Article

The Demise of Queer Space? Resurgent Gentrification and the Assimilation of LGBT Neighborhoods

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Abstract

In the past forty years, gay and lesbian populations have established a visible presence in many cities, but recent gentrification has put pressure on LGBT (lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgendered) neighborhoods. This article uses a case study of the Atlanta metropolitan area to examine the effects of resurgent gentrification on LGBT neighborhoods. The study finds that rising housing values have dispersed the LGBT population, and former LGBT neighborhoods have become less tolerant of LGBT people and the businesses that anchor the LGBT community. The article considers ways that planning practice might seek to preserve LGBT-friendly neighborhoods and the people and institutions that depend on them.

In the forty years since the Stonewall rebellion, the lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgendered (LGBT) population has amassed a measure of political clout and economic power that is, at least partially, a result of the social and cultural capital created in various LGBT neighborhoods in the post–World War II era. These enclaves in large metropolitan areas were initially gentrified by gay men and some lesbian residents fleeing discrimination elsewhere. Individually and sometimes collectively, many LGBT persons sought these safe zones that some have labeled queer spaces (Bell and Valentine 1995; Betsky 1997; Ingram, Bouthillette, and Ritter 1997). Many of these once-derelict neighborhoods, such as the Castro in San Francisco, West Hollywood in Los Angeles, Boys Town in Chicago, the South End in Boston, Chelsea in New York, the Gayborhood in Philadelphia, and Midtown in Atlanta, have developed reputations as desirable places for LGBT people to live and recreate. At the same time, their renovation has made them more attractive to non-LGBT individuals in search of in-town living. Higher demand for property in these neighborhoods has resulted in steep rises in rents, frequent conversion of rental properties to condominiums, and competition for commercial space, which make it difficult for less affluent LGBT people and businesses targeted to the community to remain in the neighborhoods. Municipal officials and planners, eager to capitalize on any glimmer of urban redevelopment, have often promoted wider urban revitalization, changing zoning codes to attract large-scale real estate firms, further exacerbating the rise in property value, and inviting a new wave of gentrification that alters the LGBT character of the neighborhood.

While there is a rich literature in geography and urban studies on the social and cultural dimensions of LGBT enclaves, little analysis of LGBT neighborhood change appears in the urban planning literature. Some scholars have examined the role of LGBT people in urban pioneering (Weightman 1981; Castells 1983; Lauria and Knopp 1985; Knopp 2004), but few scholars have analyzed the effects of resurgent urban gentrification on established LGBT neighborhoods. Forsyth (2001) provided the most synoptic review of some of the key planning issues related to this community but concluded that there is much work to do in "tracking developments and extending planning practice" to encompass these places (p. 354). Frisch (2002) went one step further, suggesting that planning itself serves as a tool to promote heterosexuality and suppress homosexuality in cities.

This article contextualizes the consequences of resurgent gentrification for the LGBT population and considers some of the ways that planning is implicated in those effects. Through a case study of the Atlanta metropolitan area, home to a number

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of queer spaces, the authors provide an analysis of the impact of the gentrification process on a variety of LGBT community members. The case study includes popular press accounts and official planning documents related to neighborhood change as well as interviews with residents and planners in and around LGBT areas in Atlanta. The article explores several questions about the ways that ongoing gentrification has changed the existing queer spaces and nearby areas that have been affected by the overspill. Have the LGBT neighborhoods been able to maintain a unique identity? Do the levels of tolerance and feelings of safety for LGBT people persist in these neighborhoods? How has the pressure of gentrification altered the residential choice strategies and decisions of LGBT residents of Atlanta? How have these choices influenced social and racial tensions in areas receiving new LGBT residents priced out of places like Atlanta's Midtown? Because this surging gentrification has raised questions about the endurance of these LGBT neighborhoods, the final section considers ways that planning policy might incorporate measures to prevent the demise of LGBT neighborhoods and the communities that depend upon them.

Gentrification Research to Date

Neighborhood change—including change through gentrification—is one of the most enduring topics in urban studies (Lees, Slater, and Wyly 2008). This section aims to provide a brief overview of some of the most salient work in gentrification as it relates to this research. In general, waves of gentrification have occurred in parallel with the expansion phase of recent real estate cycles. In the United States a first wave of gentrification, fueled by federal urban renewal efforts, lasted until the economic recession of the early 1970s (Hackworth and Smith 2001). This initial wave involved isolated reinvestments that some scholars suggested were unlikely to provide more than an occasional "island of renewal" in cities overwhelmed by the forces of sprawl (Berry 1985; Bourne 1993). N. Smith (1987) suggested that this early gentrification was produced when capital is attracted to locations where there is a rent gap between what is currently being charged for dilapidated structures and the rent those parcels could yield with improvements. Other scholars investigated the same phenomenon through the lens of consumption (Ley 1986), particularly the consumption patterns of, at first, an urban bohemie—including LGBT people—and then a new progressive bourgeoisie of professional service providers (Ley 1994) who desired a community of nonconformists (Caulfield 1989). Various scholars have expressed concern about the displacement effects of these production and consumption processes on the low-income, mostly minority people who located in the inner city even as capital and the white middle class fled to the periphery (Sumka 1979; Marcuse 1986).

Other scholars have given these changing habitation patterns a distinctly gendered perspective. Rose (1984) suggested that many first-wave gentrifiers were in fact marginally employed professionals including women, single parents, and other people on moderate incomes in need of urban services not available in the suburbs. Warde (1991) argued that gentrification is driven in part by women seeking to resolve conflicts between domestic responsibilities and work. These same observations could be extended to LGBT people, who, because of the discrimination in employment and household composition, face similar challenges. Thus, Markusen (1981) described gentrification as a dismantling of patriarchal structures in the suburbs because "households of gay people, singles and professional couples with central business district jobs increasingly find central locations attractive" (p. 32). Bondi (1999) observed that gentrifying neighborhoods of Edinburgh had higher than expected numbers of single men and women, but she did not speculate as to their sexuality.

By the late 1990s, some scholars were highlighting the resurgence of gentrification coincident with a rise in home prices that began in 1992. This "wave of gentrification" was due partly to changes in the housing finance system, partly to the increasing privatization and demolition of public housing, and partly to shifting consumer tastes (Wyly and Hammel 1999). Unlike earlier, "pioneering" waves of gentrification, risk-averse real estate interests played a key role in this process and were supported by a revanchist neoliberal state (N. Smith 1996, 2002). Where earlier gentrification efforts resulted in a pattern of isolated and incomplete renovation, the gentrification of the 1990s and 2000s was widespread, with new global patterns emerging across local gentrification experiences (D. Smith and Butler 2007). Lees (2000) suggested that some recent gentrification is fuelled by the consumption patterns of "financifiers," that is, super-gentrifiers whose considerable access to capital allows them to invest in previously gentrified neighborhoods and reinvent them according to their needs. Bridges (2007), on the other hand, found no evidence for a global gentrifier class but did find that the downtowns of global cities have indeed become inhabited by the "super rich." Nevertheless, he argued that the motivations and affiliations of these individuals are very different from those of a largely middle-class group that has driven more widely spread gentrification in places far afield from the locations typically listed as global cities. Other scholars warned that the recent research has lost focus on the displacement effects of gentrification, especially vis-à-vis the lower-income residents who feel the brunt of neighborhood changes (Atkinson 2000; Slater 2006).

Context shapes this process (Slater 2004) and determines whether gentrification is a "savior" or "home wrecker" for residents of urban neighborhoods (Atkinson 2003). Identity is an important element in understanding the characteristics of gentrifying neighborhoods (Butler 2007). Although these various experiences of gentrification illustrate wider structural trends, the exact form of gentrification in any locale remains ultimately a local process that requires a much greater emphasis on local contextualization on the part of researchers (Lees 2007).

