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THE GENTRIFICATION OF CHICAGO'S CABRINI GREEN AND THE TEMPORALITIES OF URBAN CHANGE

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Gentrification[1] is the intensification of urban change, through which the physical and social character of a neighborhood visibly alters, it becomes inhabited by higher social classes, and prices go up. This process, however, is not linear or inevitable, and its timing and duration are crucial. Even though it follows the cyclical rhythms of capitalism and is partly determined by their dynamics, we cannot directly predict from this connection when, how or even where specific changes will take place, and whether a neighborhood's changes will be enduring or ephemeral. The new order, which ultimately unsettles and displaces old residents, emerges from contestations of political and architectural visions across various levels of the state, banks, investors, developers as well as residents. This chapter examines how the history of a large-scale redevelopment project intersects with the cyclical temporality of capitalism. On a more general level, it explores the role of time in what is arguably a paradigmatic case of state-led gentrification: the dramatic conversion of a once infamous area of social housing into a fashionable mixed-income neighborhood in Chicago.

The Cyclical and Eventful Temporalities of Capitalism

Building upon Karl Marx, David Harvey argues that the built environment constitutes a 'spatial fix' to the recurrent crises of overaccumulation by absorbing huge amounts of capital surplus (Harvey 2010: 85). Crises, of course, are not accidental events; they periodically punctuate the accumulation process, crisis cycles underlie the immanent rhythm of production and destruction in capitalism as a dynamic sociohistorical formation (Lefebvre 2004: 55; Marx 1978: 264; Schumpeter 1939: 138–173). In Harvey's (1978) analysis, the rapid and systematic shifts in the location of investment in the built environment correlate with the cyclical pattern of crises in the economy. Kuznets cycles of about twenty years

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were revealed to correlate with waves of investment in the built environment in the US, and Gottlieb's (1976) investigation of building cycles in several countries showed a similar periodicity (Harvey 1978). On a very general level, capital is drawn to sectors and geographical areas that promise better returns and can act as spatial fixes temporarily. As Neil Smith (1996: 86) succinctly put it: "Gentrification in the residential sphere is […] simultaneous with a sectoral switch in capital investments". The selectively allocated flows of capital investment define the urban scale of uneven development, of which gentrification is a key element, if not its 'leading edge' (ibid.).

Capital invested in the built environment goes through alternating cycles of valorization and devalorization, ultimately leading to the emergence of the rent gap, the disparity between the highest potential ground rent level and the actual ground rent capitalized under the present land use, as Smith (1996: 68) famously defined it:

> Gentrification occurs when the gap is sufficiently wide that the developers can purchase structures cheaply, can pay the builder's costs and profit for rehabilitation, can pay interest on mortgage and construction loans, and can then sell the end product for a sale price that leaves a satisfactory return to the developer. The entire ground rent, or a large portion of it, is now capitalized; the neighborhood is thereby 'recycled' and begins a new cycle of use.

How this change happens at the neighborhood level, however, belongs to the eventful history of gentrification.

Even though uneven development is inherent to capitalism, its spatial fixes, timing and intensity are not objectively predetermined. Neither is gentrification simply the epiphenomenal manifestation of the deep-structural logic of uneven development in a mechanical manner. As William Sewell (2008) suggests, the temporal analysis of capitalism will have to reconcile the abstract logic of capital, characterized by cyclicality, objective necessity and causal uniformity, with its eventful temporality, which is irreversible, contingent and causally heterogeneous. While theory tells us that uneven development exhibits recurrent patterns, these must also be accounted for in the last instance as the contingent outcome of a sequence of events in time; stated baldly, they must be explained *historically*.

