing so, we uncover a subtly different critique of gentrification—related but distinct from Marcuse’s [4] concept of displacement pressure. Slater defines displacement pressure as: “the dispossession suffered by poor and working-class families during the transformation of the neighbourhoods where they live” [5]. In Camden, residents feel such dispossession. They express it in terms of displacement, in terms of loss of their own community icons, but also in terms of exclusion from white spaces created by new development [7]. As Freeman finds, “residents are worried about displacement even if ‘widespread displacement is unlikely’” [6] (p. 79). We argue that this phenomenon, while already present in the literature, is distinct from displacement pressure and more akin to race- and class-based exclusion found in cities across the world. Often when residents in Camden, NJ, give examples of gentrification, they reference this form of exclusion and unwelcomeness.

We also find that the legacy of such exclusion directly impacts the politics of new investment. Activists in communities at risk of gentrification have a “cynicism” [6] toward investment that influences their perspectives on new development in neighborhoods unlikely to be at risk for gentrification. In Camden, activists rallied against neighborhood development even in communities handicapped by historic disinvestment. Thus, we argue that the legacy of exclusion and unwelcomeness in new development is a catch-22; investment is called for because of historic disinvestment of urban communities, but opposed by local activists out of fear of displacement and exclusion. Camden activist Vida Neil captures this sentiment directly when, referring to development of Camden’s waterfront argued, “they’re not building it for us”. In this article, we show how that sentiment is deeply connected to existing understandings of displacement, how it emerged from our qualitative and ethnographic research in the city of Camden, and how it is indicative of a community view of gentrification that focuses on exclusion that extends beyond displacement. That sense of exclusion from new development inspires community protest to development in their own neighborhoods, even when there is relatively less risk of displacement.

2. Contested Concepts: Gentrification and Displacement Pressure

Our work builds upon existing definitions of gentrification, debates about class and race, a wider normative debate about gentrification, and the narrower discussion about where displacement and displacement pressure fit in. Defining gentrification is, itself, a major undertaking. Slater calls it an “obfuscation” [2] (p. 744) noting that entire articles have been written on the subject [8]. Ruth Glass’ original definition [9] is “One by one, many of the working class quarters have been invaded by the middle class—upper and lower . . . Once this process of ‘gentrification’ starts in a district it goes on rapidly until all or most of the working class occupiers are displaced and the whole social character of the district is changed” [9] (p. xvii). Redfern [8] focuses on distinctions between “class” and “status” across different populations, arguing that gentrification is at its core about identity and status that grows from capitalistic distinctions that mask the commonalities inherent in people wanting quality housing. Also, Hackworth defines gentrification simply as “the production of space for progressively more affluent users” [10] (p. 815). This last definition parallels Anderson’s [7] concept of white space—which Anderson develops out of a separate theory base but is particularly relevant to issues of gentrification discussed here. Anderson defines white space as having “overwhelming presence

of white people and their absence of black people” resulting in “whites and others often stigmatize anonymous black persons by associating them with the putative danger, crime, and poverty of the iconic ghetto, typically leaving blacks with much to prove before being able to establish trusting relations with them” (p. 13).

We largely agree with Slater, who argues that “so much has happened to city economies (especially labour and housing markets), cultures and landscapes since Glass’ original definition, that we should not be bound by it.” [2] (p. 744). However, Slater argues that the class component of the original definition is central to the concept. Boyd [11] mediates this focus on class by building on Freeman’s conceptions of white and black gentrification. While Glass and Slater place class at the center of gentrification and Boyd sees the impact of class as mediated by race, Freeman [6] argues that race is central to gentrification, leaning heavily on the experiences of residents in his study of Harlem and Clinton Hill, Brooklyn. In one particularly poignant moment, Miriam says, “It’s for the white people. Obviously, I mean it’s not for us” [6] (p. 103). In this conception, the lived experience of gentrification has race at its core, paralleling Anderson’s [7] concept of white space.

Central to the discussion of gentrification is the discussion of displacement. If gentrification is the influx of new, often white, residents, displacement is when existing residents, often of color, move because their community is no longer affordable. Displacement is highly theorized and highly contested. Grier and Grier [12] define displacement by arguing:

“Displacement occurs when any household is forced to move from its residence by conditions that affect the dwelling or its immediate surroundings, and that: (1) are beyond the household’s reasonable ability to control or prevent; (2) occur despite the household’s having met all previously imposed conditions of occupancy; and (3) make continued occupancy by that household impossible, hazardous, or unaffordable.”

Marcuse [4] splits the concept of displacement into a myriad of categories including: direct last-resident displacement in which the landlord attempts to force the renter to move by cutting off necessities or dramatically increasing the rent, direct chain displacement in which households over time move because of slower rent increases or physical decline of buildings, exclusionary displacement which includes both high-end development that is unaffordable for community members and the decline of housing into abandonment which similarly precludes residence, and displacement pressure in which residents see changes to the economic and community around them, and move even though they do not yet feel direct pressure to do so.

This theory underpins a debate about the way displacement happens in practice. A particularly sharp back-and-forth between Slater [5] and Hamnett [3] captures what can almost be described as a normative struggle. Slater argues that the study of gentrification should center around critical perspectives [2], and particularly around displacement [5]. He harshly criticizes what he calls “the decade-long preoccupation with researching the consumer preferences of middle-class gentrifiers” [2] (p. 306). He argues that gentrification is closely related to Lefebvre’s [13] *Right to the City*.