The Struggle for Space—The LGBT Community, Gentrification, and Planning

The historical experience of queer populations in physical spaces prior to Stonewall is one of a struggle for tolerance. Most often gay-oriented establishments were constrained to marginalized sex districts. In San Francisco, these areas included the Barbary Coast near the waterfront and the Tenderloin district further inland (Sides 2006). Eventually the gay community was forced further north to North Beach after repeated police "crackdowns" on gay bars central to the community (Stryker and Van Buskirk 1996). It was not until gay bar operators formed the Tavern Guild, and gay activists began organizing a series of at first social and later political organizations, that a more stable gay neighborhood like the Castro would develop.[1] Castells (1983) argued that gay men clustered in this neighborhood to liberate territory where a new culture and political power could be concentrated.

Other scholars found that the gentrification of other inner-city neighborhoods by LGBT people became increasingly widespread, partly because gay men wished to create community spaces to combat homophobic oppression, and partly as a means of increasing the value of their capital investments (Lauria and Knopp 1985; Knopp 1990). Weightman (1981) was among the earliest observers to link gay habitation patterns to neighborhood change, arguing that gays were linked to "urban renovation and preservation programs, particularly in the restoration of decaying architecture" (p. 109). Lesbian spaces also developed, but their territorialization was limited by women's lower incomes and restricted access to capital as well as the threat of male violence (Adler and Brenner 1992). Still, neighborhoods like Park Slope in Brooklyn did develop strong lesbian identities (Rothenberg 1995; Lees, Slater, and Wyly 2008).

The clustering of LGBT people in specific neighborhoods facilitated local political organizing and enabled the election of LGBT people to city and state office around the country. For instance, the concentration of LGBT people in the Castro district helped propel Harvey Milk in 1978 to become the first openly gay man to be elected to public office in California. When the city of West Hollywood was created in 1984, a majority of its elected city council members were gay men (Ward 2003). A number of scholars have argued that strong LGBT political organizations (Wald, Button, and Rienzo 1996) and LGBT elected officials (Haider-Markel, Joslyn, and Kniss 2000) are critical factors in explaining the passage of antidiscrimination ordinances. Furthermore, Davis (1995) found that the proximity of gays and lesbians in Boston's South End enabled political victories such as redistricting that would not have been possible without proximate neighborhoods.

Many LGBT individuals have idealized gay and lesbian areas as queer friendly space, a kind of "thirdspace" or Foucaldian heterotopia (Soja 1996) brimming with real and imagined possibilities for a liberatory politics. But Nash (2006) argued that the process of gay village formation in Toronto was shaped in part by tensions between gays who were assimilationist and wanted to disappear in mainstream society and those who were more liberationist. In addition, place of residence has become more important in determining urban identity (Butler 2007) than type of employment, giving added impetus to the importance of queer-identified areas. Some scholars have suggested that such queer spaces are a more inclusive conceptual alternative to the hetero-normative nature of most urban areas (Bell et al. 1994), and this designation speaks to the collective aspiration of the LGBT community to find neighborhoods in which they can actualize their quest for an otherwise marginalized identity (Knopp 2004). This assertion has not gone unquestioned. Some have noted that many of these quasi-utopian spaces fall short of their claimed inclusivity (Nast 2002; Rushbrook 2002) because many such places exclude bisexuals (Hemmings 2002), transgendered people (Namaste 2000; Doan 2007), and gender nonconformists in general (Whittle 1996; Browne 2006). At least one scholar noted that radical inclusivity is best realized in autonomous spaces created by radical queer activists that are temporary, avowedly antiassimilationist, and sex positive (Brown 2007).

One of the fears of community activists about resurgent, highly capitalized gentrification is that arrival of new residents and the dispersal of existing LGBT communities will profoundly change the character of the neighborhood. For example, by the year 2000, the lesbian-identified neighborhood of Park Slope, Brooklyn, was experiencing a wave of new gentrification (Lees 2000). This "super-gentrification" by upper-middle- and upper-class investors employed professional architects and urban designers rather than the traditional sweat equity of earlier, do-it-themselves pioneers. In these rapidly gentrifying areas, the whole concept of urban community is in transition. New residents arguably have weaker ties to the neighborhood than older gentrifiers. They seek to capitalize on the social values and personal investments of earlier gentrifiers anchored in neighborhoods while retaining their own mobility and the mobility of their assets (Lees 2000).

Indeed, more recent gentrification has largely taken place in areas characterized by the "cosmopolitan urbanism" of in-town neighborhoods that are ethnically or architecturally unique, and often gay as well (Binnie et al 2006). Chambers of commerce, tourist boards, and even mayors' offices are important promoters of the new cosmopolitanism, and the attention has resulted in significant changes to once primarily queer shopping and nightlife spaces in London, Chicago, and Manchester. The impact of these changes on the LGBT community is the subject of some debate. For example, Brown (2006) argued that city planners working for the local urban regeneration agency in the Spitalfields neighborhood of East London sought to reshape the urban environment by adding street furniture and street lamps and providing a "brand" for

the area in part based on its multiethnic history but completely ignoring gay elements in the community. In some instances, the promotion of "gay villages" as spaces of consumption can be problematic for gay residents (Binnie 2004). Collins (2004) developed an evolutionary model for gay spaces (based on the gay village in London's Soho) that predicts that gay areas will be inevitably integrated and assimilated into the mainstream urban economy. However, Ruting (2008) developed an alternative model of gay transformation based on Sydney that suggests urban transformation is likely to end with the dispersal of LGBT people to fringe areas.

In the U.S. context, rapidly rising property values and condominium conversions in San Francisco's Castro district have sparked public debate on the neighborhood's future as a queer place. Some neighborhood activists have asked whether LGBT people should assimilate into the mainstream of the city's life or remain separate (Buchanan 2007). On the one hand, early gentrifiers in the gay community who invested their capital and sweat equity in these neighborhoods appear to value assimilation and economic integration; they are also the most likely to benefit from recent rises in real estate values. One prominent LGBT leader even suggested that communities without enclaves are a more appropriate model of LGBT economic and political gains (Buchanan 2007). On the other hand, LGBT activists seem fearful that the resulting community would inevitably exclude LGBT youth, retirees, and newcomers to the community without significant capital assets. Furthermore, they worry that a community dispersed as a result of high home values and rents would be far more difficult to organize for political purposes. This tension is exacerbated by the "invasion" of middle- and upper-middle-class heterosexuals into what were previously gay and lesbian enclaves.

The role of urban planning in the commodification of gay urban spaces has not been well studied. Too often nonconformist groups (including gays and lesbians) are ignored by the planning profession and are invisible in planning documents (Forsyth 2001). Plans and policies that promote urban redevelopment frequently use zoning to establish narrow definitions of what constitutes a family and fail to consider the effects of other policy changes on the LGBT populations. As noted earlier, planning functions as a "heterosexist project" to create zoning and land use regimes that "enforce and reinforce heterosexuality" (Frisch 2002, 263). Although planning is often portrayed as progressive and reformist, it can also be used to serve the powerful by controlling or oppressing minority groups (Yiftachel 1998). Moreover, there is little understanding of the consequences of such commodification and rapid gentrification for current and former residents of such areas. This article will now consider some of these concerns by examining the specific context of gentrification in several neighborhoods in Atlanta that have had the reputation of being safe zones for gays and lesbians.

Methodology for the Atlanta Case Study

The case study researched the history of LGBT neighborhoods, analyzed data from the 2000 Census to reveal the spatial residence patterns of the LGBT couples in Atlanta,[2] and reviewed urban planning documents from the Atlanta metropolitan area. These materials were supplemented with interviews of more than twenty residents of the Atlanta metropolitan area (both LGBT-identified persons and others) to examine the interactions of residents of those neighborhoods.

Respondents were identified through several means: introductions provided by politically active members of the Atlanta LGBT community, conversations with the owners of well-known Atlanta gay and feminist bookstores located in the subject neighborhoods, contacts with LGBT realtors, and referrals made by participants themselves. Efforts were made to include men and women, long-term residents and recent arrivals to Atlanta, African Americans and whites, renters and home owners, recent home buyers and long-term householders, citizen activists, business owners, and professionals. Despite its limitations, this kind of snowball approach is nevertheless considered one of the most effective means of reaching a socially marginalized group.

