

## College Prep for *Whom?* The Changing Architecture of an African American School in a Gentrifying Community



**Olivia D. Hatch, Architecture**

Research Mentor: Ruby Mendenhall, Assistant Professor,  
Department of Sociology

### Abstract

This study focuses on architectural transformations to Martin Luther King High School as it transformed to Martin Luther King College Preparatory High School in a gentrified neighborhood on the south side of Chicago called North Kenwood. Gentrification is the renovation of low-income neighborhoods by middle-class individuals. Scholars argue that when a neighborhood undergoes gentrification, the schools are also renovated to reflect the new residents' demands for quality education. This study also focuses on the school's renovations between 1997 and 2002. In 1997, KHS was underperforming in attendance and test scores. In 1999 KHS was targeted for renovation and major changes in curriculum that would make it a selective enrollment college preparatory high school. I use data from eight in-depth interviews of students and staff to get their perspectives on King High School before the changes, King College Prep after the changes, the neighborhood during the different eras of the school, and how these changes affected staff and students. Utilizing Critical Race Theory (CRT) and how it interconnects with the issue of class, I argue that King College Preparatory High School's renovations and curriculum changes served as a signal to more affluent African American families that the refurbished high school was of good quality.