Hamnett’s approach takes the opposite tact and is largely complementary of gentrification. In a response to Slater, Hamnett responds sharply to critique of his work [3], arguing that gentrification does not necessarily include displacement (using examples of old factory buildings converted into lofts). He argues that defining any improvement—such as new commercial establishments—in a community as “displacement pressure” makes the discussion about displacement “meaningless”.

“Displacement pressure” sits at the middle of this debate. Marcuse [4] defines displacement pressure as dispossession of a working-class neighborhood, such as stores that working-class families cannot afford to shop in, or public facilities inconvenient for working families, or shifts in public transportation to favor middle-class residents. Slater [2,5] argues specifically that displacement needs to be the anchoring element of gentrification research, while research by Freeman [6] and Hamnett [3] argue that displacement may not be happening in gentrification communities. For Slater and Hamnett, displacement pressure means extremely different things. In Slater’s riposte, he cites Hamnett and

Whitelegg's [14] study of Clerkenwell, London, and argues that the authors are ignoring displacement pressure that comes with new housing, a new social mix, and new commercial businesses. Hamnett [3] (p. 480) responds:

"Slater may not like the new social mix, but this is an example of new build or conversion gentrification without residential displacement whereby commercial and ex-industrial properties in this area have been converted to residential use. If Slater wishes to term this displacement pressure because of the rise of new shops and restaurants he is stretching the term so far as to make it almost meaningless."

Our work sits at this intersection, as Camden has shown little "direct last-resident displacement" [4] in which residents are forced to move by landlords attempting to increase prices, but gentrification is still at the center of public narratives, and latent signs of gentrification appear around the edges of public policy decisions and neighborhood trends. Displacement pressure seems to be the bucket for such situations throughout the literature, whether it be Freeman [6] arguing that there is a fear of gentrification even by those insulated economically from displacement or Marcuse [4] (p. 207) arguing:

"[D]isplacement affects more than those actually displaced at any given moment. When a family sees the neighborhood around it changing dramatically, when their friends are leaving the neighborhood, when the stores they patronize are liquidating and new stores for other clientele are taking their places, and when changes in public facilities, in transportation patterns, and in support services all clearly are making the area less and less livable, then the pressure of displacement already is severe. Its actuality is only a matter of time."

As in that Marcuse quote, displacement pressure is typically understood as a forerunner of more direct forms of displacement soon to come. However, Butler [15] (p. 2484) hints that this may not be a full understanding of displacement pressure, arguing:

"Gentrification has not so much displaced the working class as simply blanked out those who are not like themselves: they do not socialise with them, eat with them or send their children to school with them."

Butler's quote overlaps with Anderson's concept of white space. In both, gentrification serves as a cultural phenomenon to delineate where different groups of people are welcome. This conception of gentrification intersects with Marcuse's concept of exclusion displacement, in which residents are excluded from new housing built in gentrified communities, but makes a cultural rather than economic argument about exclusion. Freeman links the concepts as well, arguing that with new buildings, shops, and people come new social expectations and that "If anything, gentrification might be more aptly described as repressive and restrictive in the way that it narrowed the range of acceptable behaviors for some long-term residents" [6] (p. 196). Here Freeman shifts the conversation of gentrification away from just an economic understanding of changing community focused on housing. He focuses explicitly on behavioral implications and how gentrification changes the experience of living in a community.

A host of other scholars emphasize similar elements of gentrification. Valli [16] argues that residents of gentrifying communities face a shifting sense of space. Rankin and McLean [17] suggest that development of formerly disinvested commercial areas makes the city less accessible to marginalized residents who, for sociocultural reasons, often do not feel such investments were created for them. Betancur [18] emphasizes a more damaging experience for long-term residents. The author found that long-term residents faced landlord abuses, real estate speculations, racial manipulations, police harassment, and displacement threats as a result of gentrification. Butler [15] (p. 2484) comments on social exclusion arguing that the working class is "blanked out".

This, in turn, intersects with the wider literature on the Right to the City [13] which sees urban space and residency as an alternative organizing principle that can challenge neoliberalism and the logic of the market. Purcell [19] discusses a “politics of inhabitants” radically different from the existing political and economic influences on cities. Similarly, Harvey sees the Right to the City as a means to address “disneyfication” [20] in which the nature result of neoliberalism is that cities become playgrounds for the rich while becoming unaffordable for existing residents. These wider critiques map directly onto the gentrification debate, which is, at its core, about the effects of neoliberalism upon housing, housing choice and displacement.

In Camden, residents fear gentrification and even oppose neighborhood investment despite the presence of little direct displacement. Solving that puzzle requires concepts such as displacement pressure, exclusionary displacement, and also Anderson’s [7] concept of white space.

3. Methodology

Our research mirrors the perspective and approach of Freeman’s *There Goes the ‘Hood* [6]. In it, Freeman prioritizes voices and perspectives of those living in two gentrifying communities: Harlem and Clinton Hill, Brooklyn. We do the same in Camden, NJ, where—as discussed below—key urban reforms are the context for residential worries about gentrification. Freeman’s approach is consistent with Standpoint Theory which draws on feminist literature and seeks to highlight local and oft-unheard voices [21]. That, in turn, is consistent with Right to the City scholarship, which emphasizes a “politics of inhabitants” [19]. Each of these approaches attempts to amplify voice and power of oppressed or unheard groups. This research does the same, through two primary techniques: (1) interviews with local residents and activists and (2) participant observation and ethnography, with a focus on community meetings. These interviews and observations were double-checked across media accounts—making use of existing accounts of events in the city to fill in gaps in interview data.