The respondents interviewed included residents and former residents from the following Atlanta neighborhoods and communities: Midtown, Candler Park, Decatur, North DeKalb County, South DeKalb County, East Atlanta, and East Point. These communities represent places that were formerly identified as LGBT neighborhoods, areas that continue their long identification with the LGBT community, or new locations that have only recently become associated with LGBT residents. Overall, the group included respondents whose household incomes and rates of home ownership were higher than the average for the Atlanta metropolitan area. The interviewees represented a range of ages where the youngest respondents were a lesbian couple and one young gay man who had recently graduated from college (midtwenties); a range of men and women in their thirties, forties, and fifties; and one woman and one man in their sixties. The experiences of both LGBT identified and non-LGBT identified African Americans are underrepresented in the data from these interviews. Lamentably, the experience of Latinos, a growing minority population in the Atlanta metropolitan area, is entirely missing from these data. As a result, the data overrepresent the experiences of white, middle-class and upper-middle-class residents of the Atlanta metropolitan area. The interviews, which were structured by an interview protocol, were conducted by the authors in the winter and spring of 2007, and the resulting audiotapes were transcribed for subsequent analysis. The names of all the respondents have been changed to protect their privacy.

The Evolution of LGBT Communities in Atlanta

The definitive history of LGBT communities in Atlanta has yet to be written. Several books on LGBT history in the South contain chapters that describe the early development of clusters of gay men in Midtown (Howard 1997) and a lesbian-feminist community in Candler Park during the 1970s (Sears 2001; Chestnut and Gable 1997). In each case, middle-class white residents had fled their older and deteriorating neighborhoods in favor of "modern" suburban living, making space for gays and lesbians looking to create urban community. White flight that began with efforts to desegregate the schools in the 1960s continued during the 1970s with a 49 percent decline in the white population in the downtown area (S. Lee 2005), but in-town residential areas including Midtown and Candler Park experienced slower declines. A study of housing market activity in Atlanta suggested that Midtown in the 1970s was undergoing intensive gentrification (DeGiovanni 1983). While DeGiovanni (1983) did not discuss the sexuality of those engaged in gentrifying these areas, historical accounts (Howard 1997; Sears 2001; Chestnut and Gable 1997) have indicated that from the early 1970s onward gays and lesbians began moving into older in-town Atlanta neighborhoods to rehabilitate the properties (see Figure 1).

Midtown is an urban neighborhood bordered on the north and east by Piedmont Park, a traditional venue for gay cruising (Howard 1997; Bagby 2009). White flight to the outer suburbs left deteriorated housing stock in the area which become a haven for hippies and drug users. Gay men were some of the first "pioneers" to reinvest in what had become a very sketchy area, and the neighborhood was "largely restored by gays" (Pendered 2003b) who moved in and began fixing up some of the area's Craftsman-style homes. A gay bookstore, Outwrite Books, and a number of gay bars opened in the vicinity and helped to create a burgeoning gay community. Nearby neighborhoods (Virginia Highlands and Ansley Park; see Figure 2) remained stable but also attracted significant concentrations of gay and lesbian partners (see Table 1). By the 1990s, the Midtown area had become the heart of the gay community in Atlanta. Midtown's Piedmont Park is the traditional home of the Atlanta Pride celebration, and the parade route circumnavigates the neighborhood. In 1972, the first Pride march attracted around three hundred people (Fleischmann and Hardman 2004), and by 2007, the attendance had grown to more than three hundred thousand (Scott 2007). Mayoral hopefuls regularly attend the parade and make active attempts to demonstrate their support for the LGBT community (Sheltos and Hairston 2001; Fleischmann and Hardman 2004; Suggs 2009). North of Midtown there are a variety of gay-oriented businesses and bars, including a lesbian bar called the Other Side that made national news when it was bombed in 1997 by a deranged man who also
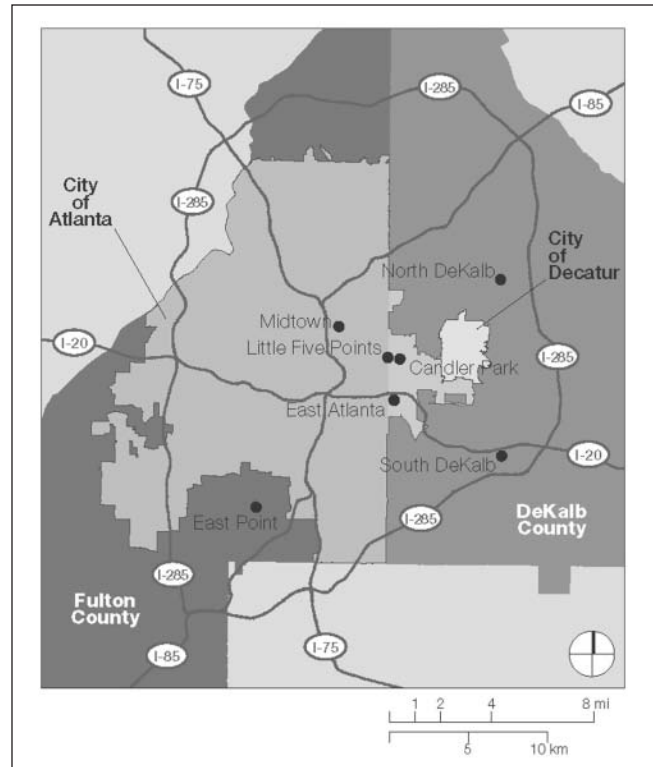

Figure 1. Map of Atlanta, Georgia, and selected neighborhoods
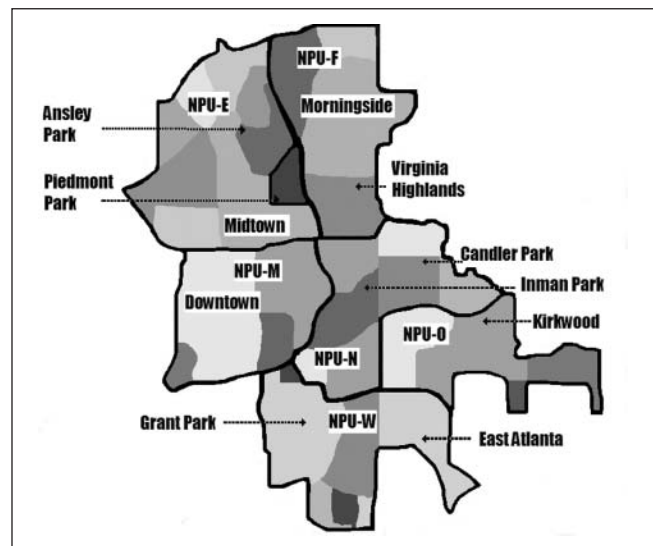Source: Constructed by the authors.

Figure 2. Selected neighborhood planning units (E, F, M, N, O, and W) to the east and south of Midtown, Atlanta
Source: Constructed by the authors from public use City of Atlanta Neighborhood Planning Unit (NPU) base map.

planted bombs at the 1996 Olympic Games and two abortion clinics (Gover 1997).

Table 1. Five Most Concentrated Census Tracts for Gay and Lesbian Partner Households in Fulton (FC) and DeKalb (DC) Counties

	Gays			Lesbians		
Rank	Neighborhood	Census tract	%	Neighborhood	Census tract	%
1	Va. Highlands	Fulton 2	6.85	Va. Highlands	Fulton 2	4.51
2	N. Druid Hills	Dekalb 215.02	5.79	S. Columbia–Forest Hills	Dekalb 229	4.45
3	Midtown	Fulton 12	5.14	Candler Park/Lake Claire	Dekalb 203	3.55
4	N. Atlanta	Dekalb 214.01	4.46	Glenwood Estates	Dekalb 226	2.84
5	Midtown	Fulton 13	4.13	Decatur-downtown	Dekalb 225	2.52

Source: U.S. Census, 2000.