It is only through an attentive analytical reconstruction of the eventful temporality of urban change that one can demonstrate convincingly how change occurs in a dynamic sequence of events (Sewell 2005). This involves a turning point, which is not really a point; it has duration and extension, and can only be identified after a new trajectory is clearly established (Abbott 2001: 258–259). In a political-economic sense, as the turning point is approaching, potential and capitalized ground rent start to converge until the tipping point arrives and the 'neighborhood effect,' which operates through the ground rent structure, turns. In an anthropological sense, the turning point means that the neighborhood does

not feel like home to the old inhabitants any longer; its character changes, its aura disappears, or as Japonica Brown-Saracino (2009: 217) writes, "old timers… no longer feel comfortable in public space". Their urban routines are gradually disrupted as public space is increasingly used by different people in novel ways (Bodnar 2015). Change in their lived space is deeply unsettling for the old timers but it can be enthusiastically embraced by the new residents. A temporal reconstruction of the chain of events in a structured narrative is necessary to elucidate how the tipping point comes about exactly, and how property prices and the character of the neighborhood change, and the area embarks on a new trajectory.

The fine details of the process are crucial precisely because even if it has started, it does not always culminate in the physical and social upgrading of the neighborhood, which is what constitutes successful gentrification. We usually learn only about complete, successful cases and retrospective theorization is more often than not uninterested in the contingencies of the process. 'Success', however, is not automatic and it tends to be a failure from the perspective of social justice, as 'improvement' leads to the displacement of the most vulnerable.[2] Economically, everything hinges on the dynamics of change, insofar as a project's success lies in reaching the tipping point that is accompanied by appropriate returns on investment. The sooner it is reached the better; if it comes too late, investors may not be able to wait it out. The state, for example, often has to assume an active role in extending the timeframe of projects, providing the conditions for a longer turnover for investors. The temporal perspectives of developers, financiers, the state and the residents, however, can be difficult to reconcile, even if in the present era of neoliberal financialization, when more and more aspects of life are commoditized and transformed into the source of financial flows, the pursuit of 'higher use' has come to bear on the perceptions of more and more social actors including the local state, pulling public land into private residential development.[3]

In the following, I illustrate these diverse temporal frames and the complex ways in which the cyclical logic of urban uneven development intersects with eventful temporality on the ground in the transformation of Chicago's Cabrini-Green area, and urban theory interacts with urban history.

Time for Change: The Two Temporalities of Cabrini-Green

The name Cabrini-Green has become synonymous with the failed idea of public housing in everyday parlance: it lies at the center of a strong semantic constellation that includes high-rises, delinquency and racial segregation. The high-rises are gone now, the area has been rebaptized into various configurations of Old Town with only the oldest section still sporting the name Cabrini, and it has become the most dynamic mixed-income redevelopment project in Chicago. The demolition of Cabrini-Green seems to have completed a long series of improvements in the Near North Side (see Figure 13.1), and after decades of being squeezed between wealth and poverty, boom and neglect, the area has jumped scales in land value and social status.

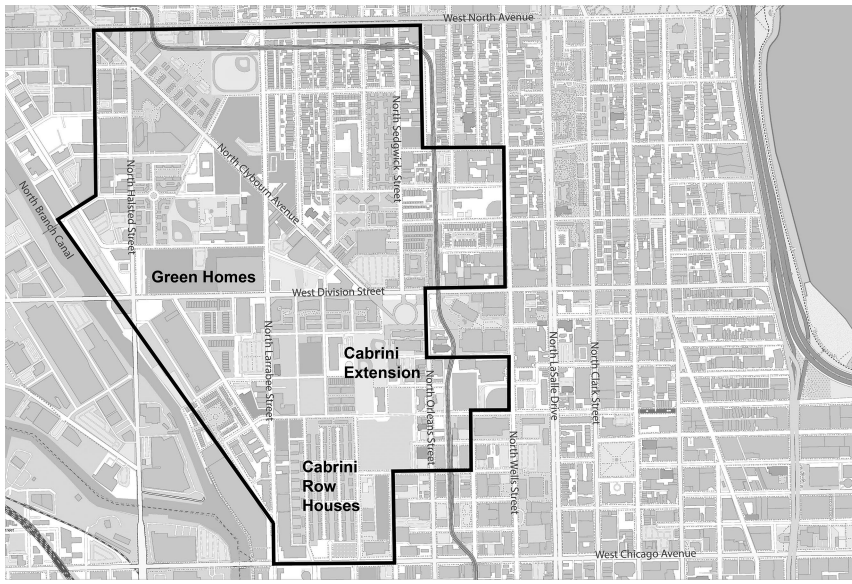

FIGURE 13.1 Map of the Near North Side with the redevelopment area inside the boundary.