Our sampling strategy reflects that inductive approach. We interviewed 30 residents and stakeholders in Camden. These subjects were sorted into strata that included: 10 unaffiliated residents, 10 activists, and 10 elites from the policy, nonprofit, and political communities. Fourteen of those interviewed are African American, while ten are Latino, one identified as mixed race and five are white. This sample attempts to gain multiple perspectives: everyday residential perspectives, elite policy perspectives, and activists in the city responding to policy changes. In doing so, our work captures different elements of the reaction to policy changes that intersect with gentrification. It captures the public justifications for such work (through interviews with policy elites and accompanying public statements at community meetings and in the press), perceived justifications (both from interviews with policy elites, and participant observation in which public officials support their policies). In doing so, we found that fear of gentrification and specific concern about being excluded from investment was a consistent theme in interviews, public debate, and local protest. Those themes emerged from an iterative coding process [22] that started with key themes found in the literature while remaining open to inductive, emergent codes from interviews.

Camden, New Jersey’s history and recent policy landscape make it an intriguing and potentially fruitful case for studying gentrification. It is an urban city in the northeastern region of the United States that has 76,119 residents, of which most are African Americans (48%) or Hispanics (47%) [23]. The city is approximately 9 square miles and is across the Delaware River from Philadelphia, Pennsylvania. The five-year poverty rate is 38.4%, making it one of the poorest cities in the nation [23]. While there has been little documented displacement of residents due to investment, the city is seeing a concerted effort to bring investment and new residents to its downtown neighborhoods.

Camden shares a history with many cities in the United States of deindustrialization, disinvestment, white flight, and segregation from surrounding suburbs. Camden is an extreme case of many of these common phenomena, making it an ideal case study. Its suburb, Cherry Hill, was the site of America’s first mall; its proud industrial heritage of companies, such as New York Shipping Company, RCA Victor, and Campbell’s Soup, is all but invisible; and local discriminatory

zoning practices that led to segregation were eventually ruled unconstitutional by the New Jersey State Supreme Court in *Burlington County NAACP v. Township of Mount Laurel New Jersey*.

If Camden's "fall" [24] is a familiar story, so is its attempt at a revival. The city's focus on reviving the waterfront [24], including an aquarium and baseball stadium, directly mirrors a similar effort in Baltimore's Inner Harbor. More recently, that effort is focused on investment in "Eds and Meds" institutions [25,26]; a strategy first written about in Philadelphia [27]. The city's more recent revitalization strategy focuses on tax credits for corporations, a new county police force, and charter schools (called Renaissance schools) [28]. New Jersey Congressman Donald Norcross, then a state senator, was the architect of legislation to open new schools and bring corporations to the city. He identified safety, education, and jobs as a three-legged stool necessary for the city to rise and saw these policies as the embodiment of that strategy. Many of our interviewees see the three-legged stool policy context as the crescendo of a long-term effort to induce gentrification in Camden.

Camden is also the location of a struggle over whether a "politics of inhabitants" [19] is possible during such a revival. Purcell [29] argues that neoliberal reforms and local democracy are at odds. That dynamic is playing out in Camden's "revival." Many of the reforms designed to revitalize the city have also restricted the democratic rights of existing residents. The education system is currently under state control, meaning that residents have lost [19] the ability to vote for decision-makers in their education system. In 2001, state investment was paired with municipal control, meaning that voters lost the ability to control municipal finances during a period of rapid development. When the city police force was converted to a county force, residents who opposed such an effort collected signatures to put the issue on the ballot—an effort that the courts later invalidated at the mayor's request, meaning that voters lost democratic control over their own police force. A politics of inhabitants would focus on improving local control and oversight, but Camden's revival has been grounded in the opposite.

This context, one of a deindustrialized city with a waterfront-centric revitalization agenda, is the starting point for our study of gentrification. Though there has been little displacement of existing residents in Camden, and little influx of middle-class residents, gentrification is both a policy goal and a residential fear.

4. Results

Using the Camden case, we argue that gentrification is not only being described by residents as displacement pressure, but also as *unwelcomeness* in which residents are excluded from new development and as a result become resistant towards it. Throughout this process race plays a central role, as new development is seen as "white" and for white people—who either live in nearby but segregated suburbs, or for potential new white residents. We make this argument in three stages. The first lays out the ways that the community describes its fears regarding gentrification, despite the lack of last-resident displacement in the city. The second describes how exclusion and unwelcomeness is distinct from displacement pressure and exclusionary pressure. Residents do not simply fear residential exclusion or displacement, but fear that they will be excluded from white spaces [7] in leisure, education or more. The third highlights that residential fears play out as resistance to much-needed investment in historically under-invested neighborhoods and links protest of these new investments to fear that they will result in replacing community spaces with white spaces.