Candler Park was developed as a middle-class neighborhood with Craftsman-style bungalows built in the 1920s. Next to Candler Park is Little Five Points (L5P), a commercial district that serves Candler Park as well as nearby Inman Park. White flight also contributed to the deterioration of the L5P area, leaving many of the shops standing vacant. The fall in home prices attracted young feminists and lesbians looking to create community. In 1974 a feminist bookstore, Charis Books, was established in the area. It quickly became a focal point for a growing number of lesbians in Candler Park (Chestnut and Gable 1997). Charis Books is in fact the only concrete evidence of the lesbian community that remains in that neighborhood. Today L5P is home to a number of restaurants, trendy boutiques, and some more traditional retail establishments. However, the reputation of the district as an offbeat shopping area "best known for murals on walls, music on sidewalks, and tattoos on shopkeepers" (Hulbert 2005) is in keeping with hip, ethnic neighborhoods that are associated with lesbians in other cities such as Montreal (Podmore 2001, 2006).

Evidence of LGBT Dispersal from the Census

The success of LGBT people in creating livable neighborhoods set the stage for another wave of gentrification. By 1995, the average commuting distance in Atlanta reached thirty-four miles per day (Henderson 2004) and made in-town living more attractive to empty nesters from the upper-middle-class suburbs. Urban home prices rose rapidly. Property in neighborhoods that had been previously gentrified by LGBT people, such as Midtown and Candler Park, became quite desirable, touching off this round of gentrification. Candler Park's once affordable bungalows were suddenly very valuable properties, and younger and lower-income LGBT people were forced to look elsewhere for housing.

Our analysis of the 2000 Census highlights the fact that that Midtown continues to be a major locus of gay concentration, with high percentages of male partners in three census districts. However, the data also suggest that there are considerable numbers of gay partners to the north and east of Midtown. In fact, Table 1 indicates that the Virginia Highlands neighborhood has the highest percentage of same sex partners for both males and females, and the second highest percentage of gay partners is to the north and east in North Druid Hills along the Lavista Road and Cheshire Bridge corridors. Other significant concentrations of gay men extend eastward from Midtown into the suburbs of northern DeKalb County, some of which are north of I-85 along the Buford Highway in a multiethnic area that has a number of large older apartment buildings. Of course, as noted earlier, there is no statistical evidence for the spatial location patterns of single gay men or lesbians.

Analysis of the 2000 Census data also suggests that lesbian partners have moved to the east of Candler Park (Lake Claire and Decatur) and south of Little Five Points. These data indicate that while Candler Park and Lake Claire continue to have substantial numbers of lesbian partners, neighborhoods further east and in southern Dekalb County also have high numbers of lesbian partners. Glenwood Estates just east of downtown Decatur has the fourth highest percentage of lesbian partners, followed by downtown Decatur, confirming the commonly used nickname for the city as "Dyke-catur." Other lesbian partners have located to neighborhoods south of Howard Avenue that since the 1960s have been mostly African American, including Grant Park, Oakhurst, and Kirkwood.

The LGBT population's slow spread to the east and south has caused some racial conflicts. In 2001, the Atlanta City Council commissioned a study of gentrification in Atlanta, *A City for All*. This report suggested that this "resurgent gentrification brings to the City of Atlanta . . . a broad range of indirect effects that significantly and dramatically harm both the lives of large numbers of residents in the City and profoundly alter the composition of the City" (Keating 2001). The report further indicated that this expanding gentrification resulted in some displacement of African Americans in both Lake Claire and Grant Park (Keating 2001), though there was no discussion of the sexual orientation of the gentrifiers. Others have also noted that this gentrification has caused tension between the mostly white gentrifiers and the long-term African American residents (Torpy 1999). While *A City for All* explicitly considered the effects of gentrification on African American populations, this article expands that focus to the LGBT population. This next section will review a series of urban development plans and consider to what extent resurgent gentrification is linked to specific urban redevelopment plans in Atlanta.

Stop here. :)

Role of Planning in the Process

Zoning Changes as an Incentive for Gentrification

Relatively little has been published about the role of urban planning in the redevelopment of Atlanta, but planners and urban plans have clearly had a significant role in the process. The 1996 Olympic Games were a watershed for the city of Atlanta, prompting planners to explore a variety of new incentives for the urban redevelopment, including Special Public Interest District zoning, Community Improvement Districts, and Tax Allocation Districts.[3] These incentives persuaded large-scale developers to invest in selected urban locations, but the results have spurred gentrification and altered the character of residential areas like Midtown.

The redevelopment of Midtown has clearly been shaped by the planning process. In 1978 a group of business and civic leaders formed the Midtown Alliance to promote the development of the Peachtree Street corridor that bisects Midtown and links downtown Atlanta to the south with upscale neighborhoods to the north. Several zoning changes in 1981 reduced parking requirements and increased allowable building heights and development intensities around the new Metropolitan Atlanta Rapid Transit Authority (MARTA) stops, which encouraged more intensive development (Nelson 1999). These changes also helped to persuade new investors, including IBM, AT&T, and Bellsouth, to build high-rise office complexes in the area. The economic recession of the late 1980s took the steam out of redevelopment, but the Midtown Alliance forged ahead with a focus on improving basic quality of life in the area (Turner 1997).

In 1997 the Midtown Alliance produced a plan called the Midtown Blueprint that laid out an ambitious series of improvements for the area, seeking to balance new residential properties, office space, and high-end retail with transportation improvements, enhanced public security, more pedestrian friendly streets, better environmental cleanup, and more green space and public plazas (Midtown Alliance 1997; see also Midtown Alliance 2003). The citywide Comprehensive Development Plan 2004-2014 (CDP) describes the Blueprint for Midtown as having the goal of creating a "successful, dynamic urban center with a unique sense of place and balance of commercial, residential, and cultural attraction" (City of Atlanta 2003). Midtown is considered to be Atlanta's jewel by one planning academic (Pendered 2005), and other planners sit on the Board of the Midtown Alliance.

Implementation of this plan included the creation of the Midtown Improvement District (MID) in the spring of 2000 to levy additional taxes on businesses to fund millions of dollars of increased security (including twenty-four-hour surveillance cameras), improved streetscapes, and other projects selected by the Alliance. In addition, two Special Public Interest (SPI) zoning districts were created along Peachtree Street (SPI-16) and Piedmont Avenue (SPI-17) (see Figure 3). Proposals for new developments within these SPIs were approved through different procedures than those in use elsewhere in the city since the mid-1970s. In 1974 the city of Atlanta approved a system of Neighborhood Planning Units (NPUs) as citizen advisory councils to make recommendations to the mayor and city council on zoning, land use, and other planning issues (Martin 2007). The NPU system was unpopular among the development community. Some developers felt that it enabled community groups to wield too much political power and block proposed developments (Torpy and Tharpe 2009). The new SPIs introduced an expedited administrative approval process using a Special Administrative Permit (SAP) that reduced the influence of the NPUs on the development process.

By 2008, the Midtown Alliance reported that new buildings had been completed with 8.3 million square feet of new office space, 2.3 million square feet of retail space, and 10,729 new multifamily residential units (Midtown Alliance 2009). The city of Atlanta clearly benefited from substantially increased property taxes, but this volume of development also had significant effects on the character of the neighborhood as well as the prices of neighborhood housing. Anecdotal evidence, reinforced by the interview results presented below, suggests that rising prices have contributed to the gradual demise of Midtown as the premier gay destination in Atlanta. Some of the existing gay and lesbians residents of the Midtown area have opted to cash out and move from the neighborhood, and at the same time young LGBT newcomers to Atlanta are no longer able to afford to rent or buy property there. Some gay bars and institutions like Outwrite Books remain, but even more gay venues have closed.

