22 October 2024

Art in Transition: The Impact of Gentrification on Seattle's Artistic Community

Seattle has a great reputation for its artists and artistic communities. It is a paramount place for a lively culture fueled by creative innovations and intellectual property. Seattle has also seen immense growth within the past decade and with the city expansions, which invites many caveats. A major con of the growth Seattle is currently experiencing is the increasing glimpse of gentrification that shadows the city. King County, Pioneer Square, South Park, Capitol Hill, and the Central District are all examples of a few local areas that are at the forefront of gentrification. Although Seattle is not the only place in the United States that is undergoing threats of gentrification, we still need to be intentional with our care and intentions on how we can handle the situation so the city is not irrevocably altered forever. The artistic community in Seattle is facing the effects of gentrification first-hand. For the eight texts that I have researched on the threats that the Seattle artistic community is facing due to gentrification, I will offer a general review of specific points such as stakeholders and theme and then I will go on to give a more in-depth analysis of stakeholders, evidence, and argument for certain articles.

When delving into the effects that gentrification has on the artistic community, specifically in Seattle, there is a lot at stake. In this occurrence, Seattle communities have been trying to respond to its gentrification threat against the arts with exactly that, the arts. The city has been committed to intertwining art ambitions into the city's community development and planning. However, a study found that "Ironically, even as Black Arts/West helped root the Black Arts in Seattle's Central Area, it helped establish ways of thinking about the arts and diversity that would contribute to the neighbourhood's gentrification. (Krasovic)" There are many instances where gentrification feels inevitable. If you keep specific artistic communities alive, it will just attract more people to the area, in turn adding to the gentrification of the city. The

initiative to help curb the spread of gentrification in the city feels confusing as there are so many contradicting factors, however one thing that we know for sure is that we cannot allow for the removal or displacement of artists and their work. As we continue to see the spread of gentrification in many cities, especially Seattle, it is becoming more imperative to highlight the stories of those affected and possible solutions.

What I was able to find when researching these eight articles was possible solutions to the consequences of gentrification experienced by the artistic community in Seattle. Three of my sources specifically highlight perspectives on their efforts of the Wa Na Wari, an immersive community art project that devotes its time to the conservation of Black artists and cultural spaces that take a stance on the gravity of Black land ownership in Seattle (Dever; Dhawan; Vansynghel). Three other sources provide further artistic initiatives for combating the repercussions faced by the arts community regarding gentrification (Dever; Gorenflo; Syed). The remaining two articles I researched give a broader understanding of gentrification in Seattle concerning artistic groups (Krasovic; Miller). After looking into these eight sources, I will go further in analyzing three specific articles and their perspectives on gentrification in Seattle.

Seattle is a city that is dominated by a lot of massive companies. Amazon, Microsoft, Starbucks, Boeing, Apple, and Meta are just a few examples of the huge prominent companies that reside in Seattle and its suburbs. With these companies and their ever-increasing business and opportunities, it is easy for the culture of the city to get swept away or overlooked. In the article “Wa Na Nari Project Uses Art to Combat Gentrification,” the author talks about the artistic community and how they are able to take art and use it to fight against gentrification. Because Seattle is becoming more and more of a monumental city for tech opportunities, various minority groups are finding it more difficult to afford to live there. Because of this, many artists,

especially artists of color, are finding difficulty in renting places to showcase their artwork. A specific area that the article talks about is Seattle's Central District just east of downtown. The Central District used to be home to more than 80% of the African American population, however today, the area currently houses less than 10%. The art center, Wa Na Wari, was cofounded by Elisheba Johnson along with three other artists. The group rents the center from a Black homeowner with the intent to give the space back to the Black community. They are always hosting art exhibitions and events and gathering donations and sponsorships so they are able to cover the costs of rent. Mishti Dhawan, the author of the article, does a great job of highlighting the current environment of gentrification that circles around Seattle. However, I wish that she went more in-depth with the Wa Na Wari community and their projects. Their explanation is very brief and I think that the audience would get a better grasp on the community and their initiative if there was more content relating to them. If the author were able to use pathos in a greater explanation about what is at stake for specific individuals, I think that the audience would care more.