4.1. Familiar Fears of Gentrification Despite a Lack of Direct Displacement

Residents describe their concerns with Camden's development as being about gentrification, and often explicitly describe gentrification in racial terms. For example, an op-ed by a Camden educator and resident states that:

"The drive behind recent development and the Renaissance schools in Camden is gentrification. Therefore, the battle over Renaissance schools, with politicians pushing for their rapid expansion versus public school parents demonstrating strident resistance, is really a proxy war over who gets to live in Camden in the future". [30]

Similarly, a local Latina activist and resident argues that local powers want to bring a certain group of people to Camden—a group she describes as “rich, little white kids.” Here, gentrification is described both in traditional terms—those of new residents—and explicitly in racial terms, in which those new residents are white. That second activist’s fears are grounded with her own history of being at risk of displacement. She helped lead a fight against a golf course that would have displaced thousands of residents in her neighborhood. The golf course was never built and residents were not displaced. She contends the process of gentrifying Camden is multistaged, including replacing a methadone clinic on Broadway street with market-rate housing, taking over the police force so that a county force could focus on areas targeted for gentrification, and building new schools (specifically referencing KIPP-Cooper Norcross Academy, which has ties to local political figures). When asked why she saw these issues as being connected to gentrification, she argued “we know who’s going to go there”. Similarly, Weaver [31] describes the experience of a new resident whose community engagement was viewed by some residents as a sign of her “taking over” in gentrifier fashion.

These types of fears map directly onto “displacement pressure”; residents see improvements around them as happening for others (described both in terms of class and race), and as potentially displacing current residents. These fears occur even though there is little evidence of actual displacement at this point in time.

As Freeman [6] found, some residents see gentrification as a potential positive for the city and others doubt whether the city would gentrify at all. One interviewee, a local artist who does graffiti, air paints shirts and shoes and more, sees gentrification as a sign that “the old days is [sic] coming back”. Another interviewee, a college-graduate Latina who grew up in North Camden and returned to the city, doubts Camden can actually gentrify. She had a hard time imagining the city going back to having white people or middle-class people in it—again making explicit the link between gentrification and race. Similarly, an African-American staffer at Camden School District argued that education, housing, and other sectors “fits in lock step” with a gentrification strategy, but argued that it was “too early to tell” if that strategy was working. Also, an administrator with the Charter Management Organization with several new schools in Camden described being listed in a real estate magazine as a good school one of the organization’s “prouder moments.”

However, positive and dubious beliefs about gentrification in Camden reflect a minority of the themes that emerged in our findings. The majority of interviewees, public documents, and observations conveyed a general anxiety about the implications of gentrification on residents. A Latino leader of a development nonprofit says he worried that everyone wants to attract artists and “yuppie professionals”, but that existing residents would not be included. We witnessed a similar fear at a meeting between Camden Churches Organized for People and Cooper’s Ferry Partnerships, a local nonprofit deeply involved with local development. There, a Camden pastor confronted a Cooper’s Ferry employee about gentrification. Similarly, at a meeting at Our Lady of Lourdes Hospital regarding rumors of the use of eminent domain (discussed further below), activists used the specter of gentrification as a way to rally action against a proposal for a Promise Zone in the community.

This fear of gentrification and displacement is at the center of Camden discussions about development, and yet, Camden has experienced few of the hallmark elements of gentrification thus far in its development. Downtown Camden, buoyed by the presence of Rutgers-Camden University, has seen a subtle increase in the rate of occupancy at the Victor Lofts—the city’s flagship market rate apartment complex and some of the only market-rate housing in the city. Housing prices have seen slight increases in the neighborhoods closest to the university and hospital, but both areas still have vacant homes and are relatively cheaper than both the markets in nearby Philadelphia, PA, and the surrounding suburbs. With only 5% white residents, there has been no marked increase in the number of white residents [23]. So why is there so much fear of gentrification in the city, and what are the consequences of that fear?

4.2. Gentrification as Exclusion and Unwelcomeness

When residents describe their fears of gentrification, they do not describe them only in terms of displacement through housing. They also point to the possibility that new development becomes what Anderson [7] describes as “white space”. The creation of white space is distinctive from exclusionary displacement or displacement pressure in that it can be an end unto itself—where displacement refers largely to having to move out of the area, or in the case of displacement pressure, the signs that in the future it will be necessary to move. Instead, we see residents worried that new development may be exclusionary towards them, they may be unwelcome in these new white spaces.

Often, this is a key element of what is being expressed in Camden resident’s fears of gentrification. For example, one of the city’s African-American activists and a long-time environmental champion took a particularly nuanced stance. He argued that the city needs a “new class of folks”, but the political strategy being used to attract them is antagonistic towards residents. His words echo Freeman’s [6] (p. 196) finding that “if anything, gentrification might be more aptly described as repressive and restrictive in the way that it narrowed the range of acceptable behaviors for some long-term residents”.

Activist Vida Neil, who built her reputation as an activist by creating viral videos on Facebook, explains in one such video that politicians were creating a “bubble city,” or a city within a city. She contends the “bubble city” is being created for other residents and employees who worked at local universities, hospitals, or any of the businesses recently recruited to build corporate headquarters in the city. This reference to a “bubble city” is indicative of a spatial component to gentrification that identifies urban space as “unwelcome” to natives when investment happens. New development is often reflective of Anderson’s white space. Slater [5] might consider this displacement pressure; it may be a signal that residents will be displaced in the future. Marcuse [4] might consider it exclusionary displacement, in which residents do not have access to new build in neighborhoods in the city. Yet residents often describe it not in terms of future impact on housing or in terms of being excluded from living in areas of the city. They describe it in terms of being physically excluded from the “bubble city”. Such exclusion may be from the physical spaces, facilities, and resources as well.

We find that this physical exclusion is a critical component of residential fear of gentrification. Our research found a myriad of examples of gentrification intersecting with such exclusion from urban space that residents framed in terms of unwelcomeness in white spaces. Residents complained of subtle messages in developed areas that tell residents they are not the target audience of development and are not welcome there. These messages leave residents with an attitude that such spaces exist for gentrifiers. Consequently, residents neglect to use these spaces, much less live in them.

