

## Gentrification: A Growing Problem In Grand Rapids

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Pleasant Park is a very green and vivacious place, located near Heritage Hill Homes. I drove past it one day with an older friend in awe. She, being a very hard working African American woman, relished in the fact that some decades ago she used to own a Heritage Hill home. But after the prices of houses in that area skyrocketed, she and many other African Americans were forced to move out. Why is an area that used to be home to industrious blacks now preoccupied with wealthy Caucasians? Priority is given to those with a higher income because real estate agents and business owners will enjoy a fatter pocket. Gentrification is becoming a big issue in Grand Rapids.

Michigan is home to many wealthy people. In fact, Grand Rapids has the largest wealth gap of any city in Michigan. This is according to a new report that was published by the Economic Policy Institute. West Michigan news media seems to seldom touch upon this topic. A lot of people do not want to admit that Grand Rapids is a highly gentrified community. To put this into more of a perspective, the top 1% of wealthy people living in Grand Rapids make more than the top 1% of the rich ones in Detroit.

Walking to MLK Park on a sunny day, you can feel the breeze flowing through your hair. The beautiful scenery, makes you forget that you are in a low-income area. You have to pass by Hall Street Bakery to reach to MLK Park. It surprised me to see such an expensive restaurant in a low-income area. Right across from it, you can see a house that obviously is in dire need of reconstruction. I walked into Hall Street Bakery one day just out of curiosity. The menu price was obviously made for those who make a high income. I stood there, being the only minority in a vast sea of majorities. Feeling out of place, I exited quickly.

If you google the definition of gentrification, you will see this explanation: “the process of making a person or activity more refined or polite.” But at what advantage does refining an area really cause? How can the poor afford expensive restaurants, with food that’s obviously very nutritious, but unaffordable? Many homes are being demolished. People are being displaced. Memories are being discarded. The disdain can be seen on the faces of the oppressed. The faces of the poor. The minorities. The Hispanics that have to work double shifts at the factories just to make ends meet. The blacks that are constructing fancy homes in their childhood neighborhoods that their tired hands know they can’t afford.

The urban dictionary always gives a hysterical definition of a word. But this definition explains the situation occurring in Grand Rapids quite well: “When “urban renewal” of lower class neighborhoods with condos attract upper-class tenants, driving up rents and driving out long time, lower income residents. It often begins with influxes of local artists looking for a cheap place to live, giving the neighborhood a bohemian flair. This hip reputation attracts upper-class tenants who want to live in such an atmosphere, driving out the lower income artists and lower income residents, often ethnic/racial minorities, changing the social character of the neighborhood. It also involves higher prices of local businesses; shops catering to higher income taste like sushi restaurants, Starbucks, etc. ... to replace local businesses displaced by higher rents.

The description of what gentrification is, taken from [urbandictionary.com](http://urbandictionary.com) fits too well the crisis occurring in our beautiful metropolitan city. Only the rich benefit from this “renewal.” The scenes you see driving across town is sadly and slowly turning into what some call “the haves, and the have nots.” And those that “have not”, are being pushed aside.