Invisibility of the LGBT Community in Planning Documents

Our review of planning documents for Atlanta neighborhoods with substantial LGBT populations reveals that there is not a single mention of the this population, confirming Forsyth's contention (2001) that nonconformist populations continue to be ignored in most planning efforts. There is a remarkable uniformity in their invisibility in every planning and urban development document reviewed. Despite substantial concentrations of gay residents and businesses in Midtown, discussion of this population and its pioneering role in the redevelopment of Midtown is omitted from any of the Midtown Alliance Blueprint documents. Even documents on the history of Midtown from the Midtown Historic Preservation website are entirely silent about the role of gay men in rehabilitating this neighborhood.[4]

The story is the same in planning documents reviewed for other neighborhoods with LGBT populations. Both of the citywide plans for the Atlanta area (the 2003 Comprehensive Development Plan and the 2008 Strategic Action Plan; City of Atlanta 2003, 2008a) did not mention LGBT populations or any needs related to these communities. The 1999 Cheshire
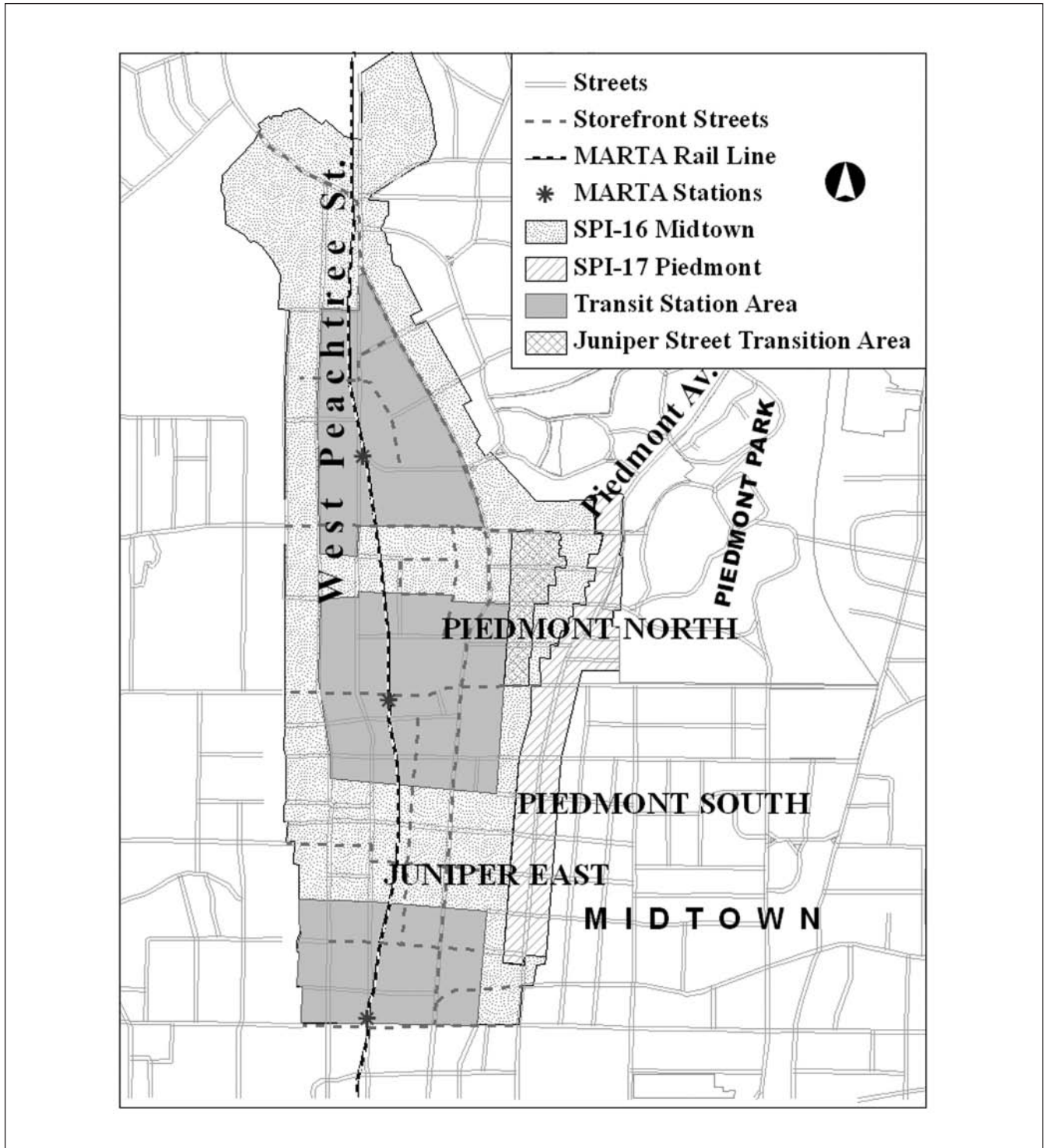
Figure 3. Special Public Interest Districts in Midtown Atlanta
Source: Constructed by the authors from public use maps showing Special Public Interest zones (SPI-16 and SPI-17) for the Midtown and Piedmont areas, City of Atlanta Department of Planning, Development and Neighborhood Conservation.

Bridge Transportation Study (including the neighborhoods of Piedmont Heights and parts of Morningside—see Figure 2) included a history section that indicated that homes in the area were being bought by "singles and childless couples" in search of affordable housing, but it did not discuss the fact that many of these people may have been gay men and lesbians (City of Atlanta 1999a). In addition, the report suggested that commercial areas along Cheshire Bridge Road shifted from a

restaurant row to adult businesses, making this venue the best place in Atlanta to "buy pornography, view erotic dancers, and partake in other adult activities (unspecified)." However, the report did not recognize that although some of these businesses were heterosexually oriented strip clubs, many of these bars and nightclubs were oriented to the LGBT people who lived in the surrounding area. As a result, the plan's stated goal to change the character of the neighborhood by reducing the presence of these adult businesses and making the streets more pedestrian friendly promoted a neighborhood that would be attractive to heterosexual families at the expense of the LGBT community.

The North Highlands Transportation Study (City of Atlanta 1999b) provided a history of the Morningside and the Virginia Highlands neighborhoods but was also silent about the sizable concentrations of lesbian and gay couples in these areas (see Table 1, which indicates that Virginia Highlands has the highest concentration of both lesbian and gay couples). There was not a single mention of LGBT people in the discussion of the Little Five Points, Candler Park, and Inman Park neighborhoods in either the Moreland-Ponce de Leon Corridors Study (City of Atlanta 2005) or the South Moreland Livable Center Initiative (LCI) study (City of Atlanta 2008b), despite the evidence of the LGBT populations cited above. Similarly, the East Point LCI Study (City of East Point 2005) described the potential for growth of the city of East Point in attracting some of the many people moving out of Atlanta wishing for an "in town" and proximate feel. The report suggested that much of the growth seemed to be "from young professionals, both single and married, looking for a viable urban alternative to high housing prices in the City of Atlanta, in neighborhoods like Midtown, Virginia-Highlands and Buckhead" (City of East Point 2005, Appendix p. 15). Once more, this report did not speculate about the sexuality or LGBT status of these new residents.

In summary, each of these planning documents discussed areas with significant concentrations of LGBT people but failed to make any reference to the contributions they made to the neighborhoods. The considerable LGBT presence in these areas is a common topic in the city's leading newspaper (Torpy 1999; Ho 2001; Chapman 2001; Woods 2004; Hunt 2008), so clearly this silence is not an oversight. While Atlanta has a reputation for being very tolerant of LGBT people, its location in the middle of the Bible Belt (Fleischmann and Hardman 2004) may have contributed to the reluctance to discuss any LGBT issues. Official neglect may be interpreted as a conscious choice to maintain silence and reduce the long-term impact of the LGBT community, confirming that planning is indeed a "heterosexist project" (Frisch 2002). Certainly planners' use of zoning in Midtown area was designed to make the area appealing not only to big business but to heterosexuals and their families, a clear attempt to recloset the LGBT population that provided much of the energy and investment for the initial regeneration of many neighborhoods. Indeed, using zoning to suit the needs of the majority is not a new concept. In Atlanta as early as the 1920s, zoning was developed as

a principal tool for stabilizing and fashioning the metropolis, for fixing spatial arrangements, protecting investments and property values, easing the blight and confusion of "transitional" and "mixed" areas, segregating the races, and encouraging the expansion and decentralization of the urban population while maintaining the vitality of the downtown business district. (Brownell 1975, 357)

To this list, one might now add "keeping the city safe for heterosexuals."

With this background, it is now useful to turn to the actual interviews that confirm the consequences of these changes for the LGBT community. The first part examines the nature of persistent social ties to the long-standing LGBT neighborhoods and assesses the extent to which heteronormative values have made inroads in previously tolerant spaces. The next section explores the effects of the gentrification process on those who have been displaced and those who have been redirected. The effects of the de-centering of LGBT community members throughout the wider Atlanta metropolitan region are also considered, as well as the impact that these shifting residential location preferences have had on previously African American neighborhoods.