Sometimes, the preference for new middle-class residents over existing residents was explicit. A staffer from the Cooper Foundation (the foundation wing of the local hospital) gave a tour to Rutgers masters students and specifically indicated that new investment was designed for them. An excerpt from our field notes captures the sentiment:

“He seemed to make his presentation a direct pitch to the students to move into the neighborhood. He talked up a forthcoming CNN piece about a family that moved into the neighborhood (with 6 kids) specifically to go to [the new local charter school]. He talked about nurses and doctors moving into the neighborhood, and mentioned that now there was a school for ‘your’ kids to go to if you moved to the neighborhood.”

That CNN special focused on a new family moving into the Cooper Plaza neighborhood highlighting that the school was a potential magnet for people considering moving to the city [32].

A group calling itself the Camden Social Club—largely new homeowners in the Cooper Plaza neighborhood surrounding Cooper Hospital, and one of the few middle-class neighborhoods in the city—met at a downtown bar and heard a similar message from Camden Mayor Dana Redd. In her speech, the mayor highlighted that the city was creating “housing for those of our peer group”. Such messages by key politicians and institutions are not just recruitment pitches to middle-class families considering moving to Camden. They are also clear signs to existing residents that these

middle-class families are the reason for development, and that political structures have explicitly decided to help these middle-class families, though in this case the message was less specifically racial as the vast majority of the homeowners and the mayor herself were African-American.

Such an approach can also be built into physical infrastructure and local policy. The waterfront and surrounding Cooper Grant neighborhood, the site of much of the investment in the early 2000s, is an example of how “unwelcomeness” is built subtly into investment. The aquarium, which received significant public investment over its history, has used an anti-loitering device that makes high-pitched sounds to keep youth from congregating in the space in front of the aquarium. The device is clearly audible along a stretch of the public, waterfront park. A curfew for those under 18 is enforced along the waterfront, and residents have long complained of high parking prices. The result is residents receive a clear message: this space is designed to protect visitors to waterfront sites from Camden residents. Because of the surrounding communities’ sharp segregation, the unwelcomeness is often visible in starkly racial terms. The waterfront is white space. It is not designed for the residents themselves.

After waterfront concerts or fireworks shows, police actively block off streets to keep tourists from driving into North Camden—another manifestation of policy demarcating what is white space and what is not. At local Cooper Grant Neighborhood Association meetings, the city’s whitest neighborhood, police routinely tout their anonymous tip line and encourage residents to call the police if they notice anything out of the ordinary. Sadly, such claims intersect with race and class assumptions. In one such incident, a local resident called the cops on a young African-American child playing in the neighborhood. The child had accidentally invaded a white space and he was not welcome. A teacher and activist asserts that policing is prevalent in the “waterfront, down by the aquarium, [and] the Camden business district”, but that there is a “deliberate understaffing of Camden’s [other] neighborhoods.” The Camden County NAACP made public records requests and found something similar; that during the city’s most violent summer (2012, the year in which the city had a record 67 murders) significant police resources were reassigned to protect concertgoers on the waterfront, despite there not being a single murder on the waterfront that year [33,34].

Even residents inclined to see gentrification as a glass half-full note how they can be excluded in current efforts to develop the city. A young Latino man working in an auto shop is more positive about the downtown development; he calls the growth of “white people” in the Cooper Grant a “good disease.” However, he mentions that the new police force, which is significantly whiter and has more residents from farther outside the city, treats Camden residents with deep skepticism. “This is Camden”, he says, “everybody is guilty until proven innocent”. One local resident, an accomplished lawyer in the city, talks about the positive aspects of Campbell’s Soup choice to build its headquarters in the city, but pointed out that the company’s corporate campus is completely isolated. Indeed, the corporate offices include a fence around the facility and a shuttle from public transportation sites so its employees do not have to walk in Camden, and an internal cafeteria so that employees do not need to venture into the city for lunch. Adam Woods, a small business owner in Camden and former employee of Campbell’s Soup, reports that once he and another employee walked across the street for food from a local restaurant. When he returned to the Campbell’s headquarters, his co-workers were waiting to see if he had made it back without incident. The shuttles long-used by Campbell’s employees are increasingly popular in downtown Camden, where local businesses and Rutgers-Camden University have partnered on a shuttle system that requires either a corporate or student ID to use. This essentially creates a parallel transportation system that is designed to protect those working in Camden from walking in the city, and actively excludes Camden residents from new resources as the city develops.

Similarly, a blog post by Gayle Christiansen [35], a Camden resident and an executive board member of the Cooper Grant Neighborhood Association, exposes how assumptions about the city are integrated into urban design and weaponized to exclude residents. The post describes a meeting with Liberty Property Trust, the recipient of a billion-dollar tax subsidy to develop the waterfront. When asked about jobs for Camden residents, the developer’s first response was to insist that residents would need to take drug tests. The meeting also focused on providing a shuttle for the “hypothetical

26-year-old female employee” commuting to the city, so that she did not have to walk the five blocks from a transit center to the planned high rises. Here, the perception of Camden residents from the developer of being something to be protected from, not connected to, has implications for the viability of businesses and the walkability of the neighborhood. Which spaces are white and which spaces are not gets mapped onto the design and policies of downtown institutions.

