

FRAMING CONVERSATIONS OF GENTRIFICATION IN DURHAM

What is the rate/state of gentrification in Durham?

For starters, our entire story is played out on land stolen by royally-sanctioned white settlers from the Occaneechi, Tuscarora, Shakori and other indigenous inhabitants who were long living here prior.¹ Our entire system of property, owning it, and saying who can own and do what on it is still an imposed colonial system.

In the past decade Durham political leaders and professionals talked about and trained up on Racial Equity, and Durham's predominantly Black neighborhoods saw Black displacement rates of 10 - 37%.² The most extreme example is the result of 8 years of CDBG funding in a City-led 'affordable housing' project. Median homebuyer incomes in that community (Southside) are nearly 7 times the neighborhood median from 2017, and 68% of the new residents (at least those with a mortgage) are white. Throughout Durham rental listings have increased in price by 35% since 2017 and at least 75% of evicted tenants are Black, indigenous or people of color.

On the other side of that process there is another unsatisfied demand for housing in Durham. Specifically housing that costs \$220 per month. Throughout the past 15 years there have been 2k, 4k or even currently 11,000 Durham residents waiting to get into subsidized homes that are not being created.³ Our largest public housing communities currently have failing inspection scores (as reported by HUD). Current subsidized housing is often deteriorated, unhealthy, unsafe and subjects residents to alienating means testing. And yet demand for it continues to grow.

What Choices Have We Made That Created This Moment?

For 35 years our local government has made important decisions to foster this ecosystem. Durham decommissioned neighborhood planning, reorienting the planning department to prioritize real estate development; the City sponsored and funded the creation of a downtown investment organization; and subsidized landmark real estate investments like the baseball stadium, American Tobacco Campus, and the Downtown Innovation District.

Too much cannot be said of the role Duke (University and Health System) has played in the process of gentrification. One key role alone has been pervasively influential: rent-setting for new downtown revitalization projects. From the first days of American Tobacco Campus, the reopening of the Chesterfield Building, to the first offices of the Innovation

¹ Native Land Digital, <https://native-land.ca/>.

² [Durham Neighborhood Compass](#), retrieved October 1, 2022.

³ DataWorks NC *Who Owns Durham*, 10/06/2022:

<https://docs.google.com/presentation/d/1495DeEbXoQ6KsJOmtUi96eFtUfZ-Gxv8f4z7nGphYdE/edit?usp=sharing>

District, Duke was there paying class A rents before anyone else and guaranteeing a project doesn't fail. While setting a higher bar for commercial rents in the new Durham.

What Questions Should Frame Our Explorations?

Gentrification is an [ages-long process](#) of enclosure that is still owned and operated unilaterally by an elite propertied class. On one side it reproduces its own wealth and prestige through real estate projects and consolidates wealth in an elite via generational boom and bust cycles. To make those booms and busts happen, enthusiastic consumers are needed to not only buy the opportunities but also participate in the identity of those projects and the image of a target consumer.