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Abstract

As Newark lies 10 miles west of Manhattan, there is an increased encroachment from investors and gentrifiers as surrounding cities such as Hoboken and Jersey City become too expensive and overcrowded. Known as the “Brick City”, Newark has history dating back to 1666. Leading up to World War II Newark was thriving, until an increase in suburban development and white flight that altered the race demographic. After years of racial stigma, the history of Newark is at risk as gentrification and neighborhood change looms over the city and its 282,862 residents, many of which are minorities.

Keywords

House, Race, Gentrification

Disciplines

African American Studies | United States History | Urban Studies and Planning

Comments

Written for AFS 250: Housing & Race

**Neighborhood Change within New Jersey:
The Evolutionary History that led to the New Newark.**

**AFS – 250: Housing and Race in the United States
By David Medina**

Many know Newark because of one of the nation's busiest airports, EWR, which resides in the East Ward. As Newark lies 10 miles west of Manhattan, there is an increased encroachment from investors and gentrifies as surrounding cities such as Hoboken and Jersey City become too expensive and overcrowded. As more developers and higher end stores move in, the local government must make sure that the current residents are not pushed out and the history of this city does not fade.

Known as the "Brick City", for its brick cobble stone streets, Newark has history dating back to 1666 when it was founded by Puritans from Connecticut. In Newark today you see remnants of a once booming Industrial hub. During the 1800's Newark was known for its leather tanneries, jewelry, and shoe manufacturing. The immigrants to move in were the Irish then followed by the Germans, that worked in these factories. This boom brought inventors such as Thomas Edison, Seth Boyden and Edward Weston (The Editors of Encyclopedia Britannica., 2019) In the late 1800's, Prudential Financial Inc. made Newark its home. Leading up to World War II, Newark was thriving. Following the war, there was an increase in suburban development and white flight that altered the race demographic. In the summer of 1967, riots broke out after police brutally beat an African American taxicab driver. The African American community wanted answers, why did it happen and is the driver okay? As word spread that he was in critical condition riots broke out. During the riots the Governor called in the National Guard and State Police force to stop the chaos, which lead to 26 Newark residents being killed (Hartman, 2020) (Wang,2019). Post- riot there was continual decline with increased tension as corruption among the police force and local government that to this day is still felt. The first African Mayor of Newark, Kenneth Allen Gibson, was

elected in 1970 (Wankoff, 2020). Following this Sharpe James was in office for 20 years and the city went under its “Renaissance period” during the 90’s (Liebson, 2019). Yet during this time public schools were taken over by the state, the mayor got a raise and the city began to catch the eyes of investors. The dark side of Newark’s politics were under the microscope during the 2002 Mayoral election between Sharpe James and Cory Booker. Most of the campaigning was won in the streets and both of the candidate’s integrity were under review. After years of racial stigma, the history of Newark is at risk as gentrification and neighborhood change looms over the city and its 282,862 residents many of which are minorities (Newark, New Jersey Population 2020).

This examination report can be broken down into three sections. Post WWII in Newark with a focus on white flight and the riot of 1967, Corruption and neglect among the civil council that almost lead Newark to the point of irreversible damage, and the future of Newark within the gentrification process. In exploring these issues, it sheds light on Newark’s future and potential depending on the leadership within office.

Critical race theory was developed during the mid 1970’s. It has been able to break down the layers of racism that occur within the United states. Race and its complexity has become embedded and normalized within society. Even when considered “equal” under the constitution, laws are constructed in favor of race and are advantageous to a select few (Purdue Writing Lab, 2020). The structural inequality has allowed for economic racism with the US and has led to economic disparity among races.

The inspiration behind the critical race theory comes from the American Civil Rights movement and the thoughts of activists such as MLK and Malcom X. In this

understanding the focus is on how white individuals focus their energy on maintaining their advantage over colored individuals (Curry, 2018). This was seen in the response of White individuals to the civil rights movement as they did not want to desegregate and wanted to maintain their advantage. This caused for reform to be a slow process.

