

## The Goose

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Volume 17 | No. 1

Article 15

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8-5-2018

# Gentrifier by John Joe Schlichtman, Jason Patch, and Marc Lamont Hill

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*Old Brewery Mission*

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### Recommended Citation / Citation recommandée

Brais, Hannah. "Gentrifier by John Joe Schlichtman, Jason Patch, and Marc Lamont Hill." *The Goose*, vol. 17, no. 1, article 15, 2018, <https://scholars.wlu.ca/thegoose/vol17/iss1/15>.

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***Gentrifier*** by **JOHN JOE SCHLICHTMAN, JASON PATCH, and MARC LAMONT HILL**  
University of Toronto Press, 2017 \$29.95

Reviewed by **HANNAH BRAIS**

Taking a holistic attempt at the question of gentrification without placing the blame, *Gentrifier* forms an accessible and practical stance on the arguments that surround the subject more largely. The core dilemma that Schlichtman, Patch, and Lamont Hill are pointing to in their construction of *Gentrifier* is a crucial one in the current context — gentrification on top of being a complex social and economic shift is most importantly an unquantifiable lived experience:

the project to frame gentrification as a uniform causal mechanism of good or evil misdirects academics and policy makers from pursuing actions on the ground that can better the lives of people within urban communities. (181)

With a far more action-oriented approach to discussing gentrification, the authors make a compelling argument for theory to be informed by experience, which should cumulatively inform practice. Speaking to this, Schlichtman, Patch, and Lamont Hill craft a book that is meant for gentrifiers, whether they be citizens, academics, or planners, with a more critical reflection of their experience within the changing urban landscape.

This practical approach to gentrification offers readers a collection of sample-size thoughts on the subject matter and fills a gap in the literature for an approachable and comprehensive guide. For a politically loaded theme such as this,

*Gentrifier* takes great pains to offer the reader the capacity to make up their own mind with the arguments presented. This is developed through five relatively condensed and overlapping chapters. In the first chapter the authors explain their analytic toolkit for unpacking the subject; chapter two takes time to explain the personal narratives of the authors as a means of situating their arguments; chapter three examines more closely the history of gentrification; chapter four takes a critical look at notions of identity and typologies of gentrifiers themselves; and finally, chapter five tries to make practical propositions for the dilemmas presented by the previous chapters.

Considering the wide range of subject matter contained within the book, Schlichtman, Patch, and Lamont Hill make an excellent overview of academic thinking related to gentrification. This content ranges from epistemological and historical considerations, spatial understandings, race, economics, community perceptions and reactions (a sizeable component of the book), and policy propositions. One of the more pleasurable elements of the book is the concise and critical history of planning that inadvertently results from the convergence of thinking on the subject. Thinking particularly for American readers, this work is valuable in providing a comprehensive image of how cities and neighbourhoods ebb and flow through what we now often ubiquitously call gentrification.

Carefully examining the existing thinking, Schlichtman, Patch, and Lamont Hill support arguments on gentrification with evidence from their personal lives. While this structure is crucial for defending the humanization of gentrification theory, the authors run into an almost

instantaneous dilemma with it. On one hand they offer an earnest effort to effectively condense a wide array of arguments surrounding gentrification borrowing from existing structures meant to define it. On the other, they provide an ongoing set of personal narratives positioning themselves directly within these more detached theoretical discourses. Both elements are meant to defend that gentrification is complicated, and above all, a subjective perspective. However, the cumulative effect continues to affirm typologies that classify the experiences of gentrification. For example, while the toolkit that the authors propose at the beginning of the book is not meant to be exhaustive, it ironically still suggests that a typology can exist for talking about gentrification.

In the same spirit, while the proposition for a conversation surrounding gentrification that actively incorporates the authors' personal narratives is valuable, it is also limited to their positions. This in turn leaves out any serious form, for one thing, of conversation surrounding the experience of gender, other than anecdotal from living with women, in the context of gentrification. Additionally, while they explain moments in their personal histories of being gentrified, they speak from the more current state of gentrifiers. This, I believe is the largest omission of the piece, in that the positionality provided from the book does not evoke real-time personal perspectives of being gentrified.

*Gentrifier* proposes an alternative means of articulating the complexity of gentrification through a more personal route. This is done by providing a thorough literature review of the core ideas supported by an unexhausted set of personal narratives from the authors. In this spirit, the book provides an accessible means of approaching the subject matter, which is its greatest strength. While the authors sometimes fall into the trap of trying to categorize the very arguments they are trying to declassify, their comprehensive structure provides an approachable means of trying to understand gentrification. Considering the subject is often one held at an arms length of its lived reality, Schlichtman, Patch, and Lamont Hill make an important proposition for a more approachable way of talking about being gentrified, being a gentrifier, and the overlap between the two.

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