Evidence from the Interviews

The interviews from the Atlanta case study serve to contextualize the impact of gentrification on a marginalized community in a large metropolitan area. This qualitative evidence illustrates the importance of having a neighborhood or physical location in which the LGBT community can gather for coffee, for socializing, or just for finding potential partners. However, the interviews also make clear that the existing queer spaces are in danger of disappearing under a resurgent wave of gentrification. Behaviors that once were defining characteristics of edgy queer space are now seen as threatening to the newest residents. In addition, there is an increasing dispersal of LGBT people throughout the Atlanta metropolitan area. Many of these individuals are struggling to re-create the feel of a queer neighborhood, but these efforts require large expenditures of sweat equity and may in fact result in the displacement of other poor minority groups from their neighborhoods.

Persistence of the Neighborhood-Identity Connection

Despite population and economic changes that have significantly affected where LGBT people live, some respondents indicated that their neighborhoods retain their "gay-friendly" distinction for LGBT people, confirming Butler's contention (2007) that neighborhood identity is an element of the gentrification process. Midtown, despite the rapid pace of redevelopment along the Peachtree Street corridor and the closing of many gay businesses in the area, continues to be identified as a haven for gay men, in part because of the popularity of the

remaining LGBT bars, Outwrite Books, and the park. Some LGBT individuals derive a portion of their identity as queer people from claiming residence in a strongly LGBT-identified neighborhood, even though they actually live outside the neighborhood. For example, two respondents, both gay men, initially presented themselves as Midtown residents but later admitted to the researchers that their actual residences were in nearby Ansley Park. Similarly, two lesbians claimed Decatur as their residence despite actually living at some distance from the city. Although these respondents no longer live in an LGBT-identified neighborhood, previous residence in Grant Park, Candler Park, or Virginia Highlands was summoned by respondents to claim a more urbane past than their present suburban lives would sometimes signal.

At the same time, where LGBT residential clustering is reoccurring in the wider Atlanta metropolitan area, identification with the original LGBT neighborhoods continues to percolate. Two new clusters have been identified as emerging queer spaces: the neighborhood of East Atlanta and the city of East Point. East Atlanta is located in an urban nook just south of I-20 and was integrated during the 1960s civil rights movement. In 2008 it was listed as the Best Up-and-Coming Gayborhood by *Southern Voice*, Atlanta's LGBT newspaper, because of the presence of two LGBT icons: Mary's, recently named the best gay bar in the United States (Hunt 2008), and My Sister's Room, a lesbian bar, as well as a number of other gay-owned or friendly restaurants and businesses. Similarly, East Point, located in southern Fulton County near Atlanta's Hartsfield International Airport, is also recognized as a burgeoning LGBT enclave. The city has a renewed downtown that welcomes LGBT people with its own small Pride festival and has just passed an LGBT inclusive antidiscrimination ordinance (Hunt 2009). In addition, East Point is also a long-time majority African American city (over 75 percent according to the 2000 Census) that has been home to a number of R&B and hip hop artists, including TLC and Outkast.

In spite of these new developments, LGBT people recognize the value of concentration. The Atlanta case appears to confirm Ruting's (2008) argument that the decline of clearly LGBT-identified neighborhoods leads to a dispersal, or what one respondent called the "diffusion," of LGBT people in Atlanta that has made organizing, for just about any purpose, more difficult. While the Internet and the cell phone are much more useful than face-to-face communication, it is apparent that they have not replaced it. Some of the interviewees confirmed Caulfield's (1989) argument that sexual desire can be a driving force in neighborhood formation. For example, despite the partial revitalization of East Point's downtown, and the possibility of a gay bar locating in the periphery of the city, one gay man living in East Point noted that he and his gay male friends continued to visit traditional gay commercial centers, especially the one in Midtown, often or even daily: "to go the gym, get a drink, buy a book or magazine, and, well, for sex."

The persistence of the neighborhood-identity connection is notable given that many recent non-LGBT residents of neighborhoods with gay and lesbian identification show no awareness of it. Whether or not LGBT-identity will adhere to traditional gay and lesbian neighborhoods over the long-term is uncertain. For instance, few of the current residents of Virginia Highlands or Candler Park, including a planning researcher attuned to Atlanta's neighborhood politics, seem aware of the neighborhoods' continued high concentration of same sex partners or Candler Park's past as a center for experimentation in lesbian-separatist-feminist communal living.

Shifting Tolerance in Established LGBT Neighborhoods

LGBT neighborhood identity is also threatened by decreasing tolerance for LGBT people and businesses due to the heterosexual residents arriving with the second wave of gentrification. The new Midtown condos are clearly designed to attract financiers (Lees 2000) and the super-rich (Bridges 2007), and it appears to be working. For some, including many LGBT activists, this leveraging of LGBT neighborhood capital by non-LGBT people represents the commodification—even the pillaging—of gay culture like that described above in the Castro (Buchanan 2007). Others view the commercialization of gay neighborhoods as one of the hallmarks of greater societal tolerance. Nevertheless, those who are calling for the complete assimilation of LGBT people into wider society may be ultimately disappointed. As predicted by Lauria and Knopp (1985), it appears that the integration of LGBT neighborhoods into the wider real estate market has enhanced the exchange value of those neighborhoods for the benefit of a few, while denigrating the use value of those neighborhoods for many LGBT individuals and families.

One example of this shifting tolerance was provided by one respondent, a long-term gay Midtown resident, neighborhood activist, and realtor who noted the following episode of confusion around the Pride festival in nearby Piedmont Park:

> The neighborhood association did a blast email to everybody's email address that Midtown was having a float in the Pride parade. This man brought his toddler children down to the Pride parade expecting it to be all about Midtown pride and not expecting to see, you know, all the fetish floats and the hooting and hollering that go along with them. He wrote a nasty letter to the association. He's one of the newcomers to the neighborhood—I guess just one of the yuppie kinds, who just had no clue.

A second example of this change in LGBT acceptance is the increase in constraints to overtly queer behavior in these neighborhoods as non-LGBT mores flourish. While the previous description by the Midtown realtor may be isolated to one oblivious neighbor, the intolerance that spurred the complaint

to neighborhood authorities appears more widespread among non-LGBT residents. One interviewee, a forty-nine-year-old gay man who lives near Midtown, described it this way:

> It used to be that a tranny prostitute was part of the local color; now it is a reason to call 911. . . . Today all the really well-built guys with great haircuts always seem to be running into the arms of wives pushing baby carriages.

While there is undeniable humor in some of these statements, it is significant that "integration" has occurred for many of the respondents at the cost of compliance with heteronormative "family-friendly" behavior. Even in new LGBT-enclaves like East Point, respondents noted that their behavior was always situational and conditional. During the LGBT Pride festival, flying rainbow flags and posting the Human Rights Campaign's equality symbol was *de rigueur* among LGBT people. At other times of the year in East Point, more subtle behavior that would identify an individual as belonging to a same-sex couple was not considered "safe." Both of these situations contrast with the wider metropolitan world of big box retail outlets and strip malls, where most LGBT respondents reported feeling uncomfortable at best and at times threatened by homophobic comments and behavior. As one respondent noted, "East Point is not downtown Decatur where you see lots of people holding hands." There is a trade-off between the negative aspects associated with "assimilation" or what Harris (1997) aptly called the cost of "subcultural forfeiture," and the benefits that "integration" affords—namely, the maintenance of the subculture in the context of political liberation.

Closure of LGBT Businesses

In the face of persistent gentrification, the survival of LGBT neighborhoods is contingent upon the continued presence of businesses that cater to the needs of the community. However, shifting tolerance for LGBT activity has a direct effect on LGBT businesses. As noted earlier, the collusion between the Midtown Alliance and the planning department promoted gentrification by designating the Midtown Improvement District and the two Special Public Interest Districts. One respondent active in neighborhood politics reflected on the planning decision to create the Midtown Improvement District and the rezoning of SPI-16 as follows:

> The Midtown Business District . . . really streamlines the process for developers, because they no longer have to go through the neighborhoods, they can now just go through a development review committee. . . . It really took the neighborhood out of the loop.