Residents pick up on these signals. They coalesce into an opinion that such investment is not designed for existing residents. They believe new developments are designed with fear of existing residents in mind. The design strategy is to isolate new development from existing residents to make middle-class whites feel comfortable and safe. It is to create white spaces. Vida Neil, in her “bubble city” video, states it plainly. “They’re not building it for us”. The Latina educator mentioned above sees the development as for “rich little white kids”. A mixed-race Camden resident in his late 20s, with both African-American and Latino heritage, sees investment as “a way to keep the waterfront area beautified for tourists and to make that the staple of Camden”. Though some residents feel new investments are made for newcomers, others feel it is all for show and that gentrification is not happening at all. This trend reflects the wider movement towards “disneyfication” of cities [20]. The headline of an article on the movement of Subaru’s headquarters into the Campbell’s Soup complex captures the same sentiment, calling the development a “city within a city” [36]. Cities are increasingly seen as tourist hubs and playgrounds for those with money and without children. As cities cater to this audience, they create stark divides across communities, especially those racial and ethnic minorities who have long lived in the city. White spaces lead to “unwelcomeness” felt by residents of color.

Those divides are felt in Camden. A local leader of the charter school movement, and former Camden resident, dismissed talk of gentrification, describing the changes being made as not a part of “real Camden”. He argues that he “has to sell that shit [Camden’s revitalization] every day”, but that it is “in no way close to reality”. He says “I’ve seen the trees get planted, the sidewalks redone, I’ve seen the construction. Tell me when the nurses from Cooper [the local hospital] actually live here”. He purposely drives himself down Broadway Street, the once-thriving commercial corridor now struggling with drug trade and blight, to remind himself of the “reality of what Camden really is”. That duality is at the heart of how Camden residents view neighborhoods targeted for investment and gentrification. They see them as the “other”. These new spaces are so set apart that residents do not even consider them part of the city.

While areas hoping to attract middle-class families to the city are seeing new investment, existing neighborhoods have a long history as locations for unwanted facilities or businesses. This makes the dichotomy between white spaces and the rest of the community even sharper. According to one activist, there has been “a regional effort to systematically and diabolically put all their shit into the city of Camden.” The most visible example of this phenomena is the Waterfront South neighborhood.

Already burdened with the twisted legacy of forgotten industry, Waterfront South has two Superfund Sites (highly polluted areas needing long-term intervention) and over a dozen brownfields [37,38]. Yet, a bevy of unpopular county facilities were built in the neighborhood. The neighborhood is home to the Camden County Municipal Utilities Authority, where the county’s human waste is processed, to a trash-to-steam facility, to a steel crushing industry and a cement factory [24] (p. 171), [39]. The result of such an industrial footprint is that 33% of residents in the neighborhood suffer from asthma [38,40]. Waterfront South is the most vivid example of a neighborhood excluded, but just outside the city center there is a county prison, and from 1985 to 2009 there was a second prison located in North Camden [41]. Many of the county’s homeless and drug abuse services are also located in Camden. One activist contends that even the drug trade is pushed into Camden from the county, a claim supported by recent analyses of drug overdoses and drug arrests [37,38,42], which show that the vast majority of those purchasing drugs in the city come from the suburbs. More recently, a methadone clinic has been moved from downtown to a south Camden neighborhood adjacent to Waterfront South.

These issues convey a message to Camden residents that the parts of the city where they live will not receive investments and that residents are not welcome in parts of the city that do. That message crystallizes and results in an avoidance of areas that see investment by existing Camden residents.

One young Latino man who grew up in North Camden is now a professional in the education sector and works downtown. Despite growing up just blocks from the waterfront park, he never visited the waterfront as a child growing up in the city, saying he “never made it to this side”—a reference to the Ben Franklin Bridge that separate his North Camden neighborhood from the downtown and waterfront only a few blocks away. It was only when he returned to the city as part of “professional Camden” that he even visited the downtown and waterfront. Another resident of North Camden who works at a prominent nonprofit in the city describes a similar phenomenon, saying that the locally owned Camden Children’s Garden is the only place residents felt welcome on the waterfront. In the rest of the development there, residents “don’t see people who look like you,” and that “if you don’t see anything nice where you live, this is a foreign land.” They are white spaces. Camden residents also complain about the prohibitive cost of parking on the waterfront, which raises money for the city when suburbanites come to concerts or the aquarium, but makes a waterfront walk cost-prohibitive for any Camden resident outside of the downtown—a complaint that local non-profit Cooper’s Ferry Partnership heard and addressed in the building of a new North Camden park on the waterfront. Others pointed to the new police force as a sign that Camden residents are unwelcome in developing parts of the city.

The result is that residents are hesitant to take advantage of developing neighborhoods, and the perception is that increased investment in neighborhoods around largely white institutions, paired with unwanted county facilities and industry in surrounding and existing neighborhoods, makes Camden “a city for others” [30]. Even residents who eventually move to downtown see it as a betrayal of their roots. A young Latino woman who grew up in East Camden, came back to live with her mom after going to school, and now lives in the Victor Luxury Lofts on the waterfront, is “sometimes ashamed” about where she’s living. She wonders if living in the Victor is “selling out” and calls it “its own separate world, different than the world that the people of Camden live in”. These gentrifying neighborhoods are understood as “bubble cities” not the “real Camden”.

Given these observations, we argue that before widespread displacement takes place in areas targeted for gentrification, signals (sometimes explicit, sometimes subtle) are sent to residents of the city, largely people of color, that they are not welcomed in new development. The result is that residents are aware that the new residents and suburban customers are well-treated in the waterfront and downtown areas while they are not well-treated in those neighborhoods, and their own neighborhoods are often ignored or excluded. They choose not to live in or visit neighborhoods with new investment. At the extremes, this new development is not even understood as part of the city—described as not a part of real Camden, as a city within a city, or a bubble city.