Source: OpenStreetMap contributors, 2021 [boundary and labels are added by Judit Bodnar].

Public memory insists on linking high-rises and delinquency to Cabrini-Green, but the social housing project that came to be known by this name was a development spanning several decades, architectural styles and social groups. The initial Frances Cabrini Homes were two- and three-story walk-ups, the oldest section erected in 1942. Fifteen buildings, mostly seven- and nineteen-floor red brick structures, were added as Cabrini Extension North and South in 1958, followed by the eleven hundred units in the white high-rises of the William Green Homes across Division Street in 1962. The idea was born out of the countrywide ambition of urban renewal, and the form it took was inspired by the sociological and architectural spirit of the times, which by the 1960s was the modernism of the 'tower in a park'. The project was slum clearance, the socio-spatial form of which became known as the 'projects' (Venkatesh 2000). This part of the Near North was indeed considered a 'slum' as the title of Harvey Zorbaugh's classic Chicago School study from 1929 suggests: home to both the Gold Coast and Little Hell, the Near North Side embodied the starkest economic differences and diversity in Chicago at the time (Zorbaugh 1929).

By the time the first Frances Cabrini Homes were erected, the neighborhood's predominantly Sicilian stock had started to give way to an increasing number of internal migrants from the US South, and the area was becoming predominantly African-American. Many argue that social housing was indeed seen positively by residents as an escape from the slums at the time, and it was

instrumental for upward mobility (Fuerst 2003; Hunt 2009). Residents trace the beginning of decline of Chicago social housing to the arrival of gangs in the late 1960s, followed by further deterioration due to drug trafficking (Venkatesh 2000). In Cabrini, public memory holds that the 1970 shooting of two police officers, which resulted in the escalation of violence and downscaled patrolling by the Chicago Police Department, was a significant event precipitating the deterioration of the area (Bennett and Reed 1999). The accidental shooting of a seven-year-old boy in 1992 marked the beginning of Cabrini's end, pushing politicians to rally around the idea of wholesale demolition (Vale 2013). Residents are also eager to point at less dramatic events in their stories of decline, such as the increasing negligence of the Chicago Housing Authority (CHA), the management's laxity in enforcing its own rules, and the removal of the rent cap in 1982, which forced better earning families out leaving only very poor people in the area who had no other option (residents, personal interview, June 2006).

The overall rhetoric of decline hides a somewhat more complex history. Cabrini's decline has at least two main components: the absolute degradation of conditions and the relative position of social housing projects in the context of the changing cityscape. The worsening of conditions was a combined result of physical wear and tear and the shifting social composition of the buildings. The modernness of the 'towers in a park' quickly wore off and growing repair costs led to severe under-maintenance, while the social composition of public housing residents shifted from racially mixed working-class families to mostly poor female-headed African-American households by the 1970s, many of whom were welfare recipients (Hunt 2009). This image came to dominate both the general idea of social housing and Cabrini. Thus, the picture that sociologist Richard Sennett (2003), who spent his childhood in Cabrini in the late 1940s, presents in his autobiographical book complicates the understanding of social housing and looks unfamiliar to younger readers: the neighborhood may have been poor, and displayed racial tension but it was new, full of hope, non-segregated and housed mostly working families, who could move on later.

The project's waning reputation was exacerbated by the intensification of urban renewal in Lincoln Park to the north and the up-scaling of the Gold Coast to the east, making both residents and city politicians feel more and more the squeeze of rising land values and the pressure of the rent gap. As in a classic textbook case of an area ripe for redevelopment, the difference in rents between the current and potential use of the land became enormous. The principal promise of the area lay in its relative underutilization from a business perspective: 70 acres of publicly owned land with decaying housing surrounded by former manufacturing zones in close proximity to prime commercial and residential districts of the city, which as *The Economist* announced "has come through deindustrialization looking shiny and confident" (Grimond 2006: 1). The 'business solution' seemed so evident and yet took so long: it needed state actors at various scales to clear the institutional ground for, and extend the timeline of, the transformation.