A recent article in Atlanta's LGBT newspaper suggested that "the future of Midtown is being built on top of the rubble of the neighborhood's gay past" (R. Lee 2007a). Developers hope that Peachtree Street, extending through the heart of Midtown, will become Atlanta's version of Chicago's "Miracle Mile," home to high-rise office and condominium projects, which will elevate Atlanta to a new level of cosmopolitan living, reminiscent of New York and Chicago but with little apparent awareness or concern for the existing LGBT community that lives and plays in the area. A prime example of this recloseting of the LGBT population is the pressure imposed on gay bars that are highly visible elements of the gay community and provide social venues for socializing with other sexual minorities. Existing gay bars and nightclubs along Peachtree Street were perceived to be not in keeping with the cosmopolitan image developers wished to project, and considerable pressure was put on them to close, including Backstreets, the Armory, and the Metro Video Bar. Other nearby bars and community institutions have also been negatively affected by new development. The Phoenix on nearby Ponce de Leon Avenue (R. Lee 2007a) and the Red Chair in the Amsterdam Walk shopping center in nearby Virginia Highlands have also shut down (Beck 2007).

The closure of gay and lesbian bars in the Midtown area has been the result of subtle discrimination through strict enforcement of liquor licensing laws (Woods 2004), as well as more overt actions such as the bombing of the Other Side (Gover 1997). The survival of gay and lesbian bars has been debated by some (R. Lee 2007b), but without them a neighborhood can be quickly "de-gayed" (Ruting 2008). While some turnover of gay and lesbian bars is part of the normal growth and evolution of gay neighborhoods, these closures appear to be linked to the wider gentrification trend in the city. For example, in September 2009, a police raid on a gay bar called the Eagle resulted in numerous complaints from patrons that the police used antigay slurs and forced everyone to lie on the concrete floor for several hours while the police "inspected" the premises (Rankin 2009).

Several respondents expressed concern about the effects of large new commercial developments on gay and lesbian bookstores that serve as vital community gathering points. These threats to the two iconic bookstores, Outwrite Books in Midtown and Charis Books in Little Five Points, stem from two separate decisions by the City Council to approve in-town big box developments by the same development company (Pendered 2003a) at Midtown Place and in Edgewood. These decisions prioritize large chain stores like Borders in spite of considerable, though not unanimous, neighborhood opposition. Large-scale commercial establishments also threaten a variety of smaller establishments that are not only gay-owned and -operated, but provide Midtown and Little Five Points with much of their local color and character. To make matters worse, Outwrite Books in Midtown has been subject to homophobic harassment by antihomosexual religious protestors (Hartley 2006). The cultural icons of queer neighborhoods are clearly at risk.

Decentering of the LGBT Population

The interviews provide considerable anecdotal evidence of the decentering of the LGBT population due to gentrification. One couple reported that their former neighbors from an apartment building in Decatur have now relocated to opposite ends of the Atlanta metropolitan area. For gay men with access to enough capital, Decatur and East Atlanta have become destinations; for those with less capital, East Point is, as one gay male respondent phrased it, "where you go after you lose your Midtown rental." Lesbians no longer able to afford Candler Park or Grant Park are migrating to East Point or the city of Pine Lake, a former weekend and vacation destination at the fringe of the metropolitan area. Two lesbian couples indicated they were constrained by home prices in their house searches, and both finally focused their searches on neighborhoods that were "transitioning," where prices were rising, but not as quickly as in the trendier neighborhoods nearby. One of the couples reported,

> We only had one weekend to get an apartment. So we drove all over, and I was determined. Actually I really wanted to be in Decatur, because I heard that that was the lesbian place to be. And we scoured Decatur, and [my partner] was very patient. I begged her to drive through neighborhood after neighborhood of houses. And some of them were for rent, but they were expensive because they were these cute little remodeled houses.

LGBT populations continue to struggle to find accepting neighborhoods and to re-create the previous sense of community which characterized Midtown. Several of the dispersed LGBT people interviewed indicated they were somewhat politically involved at the neighborhood level, where property politics and school policies hold sway. Respondents from several DeKalb neighborhoods talked about school "quality" issues and their effect on home values, but there was little awareness of overt LGBT community organizing. One respondent, a gay man long active in Atlanta community organizations, suggested that "if I were looking to start a political career, achieve elected office, that's where I'd move: East Point." Other respondents spoke of participating in "community building projects," establishing connections with their neighbors, and organizing for neighborhood improvement. Those who participated in these neighborhood organizations and local planning boards tended to be home owners, sharing with their straight, middle-class neighbors a focus on property value preservation and enhancement. In another interview, a gay male realtor indicated that he felt that wealth accumulation through appreciating home values was the wish of his young LGBT, first-time home buyer clientele, echoing Lauria and Knopp's (1985) findings from New Orleans.

Home improvement work remains a political project that holds sway among many LGBT people, echoing the efforts of LGBT first-wave gentrifiers. This kind of community-building, accompanied by traditional sweat-equity housing renewal efforts, is by now embedded in gay and lesbian culture. In this context, home improvement can be understood as a political response to the oppression resulting from prior discrimination in housing. In response, gay men and lesbians create new housing options for themselves by investing in nonstandard housing and struggling neighborhoods. The city and the development community in general continue to allow this marginalized population to do the hard work of rehabilitating deteriorated neighborhoods that are not attractive to other middle-class residents.

But these renewal efforts reveal some inherent conflicts. While many LGBT people remain committed to doing political work at the community level and being agents for positive change, the politics of property appear to be trumping the more progressive policies that once characterized the gay liberation movement. As one respondent noted, speaking of south DeKalb County, "As the prices go up, more straight people move in, more people with kids move in." Certainly the wider social change advocated by the residents of Midtown during the era of the counterculture has receded, as it has elsewhere, and been replaced by the class-based property interests that focus on traffic improvement, the installation of security cameras, school quality, nuisance removal, and beautification concerns reflected in the plans of the Midtown Alliance.

The Persistent Desire for Queer Community

Given the persistence of the neighborhood-identity connection among LGBT people—and despite its evanescence among their neighbors—many of the respondents would choose to live in LGBT-identified neighborhoods if they could. Most cannot, however, and the reason most often stated was that gentrification has driven the cost of housing in these neighborhoods too high. "Laura" and "Lisa," two lesbians in their late thirties, provided a typical response in their description of long, often frustrating housing searches:

> There was an ad from a lesbian realtor who was super friendly. She said, "This street is great, very friendly. My partner and I live down the street. It's a very friendly community, and it's close to downtown." But everything in Decatur was just too expensive.

Another respondent, whose household income was cut by more than half after separating from her partner, opted to rent to remain in an LGBT-identified neighborhood rather than buy in the non-LGBT neighborhoods she could afford.

Although many interviewees had once lived in LGBT-identified neighborhoods (including Candler Park, Grant Park, Virginia Highlands, and Midtown), all but one of the women had to leave these neighborhoods and were unable to return. While the reasons for leaving were various (attending grad school, being evicted for condo-conversions, ending of a relationship or the beginning of another), the reason for not returning was always the same: the high cost of housing in

those neighborhoods as a result of gentrification. One of the female respondents, a former resident of Grant Park, benefited from the upsurge in real estate values, as did one of the men. Most of the others had been renters during the heydays of these neighborhoods.

LGBT people are attracted to queer-identified neighborhoods for myriad reasons, but the perception that these areas are more tolerant is often critical in their decision making. Those respondents who had lived more closeted lives before they moved to Atlanta were quick to note the city's vibrant LGBT culture and tolerance as a reason for relocating there. Several southern-born respondents wanted to stay in the Southeast and felt that Atlanta was the only safe choice.

Personal safety is an important component of tolerance, which is reinforced by access to LGBT institutions as well as other "open" or "affirming" organizations (several respondents noted the importance of the welcome they felt from their faith communities). Another factor is the ability to navigate many of the activities of everyday life with no more hassle than that experienced by non-LGBT people. LGBT people with families spoke of desires for their children to attend schools with at least some other children with same-sex parents and the struggle to find tolerant child care providers. Others spoke of wanting to be able to go grocery shopping as a couple and not be stared at. While none stated any desire to demonstrate their affection for partners publicly, those who lived in LGBT-identified communities valued the fact that they could do so unmolested.