4.3. How Unwelcomeness Leads to Protest of Neighborhood Investment

Residents’ unwelcomeness in new development has political impact. Even in Camden, where the housing market has not risen to the point of much displacement, repeated experiences of being excluded from new development in public and private spaces results in the same type of deep cynicism that Freeman [6] reports with more traditional gentrification. That cynicism expresses itself as opposition to development, even when new development may be in under-resourced locations in the city. We look at two cases of such opposition: one surrounding the city’s application for a federal Promise Neighborhood designation, the second surrounding the demolition and rebuilding of the city’s flagship high school. In both cases, the city received major influxes of resources for new developments and residents rallied against these developments out of fear that their communities would not benefit.

The first example is Camden’s receipt of a Promise Zone designation, a Promise Neighborhood planning grant and eventually a Promise Neighborhood designation from the federal government.

The Promise Zone designation gave Camden a competitive advantage over other cities seeking federal grants, and the Promise Neighborhood planning grant provided \$500,000 towards a planning effort to receive a more lucrative Promise Neighborhood award to cover the Cooper Plaza, Lanning Square, Bergen Square, Liberty Park and Centerville neighborhoods. When the city applied for a second designation, that of Promise Neighborhood, a letter went to residents explaining that their homes may end up being taken through eminent domain. Politicians insisted it was a pro forma letter that did not reflect actual plans to use eminent domain but was required by the grant process, but within a week, local activists had scheduled two information sessions at Our Lady of Lourdes to organize opposition to the application. Approximately 600 residents attended each organizing meeting, with many fearful that they would lose their homes. Activists threatened to sue and local politicians tried to assure residents that there were no plans to use eminent domain. Quickly, city council incumbents, feeling pressured by an election challenger using the Promise Neighborhood application as a wedge issue in the election, came out against the development proposal. Despite the opposition, the proposal went forward, and four years after the initial planning grant was awarded, Camden received \$6,000,000 as a Promise Neighborhood. That funding now provides a variety of cradle-to-college services including parenting classes in these neighborhoods. While the program has struggled at times to reach deeply into the community with its resources, there have not been conflicts with local community nor displacement.

Similarly, after years of waiting, the State Development Agency (SDA) committed \$132.6 million to redevelop the famous Camden High facility [43]. In 2005, at the end of the Governor Jon Corzine's administration, the school district was promised funds to renovate Camden High along with funds to rebuild the collapsed Lanning Square School. When Gov. Chris Christie came into office, he froze all SDA spending, eventually converting the Lanning Square school into the first Renaissance school, and promising \$50 million to Camden High. Later, that number would be increased to \$132.6 million. However, residents protested the decision to demolish and rebuild the school. There were a host of reasons for that skepticism, some grounded in historical preservation, others in the fine print of what to do with students while the new facility was being constructed. However, the largest public statement against the new school was made, again, by Keith Benson [44], who argued in an op-ed that the school was being built as part of a wider plan to redevelop and gentrify the neighborhood of Parkside.

What is striking about these two examples is that one of the longstanding complaints in Camden has been that there has been no investment in neighborhoods such as Parkside, Centerville and others. In Katz's [45] investigation of Camden's waterfront development, activist Luis Galindez sharply criticized the public funds going towards a waterfront aquarium telling *The Inquirer*, "We got two and three families living in one house and fish in tanks by themselves . . . we could really have used that money." Indeed, one of the primary complaints of the state's 2001 investment of \$175 million in the city was that too high a proportion of money went to downtown institutions, including Rutgers University, Cooper University Hospital, and the aquarium, not neighborhoods with crumbling infrastructure, and yet, when a decade later resources were invested beyond those boundaries, there was still local pushback.

This pushback is clearly linked to displacement pressure but also to the potential that residents end up "unwelcome" in new development. The new Camden High building is a particularly strong case—residents fear that the new school will be transitioned to a charter school and be less welcoming and rooted in the surrounding community. Similarly, residents worry that the Promise Neighborhood will turn their community into a white space and they will be unwelcome as a result. As Freeman [6] finds, these fears extend even to individuals unlikely to be displaced, and in neighborhoods unlikely to face displacement but we argue that these fears—and the political opposition that grows out of them—are also related to more daily interactions with institutions and new development that actively exclude residents. Residents feel unwelcome in white spaces, and see how new development caters to whiteness. Displacement is only one component causing cynicism about development. Residents who are unable to access the waterfront, youth actively targeted by a new police force, anti-loitering

devices discouraging use of the waterfront park by the residents, and beyond breed frustration in the community and a perception that “they’re not building it for us”.

5. Discussion

Building from the case of Camden, NJ, we make three arguments that build upon the existing study of gentrification and displacement pressure: (1) we argue that displacement pressure and exclusionary displacement are paralleled by a more daily form of unwelcomeness and exclusion in which residents in gentrifying cities are excluded from the new development which becomes a white space, and that this happens prior to (or possibly alongside) more traditional impacts such as displacement, (2) we argue that the fear of development which creates white spaces has a dampening effect on new development that could potentially be beneficial to neighborhoods and (3) we argue in this conclusion that these first two points indicate an opportunity to address gentrification by focusing on issues of access and inclusion in urban space.