Following World War II, the GI bill accounted for 40% of all home loans. This was an illusion to African American service men as they were denied this opportunity. Which created gaps between the races in wealth and education. Following desegregation and integration of schools, the nation experienced a high volume of white Americans moving to the suburban areas. This would come to be better known as White Flight. Redlining lead to African Americans becoming isolated in pockets and also limited the funding to these areas because they were considered “bad neighborhoods” (Blakemore, 2019). Due to increased systematic racisms, race riots broke out throughout the nation within African American communities. As stated in *The Other America* by MLK “And so we must still face the fact that our nation's summers of riots are caused by our nation's winters of delay.... social disruption” (King, 1968). These riots were calling on the government to make change, The Fair housing act of 1968 is the most contested act as it took 48 years to be passed, but only 6 days to be approved following the assignation of MLK.

The last concept of focus is Gentrification. Gentrification is “the process of repairing and rebuilding homes and businesses in a deteriorating area (such as an urban neighborhood) accompanied by an influx of middle-class or affluent people and that often results in the displacement of earlier, usually poorer residents” (Merriam-Webster. (n.d.)). This change tends to go against the option of long-term residents as

it increases the cost of living in the area. Causing many to face evicting and be displaced from the area. The CDC has dedicated a page to the effects of gentrification as it becomes more prevalent within the United States. The environment of where people live, and work have an impact on their lives. A specialized population is affected by displacement, the poor, women, children, elderly and minorities. Studies have shown the individuals displaced have shortened lifespans, increased cancer rates, birth defects, infant mortality, cardiovascular disease and diabetes (US department, H., 2009). This is because of the increased exposure to hazardous substances, lack of proper nutrition and exercise facilities. The debate is made that it can benefit the original families that stay. Yet that is a small portion that can financially support that change. Gentrification tends to follow along the redline policies that were put in place during segregation. Many cities within the US face the dilemma of: To Gentrify or not.

Newark is divided into five wards North, West, Central, South and East. The North has a large Italian and Latino population, the East ward is a combination of its downtown and the Ironbound it largely industrial area and has a high Portuguese population. While Central is a poor black community with lots of apartment complexes. This was only possible following slum clearance, "At one time Newark seemed determined to replace the whole central section of the city with high-rise and low-income housing complexes" (Cummings, C. (n.d.)). The South ward is a combination of low-income areas and the middle class. The West ward is a mix of African American, Latino and Italian American community. Newark's median Age is 33.7, with 65% of its residents being 18 to 65. By race 49.73% of residents are Black or African American

and 26.1% are white. 39.31% of Newark's residents have above a high school diploma, whether it be some college, Associates, Bachelors or graduate degree. The median household income is \$35,181, with 22% of the population below the poverty line (Newark, New Jersey Population 2020).

Since the 50's due to tension among races, white flight, Highway placement and decrease in economic opportunity Newark's total population has been declining from a high of 438,776 to today with 282,862 residents (Newark, New Jersey Population 2020). The Great Migration brought southern African Americans to the central ward, which was predominantly European prior to the war. Prior to the Riots of 1967, under Addonizio the city attempted to use the law of public domain to obtain 160 acres for a medical school. African Americans reached the boiling point in the summer of 67' due to disappointment in the expectations of the standard of living and constrains of segregation (Coleman, 2017). In the Evening of July 12th, John Smith was beaten by two white officers for driving around a police car and being double parked. Smith was charged with "tailgating", driving in the wrong direction on a one- way street, offensive language and assault. Word had spread and members of the African American community gathered in front of the precinct where Smith was being held. At first it was a peaceful protest until and unidentified member of the community urged for violence (Wang, 2019). These words echoed against the cities buildings as within hours all of Newark was rioting. By the second night officers were given clearance to protect themselves with their firearm. Even in the presence of National guard and the State troops, rioting continued for three more days. Newark was left in shambles as 26 members of the community majority African American were killed and damages exceeded 10 Million dollars.

The Kerner commission of 68' determined that rioting was caused "Bad policing practices, a flawed justice system, ... inadequately trained police officers and National Guard troops entered affected neighborhoods, often worsening the violence" (George, 2018). While their report was correct, Kenneth Clark felt that he was in a time warp with the same film playing over and over again (Doreski, C. K., Sundquist, E., & Gelpi, A., 1998). In that they are the same issues as prior to the war but there has not been any progress. His statements coincide with the fact that people assume that time is linear, and that racism can be cured through time.