On the federal level, a major shift took place in public housing policy, which gradually removed the relics of Keynesian welfare policies and constraints on the potential gentrification of social housing. In 1994, the Department of Housing and Urban Development revealed its new program *HUD Reinvention: From Blueprint to Action* (HUD 1995), which shifted responsibility for housing and community development from federal to state-level and local governments. Along with the increasing involvement of the private sector to produce and manage affordable housing, and the introduction of project- and tenant-based subsidies as Section 8 vouchers, the HUD program signaled the transformation of public housing by limiting the role of the state to mere financing instead of construction (Smith 2006).[4]

The HOPE VI (Housing Opportunities for People Everywhere) program, which was launched by the Department of Housing and Urban Development in 1992, created the conceptual and financial foundations for the transformed idea of housing, mixing neoliberal ideas and design principles inspired by New Urbanism (US GAO 1998). Embracing the tenets of neo-traditional design, the program advocated a shift from high-rises to town houses and conventional street layouts. Shifting moods both in design and federal legislation unexpectedly lent support to the city's plans to turn Cabrini around, and shaped its redevelopment accordingly. HOPE VI funds provided for the demolition and construction of social housing units, and Section 8 vouchers were widely used to move displaced tenants into private rental housing in other areas.[5]

The city revealed the Near North Redevelopment Initiative under the enthusiastic tutelage of Mayor Daley in 1996, marking a new scale for municipal involvement. "The city's basic plan was to offer Section 8 certificates to all residents… there was not really any permanent relocation plan" (planning official, personal interview, August 2005). The redevelopment plan called for the maximization of the market potential of the area and a partial replacement of subsidized units to be achieved in the form of a mixed-income community to be housed in low- and mid-rise buildings. The proposed mix was 50% market-rate, 20% affordable housing, and 30% social housing for an area that was all social housing. Attorney Richard Wheelock from the Legal Assistance Foundation recalls that "initially CHA was talking about 50% public housing" and also fewer apartments to pull down. "In early 1996, the city took over the whole planning process, and CHA and the city came up with an entirely new plan", shutting the residents out of the planning process altogether (Richard Wheelock, personal interview, September 2005). The residents organized themselves, and the Cabrini-Green Local Advisory Council (LAC) filed a lawsuit with the help of Wheelock. Tenant activism resulted in a consent decree in August 2000, which has been guiding the relationship of the city, CHA and the tenants ever since (Cabrini LAC v. CHA 96 C 6949). The decree determined a higher number of replacement units to be built in the planning area: at least 700 public housing units and 270 affordable ones, in the allocation of which Cabrini displaced residents should have priority. The income mix was confirmed on city- and CHA-owned land for the next

forty years, and applied to both rental and for sale housing. Since most of the new private construction would take place on city-owned land with ninety-nine-year ground leases—a not uncommon formation in Chicago—social housing would be included in the whole area. The decree stipulated that the LAC becomes a partner to housing development projects enjoying proportionate developers' fees and profits and participating in the selection of property managers and contractors. The market pressure was, however, formidable and the stakes high; a second lawsuit had to be filed in 2004 challenging the last phase of the relocation process. A further legal action in 2013 made sure to protect the remaining public housing in the area and raised its proportion to 33% from 30% in new construction. "The city would not have done it without the lawsuit", the planning official in charge of the area admitted frankly (personal interview, August 2005).

