I. OBSERVATION:

For my I-Search Paper I would like to delve into the issue of gentrification and what it means for lower income minority families and communities. For those unfamiliar with gentrification, it is the process of renovating homes to conform to the middle and upper middle-classes’ tastes. In the 4 years since I discovered what gentrification is, I’ve learned that gentrification is often seen as a negative topic. Whether it be through discussions with peers, headlines on the news, or even billboards across Los Angeles, gentrification is seen as an unfavorable affair. I believe the reason behind this is because gentrification is also a cause of homelessness among lower class families, but all I have to base that on is my own experiences.

I took an interest in this topic as it hits close to home – no pun intended – because it has happened to me and my family. It wasn’t until I started a new job in Torrance almost a year after it happened that I realized this. When my new coworkers were getting to know me, one asked what I was doing way over in Torrance when I’m from the city of Cudahy. I explained that though I am from Cudahy, I had recently moved to East Los Angeles due to the house my family had been renting for over 20 years being sold to a property management company. The company that took over promised to make much needed renovations to our old home. However, it wasn’t
until 2 months before the scheduled renovations that they notified us of the catch. After the renovations, our rent for a 2-bedroom 1-bathroom house would increase from $1,200 per month to $1,950 per month. They gave us a “choice” to either agree to pay the new rent cost by the end of the 60-day notice or find a new place to live. After hearing my story, my coworker said “ah, gentrification.” I had heard this word before, but I didn’t understand what it meant. My coworker explained that gentrification is when companies take old homes and apartments building and renovating and modernizing then to satisfy middle class preferences. This usually meant an increase in housing costs as well. However, to me and my mother, gentrification meant we would be homeless for the next three years as the cost of renting a home became increasingly unaffordable.

I have many questions that I hope to have answers to by the end of this research. To list a few, I wish to find out what is the history of gentrification. I want to know if it significant or beneficial to have gentrification and if so, why? Who are the middle class these property management companies are trying to accommodate and who are the lower-class that are commonly affected by gentrification? First and foremost, I hope to discover ways and ideas to promote urbanization improvements and modernization without displacing families and communities as my family once was. I also hope to find ways in which I can help those effected by gentrification in my own community.

II. INVESTIGATION:

Gentrification is a complex subject and even its very definition provides insight to both sides of the narrative surrounding it. In their article “Gentrification Explained”, Doctor Karen Chappele et al. of the Urban Displacement Project of UC Berkeley define gentrification as “a process of neighborhood change that includes economic change in a historically disinvested
neighborhood —by means of real estate investment and new higher-income residents moving in - as well as demographic change - not only in terms of income level, but also in terms of changes in the education level or racial make-up of residents” (Chappele et al.). In other words, when gentrification occurs in a city it not only creates a change to the look and style of a city but also a change in the character and background of the town and its residents. There is a lot to unpack there in the definition itself, and whether the changes are a good thing depends on who you ask.

In this paper, I want to examine the effects and outcomes of gentrification in low-income minority communities in Los Angeles.

When looking into the effects of gentrification on a community, we must understand that these changes will have different results for a resident depending on if they are a homeowner or a renter. Thus, before delving into my findings on the effects and consequences of gentrification, let us begin with an in depth look into its history to determine who are the renters, as they are the ones most affected by this occurrence.

To pretend that the origins of gentrification is purely based on economics and neighborhood improvement would be to dishonor the people who experienced the racial discrimination that its history is steeped in. Between the 1930s and 1960s, property investors and the Home Owners’ Loan Corporation took part in a practice, now known as “redlining”, which outlined which neighborhoods and cities were considered high risk for mortgage loans (Domonoske). Cities and neighborhoods across the country were categorized into 4 classifications that determined their investment risk: “Best”, “Still Desirable”, “Definitely Declining”, and “Hazardous” The HOLC describes “hazardous” areas as “characterized by detrimental influences in a pronounced degree, undesirable population or an infiltration of it” (qtd. in Nelson).
Image 1 is a scanned archived map created by the HOLC in the displaying of Los Angeles and its surrounding cities and towns being graded into these categories. In a strange coincidence –that one might argue was no coincidence at all – these neighborhoods that were often considered poor investments and thus labeled “Definitely Declining” or “Hazardous” were neighborhoods whose residents were predominantly lower-class minorities. These are neighborhoods such as Boyle Heights, East Los Angeles, South Los Angeles, Huntington Park, and Compton. According to Robert Nelson of *Mapping Inequality*, “These grades were a tool for redlining: making it difficult or impossible for people in certain areas to access mortgage financing and thus become homeowners” (Nelson). To put it differently, the purpose of redlining was to ensure that low income minority groups could not become homeowners, thus they became, and remain, renters. Over 50% of residents in major California cities like Los Angeles are renters (*City Rising* 00:11:21).
IDENTIFICATION