We emphasize that when residents talk of gentrification, they are not always speaking solely in terms of displacement. Sometimes they are speaking specifically of unwelcomeness and exclusion. This exclusion is a critical component of gentrification in its own right. The literature on displacement pressure, gentrification and the Right to the City address the types of exclusion we found, ranging from policing tactics, to curfews, to white spaces where current residents feel unwelcome, are mirrored in the literature, but often discussed as a precursor to displacement, not a problem in their own right. It is Anderson’s conception of white space [7] that more fully captures the type of exclusion and unwelcomeness referenced by Camden’s residents. The intentional creation of white spaces is not limited to Camden—for example, “poor doors” in New York City actively segregate communities. These doors were a response to regulations requiring additional affordable housing. Some developers built entirely separate entrances to isolate those in affordable housing—those entrances did not connect to market-priced units and became colloquially referred to as “poor doors”. Given communities’ existing fractures along racial lines, these type of efforts result in the creation of pockets of white space even within communities of color.

Our findings are similar. We seek to reposition this concept of white space within the gentrification literature, mirroring the ways Camden residents merged the concept of exclusion from white space with their own fears of gentrification. In the gentrification literature, much of the discussion of such unwelcomeness within white spaces is described as a forerunner to traditional understandings of existing residents displaced by middle-class (often white) newcomers. We argue that residents describe these types of unwelcomeness as negative regardless of whether they are followed by displacement (though we find residents also fear displacement).

As we have shown, such exclusion has impact on the politics of new development. In Camden, NJ, fear of displacement and experiences of exclusion contribute to distrust and cynicism about new development. While Freeman [6] captures similar cynicism in interviews with residents in gentrifying communities, our study shows the link between such views and opposition to new development. Such opposition is complex and multifaceted. Given the history of exclusion and displacement found in Camden, such views are understandable, but the examples cited here show that firm stands by activists against new development may also inhibit programs that provide critical investment to historically underinvested neighborhood. These protests and opposition have the potential to create a catch-22; if neighborhoods do not have development and investment, they are left behind, but new development is threatened by cynicism, opposition, and protest. The history in Camden of building for others undermines the ability to build in underinvested neighborhoods. In particular, such history and the cynicism it begets undermine the potential for positive development—though our research shows how varied the visions for such development are in the Camden community. Some see the wider efforts, such as subsidized corporations or nonprofits coming to the city, as positive, while others are so skeptical that even a Promise Neighborhood or new school are opposed on the grounds that they might cause exclusion and displacement. The result is a wicked problem, in which “good” development

has the potential to be lumped in with bad, and underinvested neighborhoods have no clear path to new development.

Our research highlights the wicked problem of developing underinvested neighborhoods in light of gentrification cynicism that new development will create white spaces. However, the experiences of exclusion by Camden residents also point to another avenue for addressing gentrification beyond traditional approaches ranging from holding property taxes steady for seniors, to rent stabilization programs, to increases in affordable housing [46]. Most gentrification policy focuses on avoiding displacement but if we view exclusion and unwelcomeness as a distinct problem from displacement (though it contributes to displacement pressure and exclusionary displacement), that view leads to a different class of remedies: those that ensure that new development is inclusive and accessible, i.e., that it is not a white space. Since distrust is built both through the threat of displacement and through daily exclusion, rebuilding community trust needs to address both elements as well.

Take, for example, Cooper's Poynt Park, built in North Camden adjacent to the aquarium and baseball stadium. Cooper's Poynt Park, opened in 2017, stands in sharp contrast to the rest of the waterfront which was developed two decades earlier. In the older waterfront development, almost all of the physical design caters towards visitors. That stretch of waterfront is separated from residential communities by vast, expansive parking lots. It has an anti-loitering device. It has no facilities explicitly for residents. Its three main attractions (the aquarium, the baseball stadium, and an outdoor music venue) all cater to tourists. It is a white space. Cooper's Poynt Park, which is just three blocks from the baseball stadium, uses an entirely different approach. Its centerpiece is a playground, it is accessible to residents in North Camden, and it has free parking. While you can almost never find residents out in front of the aquarium, there are almost always residents in the playground. The park is a point of community pride, and seen as a community resource, not a sign of oncoming gentrification.

This is a simple example, but it shows how addressing exclusion is another dimension of addressing gentrification. If the new shuttle buses in downtown Camden were accessible to city residents, if new university buildings included ground-level retail, if transportation plans focused on accessibility to residents not keeping commuting employees "safe" from residents, and if new school buildings followed a community school model making facilities open to residents, residents might come to see these investments not as markers that they are unwelcome, but as positives for a community in dire need of investment. They would become community spaces not white spaces. In short, the robust writing on the need for inclusive design and development in cities [47] and placemaking [48] should also be seen as a strategy for addressing the impact of gentrification. This policy strategy is drawn directly from the experiences of Camden, NJ, residents and their fears of gentrification—as a single case study, such findings need to be systematically studied across communities. The fears of Camden residents are not solely linked to displacement, but also to exclusion and unwelcomeness from new investment that creates white spaces. Such fears have political consequences, but also point to the ways that creating inclusive development is a critical domain for addressing the negative effects of gentrification.

Author Contributions: S.D. was the lead PI on the ethnographic research in Camden, NJ. He designed the research, conducted field work and interviews, led data analysis and led the writing team. R.W. contributed to the design of the project, data analysis, as well as drafting and editing the manuscript.

Funding: This research received no external funding.

Conflicts of Interest: The authors declare no conflict of interest.

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