Corruption and the Newark administration have become synopsis since post World War II. Hugh Joseph Addonizio, mayor from 62' to 70', went to trial for counts of extortion. Addonizio obtained 1.4 million in kickbacks from contractors on city projects during his term (Barbanel, 1981). Just as Trump has placed unqualified members in his cabinet such as Ben Carson, prior to the 1967 riots so did Addonizio. The position of Secretary of the Board of Education of Newark was appointed to a white male with a high school diploma over a black candidate with a bachelor's degree (Coleman, 2017). He also was linked to Genovese Crime Family during his terms (Barbanel, 1981). Kenneth Allen Gibson, mayor from 70' to 86', was the first African American mayor of Newark. Yet, Newark became an image for decay as the buildings were neglected and crime increased. In 2002 he plead guilty for tax evasion on a school construction project near Newark. Sharpe James was the worst of all. Sharpe served from 20 years, from 86' to 06', till he was defeated by a young Cory Booker. Much of his administration was corrupt, yet he used his power to stay on top. In 2008 James was indicted for using city-issued credit cards to fund his extravagant lifestyle and 8 mistresses. What truly put the

nail in the coffin was the sale of nine plots city properties to his mistress in a city redevelopment zone, among other acts of wrongdoing (Sullivan, S. P., 2019).

During the 2002 election, Sharpe's and Booker were under the microscope for their actions. The documentary *Street Fight* follows Cory Bookers team during the electoral campaign. Within the opening scene you are able to see Sharpe's power, as he calls the deputy chief to an area that never has cops, but since Cory Booker was campaigning, they were there to stop him. Sharpe James ran on the story of growing up in Newark, serving his country in the army and returning to serve his hometown. While Booker was seen as an outsider that grew up in a suburban neighborhood and did not know the needs of a Newark resident. To relate to the residents, he decided to move into the Brick Towers, a crime ridden area, and live with the community that elected him.

In Newark campaigning was won in the streets, not just with signs and flyers but food, the police and news. James was able to use the police force as a way to deter Booker supporters; one businessman was forced to close after he had a social gathering to talk about Booker. Pablo Fonseca, the campaign manager for Booker, used to work for James until he was demoted. Stories like these echo the streets of Newark as Sharpe used his power to stay in power.

Cory Booker ran under a choir boy campaign, with that when one stubble they fall hard. Jermaine James, Cory's Chief of Staff, was in the press for being at a Strip club when a bust occurred, and they discovered a dancer was underage. Sharpe James was able to manipulate the media in his favor, yet was hypocritical in his statement, that anyone that went to a gentlemen's club would be removed from his team. The owner of Sights strip club went on the record and stated he has seen James in the front row.

For 20 years Sharpe James was more focused on his personal agenda, then on the city that he represented. James was a powerful individual and utilized intimidation to pull the veil over the eyes of the community he served. He racialized the campaign calling Booker a little skin, white that was Jewish. James asked for President Clintons support, when he said he was indifferent, James placed a photo of the two together to make it seem as he had the support. The election had so much press and conflict that the State and Federal government stepped in. As there were stories of tampering of machines from a member of the board of election, the Attorney General, Chris Christie, stated they will be surveying the election. Federal law stepped in to stop illegal mayor sign removal, but police officers were still committing the crime as voting neared. Lastly, James' imported supporters from Philadelphia to continue the mob mentality energy his campaign was using to win. In the end Booker lost by under 4000 votes but returned in the 2006 election and won (Curry, Marshall., 2006).

In the late 90's and early 2000's, Sharpe James goal was to bring Newark back to its Glory, by investing into Newark and its downtown. The first of his ideas was the New Jersey Performing Arts center with the mission of "...by celebrating diversity, shall be America's foremost urban presenter of arts and entertainment, ..., and a catalyst for economic development in its home city of Newark" (Unknown, 1996). In the summer of 99', a publicly financed minor league baseball stadium was built for 34 million dollars. Twenty years later, that stadium no longer stands, and a developer bought the property with the idea of creating a development called the Riverfront Square. The city had incorrectly used taxpayer dollars as it invested money on something that would not benefits its people (Liebson, 2019). To truly invest within the city James would have

invested in the education system of Newark as it was struggling. In 2006 Sharpe was able to attract the New Jersey Devils to Newark and make the new Prudential center their home when it opened in 2007. "The Rock" was built for 375 million dollars, is the most visible symbol of Newark's revitalization (Viquez, M. (2019)). Under the renaissance period, elected officials focused on attracting investors and developers, to a city that was struggling with its image. That being said education had been put on the backburner for years, leading up to the state stepping in. As the New Jersey introduced monitoring of schools against state curriculum in 1984, Newark's schools struggled. By 1992, the state began an external investigation. Within a year, the state deemed Newark deficient and began its takeover with financial control of the district, by vetoing any unnecessary board expenditures. Within 10 years of implementation of school monitoring, the state took over the whole district. Newark was unable to gain control of its BOE until 2017. This take over was due to years of racial stigma and lack of funding in minority areas (Strunsky, S., 2017) (Yi, K., 2017).