The first mixed-income residential complex in the area, Old Town Village East and West, opened in 2003 offering the prescribed housing mix. It took four years to sell the 225 market-rate units, recalled the agent in the sales office, attributing this slowness to the relatively high price in a neighborhood still considered risky at the time (sales agent, personal interview, September 2005). In 2005, there was still quite a visible difference between the two sections of the development: Old Town Village East north of Division Street was a consolidated neighborhood bounded by historic Old Town and the new commercial section around the former Dominick's supermarket, while Village West (south of Division) truly looked like the western frontier with huge vacant lots, demolition debris and a good view of both the Cabrini Row Houses to the south and the Green high-rises across the street—"where… things happen", as the agent suggested (ibid.). The exact same townhouse would go for US$200,000 less in Village West than in Village East (see Figures 13.2 and 13.3).

In spite of the impressive line-up of forces, there were still doubts about the viability of the mixed-income developments at the time. The planning official, however, was quite relaxed: "when the economy is not too bad, it'll be easy to find 2,000 who do not mind mixed-income developments… In Chicago you have enough liberal, educated folks who will participate in the experiment" (planning official, personal interview, August 2005). True to the planner's vision, the renewed Cabrini area was in fact on the way to become a commercial success. Change seemed well beyond the turning point. Parkside of Old Town, as the former Cabrini Extension North is called now, was almost sold or under contract before the market crashed in 2008. With the onset of the crisis, not only did sales slow down and buyers step back but the fate of the mixed-income development started to look insecure. As Lawrence Vale quotes the nervous developer: "by October 2009, [they] had 'moved in all […] returning residents, but only half the market people' had occupied their units […] It's now perceived as a big, new public housing development" (Vale 2013: 297).[6] In other words, the financial crisis disrupted the optimism of linear (re)development even after the turning point, conjuring the spectral memory of its less than glamorous local history: "It's […] the projects all over again", as one new owner lamented (Spoerl 2011).

FIGURE 13.2 Old Town Village East.
Source: Judit Bodnar, 2010.

FIGURE 13.3 Parkside with view of Sears Tower in the distance.
Source: Judit Bodnar, 2010.

At this point, more time had to be bought for the project to succeed. The city released the remaining funds before the conditions were met, and J. P. Morgan Chase extended the construction loan it provided. The last tower of the William Green Homes was demolished in 2011—a significant visual change in the landscape (see Figure 13.4).

A year later, a new Target store opened on the site—a comprehensive discount store which is popular both among lower- and middle-class shoppers. It completed

FIGURE 13.4 The last Green Tower.
Source: Judit Bodnar, 2010.

the facelift of the neighborhood, making it difficult even to remember where exactly the Green towers stood. The only section that remained of the former Cabrini-Green is the oldest part of the housing project—low-rises and row-houses—in an area not immediately visible from the main transportation arteries. What is quite visible instead, though, is the new cutting-edge eighteen-story Xavier (as in Mother St. Frances Xavier Cabrini) building, which is three stories higher than the demolished Green Homes. Going against the very argument that was originally used to destroy Cabrini, the Xavier brings back the once-loathed high-rises to the neighborhood repackaged as hipster luxury and green design. Timing was crucial for this development—the plot was acquired in 2013 and the building completed in 2015. As a high-rise that eerily reminds locals of the stigmatized past, the Xavier could be built only in an area whose fortune had already turned and steadily embarked on a trajectory of rising property prices and popularity. Thinking beyond mid-rise construction was inconceivable earlier. Once the new structure went up, building height has accelerated in the fringe areas, and the recent thirty-two-story Old Town Park development not only drastically surpasses the former Cabrini high-rises but gives the impression that the new mixed-income community had jumped scales and suddenly wants to catch up with the towers of the neighboring Gold Coast (see Figure 13.5).

Change of Plan?