Now that we’ve established the foundation of gentrification and who it touches, we can begin to identify the effects it has on low income minority communities in Los Angeles. Of course, when looking into these effects, there are many angles to view them from: the community standpoint and the individual. The pros of gentrification mostly change the community as a whole. These changes include revitalization of the city, economic and business prosperity, decrease in crime rate, and decrease in average poverty rate. The negative side of gentrification tends to impact the community through the lives of individual families. These effects include: increased rent prices, evictions, and displacement which then can lead to depression (Chappele and Zuk., *Pushed Out*).

REVITALIZATION

When a disinvested neighborhood with homes and retail spaces with low property value become prime hot spots for investment by businesses and housing developments. This leads city officials to improve transportation, increase funding for schools which then improves education, increased funding for police force which drops the crime rate of the city, as well as opens up new businesses which then creates new employment opportunities for residents (Litman). All improvements that essentially bring a city back to life. However, my findings indicate that lower income residents do not always get to see these improvements.

DERACINATION

These benefits are all for naught if the original residents are being left out of the celebration due to being pushed out of their homes. One of the most commonly known effects of gentrification, and the reason so many advocate against it, is displacement. When a city is
revitalized it becomes more desirable to new investors and most importantly, potential new residents. This creates an increased demand for more housing and as a result of this shortage, rent prices also increase. For many working-class low-income families, this change comes at a great cost. Many are unable to afford these increases and are then forced to move to more affordable exurban towns. (Chappele and Zuk, *Pushed Out*).

III. INSPIRATION:

With the facts laid out and the causes and effects established, my thoughts on gentrification are conflicting. On one hand, gentrification can revitalize a city and bring in new investors and profits for the city to improve the quality of its neighborhoods. But on the other hand, low income residents of these cities are being forced out whether intentional or not. Now the question remains, do we let gentrification of our underprivileged neighborhoods continue and improve the lives of a select few who can afford it, or do we stop gentrification all together and leave our cities and citizens to remain in the same impoverished state that they have been in for years? Solutions are still in short supply but some that have been offered by the Urban Displacement Project include: creating laws and ordinances that protect current residents like rent control and eviction protection, creating programs that provide rental assistance to low income families, and developing more affordable housing.

IV. EDUCATION:

At the start of my research, my knowledge of gentrification was very limited and, quite honestly, biased. My negative experiences with gentrification had led me to believe that it had nothing to offer but negative effects for lower income minority families, like mine. There is no denying that gentrification mostly imparts negative consequences for minority families,
especially those who are renters. Of course, I tried to keep an open mind during my research, but while looking for positive effects of gentrification for low income minority families, I had a hard time finding any credible sources. Most of the benefits are for investors and homeowners who are typically majority white. But taking into account the benefits gentrification has to offer, does make it seem favorable, if I were a homeowner of course. As I am not, my perception is unchanged. A concept that benefits some while being detrimental for others is not beneficial for society at all. In my opinion, the negative outcomes outweigh the positives.
Annotated Bibliography


The first episode of this documentary series sheds light on the history of the discriminatory laws that are the foundation of gentrification.


This web page gives an in depth explanation of gentrification and the impact it has on communities by looking into its history and exploring the patterns of gentrification.


This web page discusses the impacts of displacement on families and provides possible solutions for improving neighborhoods without forcing low-income families out.

This article provides information and an interactive map that displays the history of redlining in American cities.


This blog post provides insight from multiple sources on the effects of gentrification.


This site provides an interactive map of archived Home Owners' Loan Corporation maps and looks into the history of redlining and housing discrimination.