Throughout the city, since 1994 30,000 abandoned high-rise units were destroyed due to the price of maintenance and were replaced with townhouses and garden style apartments. Within Newark the largest nonprofit housing corporation of New Jersey exists, the New Community Corp. With the goal of "offer dignified and affordable housing, a safe neighborhood, quality health and day care, creative education programs, mutual awareness of the value of a faith life, and neighborhood economic opportunities" (Cummings, C. (n.d.)) They are transforming the central ward into a showplace for its design and livability as they try to market the area to middle class residents.

During his term as Newark's Mayor, Cory Booker, had the curse of the celebrate mayor. Booker was unable to live up to the hype, as his mayoral term was all over the News national. He put Newark back on the Map and initiated the changing of the guard of patronage culture. Also, he brought big businesses to Newark's downtown. He also brought a Wholefoods to the food dessert of Newark. Since the early 2000's rents have gone up 20% (Yi, K., 2019). Following the death of the previous senator, Booker ran for US Senator of New Jersey. He won and is the first African American U.S senator for the New Jersey.

Ras J. Baraka, the son of American poet Amari Baraka, is the current mayor of Newark. Having grown up in Newark he has seen the needs of his people. His focus is reducing crime, addressing affordability and maintaining steady growth (Baraka, R. J., 2014). Mayor Baraka is most famously known for saying Newark must not become the next Brooklyn. "Since Mr. Baraka took office in 2014... policies like inclusionary zoning, ...offer 20 percent of residential units below market rate in new buildings with more than 30 units, Developers can also receive tax abatements for hiring minority and female contractors as co-developers on projects to build affordable housing" (Liebson, 2019). Under Baraka, Newark has implemented a commission to prevent gentrification and assure equitable growth. So that benefits of growth can be shared by all residents and no one is displaced. This 15-member committee will have experts from all fields, so that the wants and needs of the community are met. This committee will provide advice and recommendations as Newark continues to develop (Newark, C. O., 2018). Not only does this help residents have their voices heard, but also breaks down the negative connotation of growth and its association with gentrification.

As Gentrification spreads in throughout the nation with a new wave of residents that strip the city of this is history. The Fear of becoming surrounding cities like Hoboken and Jersey City that were stripped have been dismissed, as the residents and the mayor focus on the long-term prosperity of Newark. Behind Ras J. Baraka whose father, Amari Barak, faced police harassment before and during the riots of 67' is steering Newark into a positive future. Not with investors or developers but with the wants and needs of Newark residents in mind. Urban revitalization, with steady growth and little to none displacement is the future of Newark, even if there is a Wholefoods within the neighborhood. Growth without gentrification is difficult, but by monitoring rent rates and growth rates of developments as Newark does. It can lessen the toll that gentrification has on poorer individuals with the community, with a focus on minorities. Instead of trying to be something they are not and create a whole new atmosphere. Newark wants to grow with its history and its communities in mind as it develops into the future.

After years of corruption and shady businessmen, from organized crime associations, to supporting multiple mistresses, Newark has found the light at the end of the tunnel with its current administration. This progress is would not have happened without the determination of a young politician, Cory Booker, to go against 20 years of an established iron fist on Newark and set a precedent for change. After years of corruption and neglect within the city council, police force and housing; Newark is finally on the upswing.

The Riots of 1967 have left its mark on Newark, as it was a pivotal point in the transition of Pre-war and the modern city that stands today. Post-World War II Newark was a difficult time for minorities as they were left in the dust of White flight to suburbia.

With construction of Highways, these minorities were reminded of how close they were to migration but still so far away because of the racial stigmas and systematic racism that was saturated with the United States.

Newark's industrial history has instilled a bend don't break mentality, as they have dealt with years of disparity and still are standing. Newark should not just be known by an Airport, but by the resilience and heart of its residents. As Newark was torn down to nothing but rubble, the residents that stayed have rebuild Newark brick by brick as the "Brick City" lives up to its name and the history of this city lives on.

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