The transformation of Cabrini represents the complete re-branding of a neighborhood in a large-scale coordinated effort of state and private capital. It did not start, however, with the Near North Redevelopment Initiative in 1996

FIGURE 13.5 Old Town Park under construction.
Source: Judit Bodnar, 2017.

and neoliberal urbanism, or even with the accelerated decline of Cabrini-Green in the 1970s. The very construction of Cabrini-Green between the 1940s and the 1960s was a part of a long durée Near North redevelopment initiative even if it was called slum clearance at the time. It was a social housing project but it entailed both physical and social upgrading, and resulted in displacement. While it provided social housing, it did so to people who were less marginal than the former residents, the poorest groups of whom were displaced as a result (Hunt 2009; Vale 2013). The new construction halted the devalorization of the area for a while but Cabrini reached a new bottom of the disinvestment cycle in two generations, became ripe for redevelopment once again, then was caught in the neoliberal zeal of radical urban change in the new millennium. Neither the spectacular decline of Cabrini nor its demolition and replacement by mixed-income housing were inevitable though. The story of the neighborhood did not simply conform to the logic of uneven development by closing a long-standing rent gap. As the narrative of change shows, it was a long process, which required major efforts and was completed in several stages, complicated by many reversals, corrections and additions, putting the turning point at risk several times.

Time has worked in a complex manner. In the bureaucratic exercise of power, waiting implies submission (Bourdieu 2000: 228), and the 'patients of the state' (Auyero 2012), such as people in need of social housing in our case, are routinely made to wait by the authorities (Koppelman 2018). Being kept waiting in the case of simple relocation in the social housing system or following a neighborhood renewal decision increases residents' vulnerability (Sakizlioglu 2014), but it can also give them an opportunity to organize, as it happened in Cabrini. The tenants' organization managed to slow down the pace of demolition and contest the scale of replacement housing, which as planning officials admitted, would not have happened without tenant mobilization and the ensuing lawsuit. The transformation of the neighborhood entailed massive displacement nonetheless (Smith 2006; Vale 2013). Activism made a difference, altered the mix of the mixed-income development and made change less unsettling for the former tenants, but could not redraw the original business design completely. The original plan was about 'improvement:' improving the business potential of the area and housing for a select group of tenants while shifting the problem of social marginalization and inadequate housing elsewhere. The residents wanted a different kind of improvement, of their housing conditions and environment, but they did not care for property prices in the area, and did not imagine the improvement in the form of an upscale mixed-income development. They were not overtly concerned by what others saw as racial segregation either.

The business solution was conceived amid a major structural shift from the industrial to the corporate city, from managerial to entrepreneurial urban governance (Harvey 1989). This expanded the possibilities for a higher use of space and quickened the pace of change, culminating in the transformation of an area of social housing, which was theoretically possible but practically unimaginable earlier. Policy changes, growing economic opportunities and the shifting philosophy of urban governance created a powerful alliance of state and capital to close the rent gap, which, once closed, is bound to emerge elsewhere. The striking transformation of Cabrini can only be adequately understood through the multiple temporalities of gentrification, oscillating between the eventful and cyclical-teleological temporalities of capitalism. Such an approach reveals how housing policies, architectural imagination, the politics of urban competition and high-minded state involvement in improving housing for the poor intersect with the rhythm of neoliberal capitalism, which may create, in retrospect, the illusion of structural inevitability, but is, in fact, shot through with tensions and contingencies that require closer historical scrutiny.

Notes

1 The term was coined by Ruth Glass (1964) more than fifty years ago. For a comprehensive treatment of gentrification see, among others, Atkinson and Bridge (2005), Lees et al. (2008, 2016).
2 This explains why gentrification is by default an undesirable phenomenon in critical urban scholarship.

3 For an overview of debates on financialization, see Adorjan (2014: 306–311), on the financialization of housing, Aalbers (2012).
4 Created originally during the Great Depression as Section 8 of the Housing Act of 1937, Section 8 vouchers became widespread in the mid 1970s. Low income tenants (whose income does not reach 50% of the median income in their area, but typically is less than 30%) are given housing vouchers which they can apply towards private rental housing. It is a popular tool of desegregation, by making tenants move out of segregated public housing.
5 The most vocal popular critic of the HOPE VI endeavor has been singer PJ Harvey in her album *The Hope Six Demolition Project*.
6 The other side of the story is that in 2010 only 372 ex-Cabrini households lived in mixed-income developments (CHA 2011).

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