

Stopping Gentrification: The Case of Beirut and its implications for Cities in America and Beyond

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Analyses of gentrification in North American and British cities have found a wide variety of causes of the process and incontrovertible evidence that it leads to residential displacement. Insofar then that gentrification can be seen as a problem, there is an alarming need to develop appropriate solutions. With a few notable exceptions, most researchers have only tacitly offered possible strategies for limiting, much less stopping, gentrification. Moreover, most of these solutions rely on market-based approaches, which seek to manipulate the surface conditions that cause or limit gentrification, rather than aiming at its foundations. That these surface conditions vary from neighborhood to neighborhood, and city to city, leaves us with a dizzying array of explanations and an impractical bevy of apparent solutions. The confusion has only worsened as geographers and other social scientists have begun studying the ways in which gentrification has worked in cities outside North America and Europe. We find ourselves in this conundrum, however, not because of the geographic diversity of gentrification, but rather because of the failure of researchers to identify the uniform root cause of the phenomenon—capitalist urbanization. This paper uses the case of gentrification in Beirut to illustrate the dangers of market-based approaches to studying and confronting gentrification. It concludes that we can and should stop gentrification in Beirut and in other cities by removing housing from the iron-clad grip of capitalist commodification and exchange.