In the Seattle Times article "Seattle Artists Scramble to Save Historic Formal INS Building, Now Home to 100-Plus Studios" by Grace Gorenflo, highlights Kristen Moher, a Seattle photographer who describes art as her salvation. Following the death of her husband, Moher was able to rent "Seattle's largest arts and culture enclave," a studio at Inscape Arts in Seattle's Chinatown International District. The single mother of two was frightened to find out that the building was at risk of "becoming a redevelopment opportunity." Many tenants were disappointed to find out about the possible danger of the building being sold and formed Friends of Inscape, "a working group building a community of immigrant, neighborhood and artist stakeholders that would eventually form a nonprofit to raise money to purchase the property

(Gorenflo).” The building is known to be the largest arts and culture building in Seattle and if it were to be sold there would be more than 100 artist studios that would disappear from the area. This possibility is due to the rising costs of rent prices in the area due to gentrification. Gorenflo talked to a part of Friends of Inscape’s leadership team Tara Tamaribuchi and she mentions that there is such economic uncertainty and how there is a lot at stake. So many individuals' lives are at risk of being shifted and having an area like the INS building to showcase creative freedom is more important than it has ever been before. Gorenflo uses a lot of pathos throughout her article. She appeals to the emotions of the people being affected by gentrification in Seattle and she gives the audience a reason to care. Art is what a lot of individuals find as a massive part of themselves and if they are losing a space to experiment with art, they are losing a part of themselves. By examining multiple stories in one article, the audience can understand that this is

My third and final article that I am analyzing is "Central District Artist Fight to Keep History Alive” authored by John Dever. This article talks about how culture, sights, and scenes are beginning to disappear from certain Seattle areas. The strain of gentrification is continuing to put stress and panic on artistic communities. Seattle arts consultant Leilani Lewis was able to help mold a new direction of contemporary Jackson Apartments 'Artwalk. These are a gathering of art sculptures from the public that reside in Seattle’s Central District. Many neighborhood artists were subject to commission of artworks and pieces to highlight and save the community’s culture. A lot of individuals from many different walks of life and backgrounds were able to participate in this initiative. Paul Rucker, a musician and artist from Jackson Street was able to make a creative sculpture of a record player that sprinkles the names of various historic musicians and venues throughout its composition. Dever, the author of the article, does a great job of showing the works and stories of many artists that have participated on this project to save

the Central District's cultural heritage. This inspires the audience to keep learning about individuals who are participating in the different ways that they can try to curb gentrification in their communities. I do think that Dever could elaborate more on the overall project just to provide the audience with more information that they are reading about.

All in all, with the increase in major tech company prominence in Seattle and its neighboring districts, gentrification is going to continue to spread, pushing out the communities that have resided there for many years. After analyzing these articles, the reader is able to get a good idea on different ways that they can combat gentrification in their own area using art.

22 October 2024

Works Cited

Dever, John. “An Oasis of Art in a Neighborhood Under Stress.” *King 5*, 21 Feb. 2022, www.king5.com/article/entertainment/television/programs/evening/an-oasis-of-art-in-a-neighborhood-under-stress/281-efcf4f3c-9394-4063-a5a2-1d2cbd1f0011

Dever, John. “Central District Artist Fight to Keep History Alive.” *King 5*, 5 May 2022, https://www.king5.com/article/entertainment/television/programs/evening/central-district-artists-fight-to-keep-history-alive/281-345b3f75-ee6b-4496-9905-69a591e49e62

Dhawan, Mishti. “Wa Na Wari Project Uses Art to Combat Gentrification.” *The Daily of the University of Washington*, 3 Apr. 2023, www.dailyuw.com/arts_and_culture/galleries_museums/wa-na-wari-project-uses-art-to-combat-gentrification/article_62e42588-d1d1-11ed-a3f2-27ad040ccef3.html

Gorenflo, Grace. “Seattle Artists Scramble to Save Historic Formal INS Building, Now Home to 100-Plus Studios.” *The Seattle Times*, 15 Mar. 2022, https://www.seattletimes.com/entertainment/seattle-artists-fundraise-to-buy-former-ins-building-now-home-to-100-plus-artist-studios/

Krasovic, Mark. “Black Arts/West and the ironies of development in Seattle’s ‘Other America.’” *Planning Perspectives*, 13 Dec. 2023, https://doi-org.ezproxy.lib.utexas.edu/10.1080/02665433.2023.2291219

22 October 2024

Miller, Lindsay M. “Community-Based Equitable Development: Seattle’s Response to Gentrification.” *National Civic Review*, vol. 107, no. 4, 2019, *JSTOR*, https://www.jstor.org/stable/10.32543/naticivirevi.107.4.0036

Syed, Maleeha. “This King County Initiative Wants to Prevent Further Gentrification.” *Cascade PBS*, 26 Apr. 2022, https://www.cascadepbs.org/equity/2022/04/king-county-initiative-wants-prevent-further-gentrification

Vansynghel, Margo. “How This Seattle Family Used Art to Keep Their Central District Home.” *The Seattle Times*, 19 Sep. 2024, https://www.seattletimes.com/entertainment/visual-arts/how-a-seattle-family-kept-their-home-by-starting-a-nonprofit/

22 October 2024