Security and comfort are, nevertheless, only a few of the variables affecting neighborhood choice. Participating in community building and being part of something larger than oneself or one's family are also important aspects of LGBT residential decisions. In some cases, especially among gay men, this translates into formal participation in majoritarian political institutions (neighborhood organizations, planning boards, and even elected office) as discussed above. For example, one well-connected community activist respondent argued that commercial collocation, combined with residential concentration, was needed to provide LGBT neighborhoods with the personal networks and social capital (most built on face-to-face interaction) essential for ensuring the survival of LGBT liberationist politics.

Several interviewees indicated that socializing among fellow LGBT community members was important. "Jane," a lesbian living in Decatur, captured the value of the unplanned, sometimes serendipitous bustle of urban life:

> I wanted to be able to walk down to Java Monkey to see my friends, things like that. It's a very friendly place even if you don't see people you know. If I walk up to the Kroger for my groceries, people who don't know me will say, "Hello." You know, it's just a very warm sort of atmosphere; it's a nice community.

Similarly, "Leah," a lesbian resident of East Point, mentioned,

> There are a lot of new restaurants in downtown East Point so a lot of queer people work and eat there, some of whom don't live in East Point. So even though, when you walk through a restaurant . . . you are surrounded by queer people, "Oh, wow, they're here too?" It is exciting!

LGBT Suburbanization and Racial Tensions

Because many LGBT people now find they are unable to afford housing in traditional LGBT-identified neighborhoods in Atlanta, these individuals are more likely to seek out neighborhoods they describe as "diverse." These neighborhoods are often characterized by populations that mix races and ethnicities, most often as a result of neighborhood change that has accompanied the burgeoning of Atlanta's Latino population. Several respondents from East Point indicated that if they could not afford to live in already established LGBT-neighborhoods, they would prefer to live in a mixed community among Mexican Americans rather than in all-white or entirely African American places in the city.

While it is difficult to ascertain the exact value of "diversity" for LGBT individuals in making housing location choices, it is clear that LGBT people conceptualize "nondiverse" communities as exclusively white enclaves characterized by conservatism in politics and fundamentalism in religion. Nondiverse places, like the northern suburbs of Atlanta, are usually described with a certain foreboding. "Jane" from Decatur says of them,

> I don't find any reason to go out there; I wouldn't seek that out as some place to go. It just wouldn't happen. . . . It's a different feeling out there, you know; it's definitely not as queer as here.

In general, the LGBT interviewees stated preferences for LGBT-identified neighborhoods but noted that when they cannot afford the price of gentrified housing, they opt for neighborhoods with a mixture of identities and orientations. However, the process of neighborhood renewal of these "diverse" neighborhoods in Atlanta is increasingly characterized by reversed racial transitions within neighborhoods, greater volatility and social conflict between LGBT residents and their non-LGBT neighbors, and population shifts that affect the racial composition of the electorate. The visible conflicts between African Americans and LGBT people in certain neighborhoods have been exacerbated by the loss of affordable housing units throughout Atlanta.

The conflict in the Kirkwood neighborhood between blacks and LGBT gentrifiers has received the most attention. Kirkwood was a largely white community until the Atlanta School Board integrated the Kirkwood School in 1965, and the ensuing white flight transformed Kirkwood into an all-black community. Beginning in the 1980s, however, the neighborhood

began experiencing gentrification, particularly by gay men and lesbians attracted to its historic housing stock (Chapman 2001). The tension came to a boil in 1998 when an African American minister called a public meeting to incite his flock to "put an end to the homosexual and lesbian takeover of our community" (Schrade 1998). The city council member representing Kirkwood (a heterosexual African American woman) jumped on the bandwagon and began criticizing "those homosexuals," and a political firestorm erupted. The tensions lingered until she lost her bid for reelection in 2001 (Bennett 2001). One interviewee described recent conflicts as follows:

> There has been more friction on the south side of Decatur. . . . Some of the older African-American religious women, who were not so happy about gays and lesbians in the community . . . took great umbrage at their moving into their neighborhood. . . . It was not driven primarily by residents but by African-American religious and political leaders.

Many LGBT people are aware of the conflicts. "Sara," the lesbian owner of a small business, acknowledges the tensions faced by many of her employees, women mostly in their early twenties. She stated that if these women want to live anywhere within the perimeter of metropolitan Atlanta, they are likely to locate in neighborhoods that are predominantly African American. They cannot afford to live in the neighborhoods near where they work or in the city of Decatur due to the rising values associated with gentrification.

Two lesbian partners were priced out of Virginia Highlands and neighborhoods in Decatur. Although they claimed to disdain the displacement and speculation that accompanies gentrification and loathed being labeled gentrifiers themselves, nonetheless, they bought property in a gentrifying neighborhood. As "Lisa" notes,

> When we moved into our neighborhood, it was predominantly African-American. I had some reservations. Not because I didn't want to live in the neighborhood that was all African-American, but I was concerned about the way African-Americans would look on us. I was also concerned-and with some reason, as it turns out-that the neighborhood would be changed by the fact that we were there. And it has changed.

Neighborhoods undergoing reverse racial transition do provide places where LGBT people of color, especially mixed-race couples, feel comfortable living. At the same time, the changes that often accompany LGBT people's arrival in a neighborhood, including enhanced police surveillance and greater variety in dining and shopping opportunities, are not always unwelcome. "Leah" of East Point agreed that some long term residents appreciated the changes and noted, "I don't think the older African-American ladies were particularly fond

of the police ignoring the neighborhood crack house." "Hal," a straight resident of Decatur, offered another typical appraisal of neighborhood change associated with gentrification:

> It increases street traffic, the number of shops that are open, the number of restaurants. So, for me it [gentrification] has not been an issue. The folks that are really against it are the ones that are really sensitive to the transportation issues and traffic, and then those that have housing that is adjacent to these higher-rise zones.

Finally, it is important to note that not all gentrifiers are LGBT-identified or white. "Carol," a straight, young African American professional born and raised in DeKalb County, recently moved back to Atlanta. After looking all over the city for a neighborhood with the same urban ambience she experienced in Central City Philadelphia, she settled in the increasingly LGBT-friendly East Atlanta. She described her goals—many of which are similar to LGBT people—as follows:

> I was looking along Peachtree Street, north of downtown. I just didn't find anything that I loved, and I think I realized that I didn't want to live in a high-rise. I thought it was cool initially, but it's just not community-oriented enough for me. I decided that the most important thing to me was to live in a place, no matter how big or small, that was convenient to things. I fell in love with Philly just because it was so convenient. . . . I lived right in the city, and I could walk to work, get there in 30 minutes on foot. Walk to the grocery store. I could walk to anything. And I was trying to replicate that here.

Because these interviews occurred in the spring of 2007, they shed little light on the impact of the 2008 financial meltdown on these neighborhoods and their residents. Certainly declining property values may ease some of the pressure on renters to move to more peripheral locations, although it is unclear how hard unemployment or reduced hours has hit the LGBT population in these areas. There have been delays in the development of the Miracle Mile shopping district along Peachtree Street (Ramos 2009), but many of the gay bars that were shuttered to make way for this development remain closed. In outlying neighborhoods it is not clear whether the mortgage crisis has slowed the pace of gentrification.

Findings and Implications for LGBT Neighborhood Preservation

Findings from the Atlanta Case

This research on LGBT neighborhoods in Atlanta finds that the resurgence of gentrification in these areas has had a profound effect there, as well as in other neighborhoods. While it is premature to declare the complete demise of the gayborhood

in Midtown, it and other LGBT-identified neighborhoods are clearly struggling to maintain those identities. The gentrification of the late 1990s and early 2000s was undertaken in part by the development community in contrast to earlier gentrification based on the sweat equity of LGBT people (and others) over the preceding several decades. This new wave of gentrification involved twice as many Atlanta neighborhoods that became redevelopment targets—not because of underlying architectural aesthetics, but because of their proximity to the downtown Atlanta employment center. As noted earlier, city planners became major redevelopment sponsors by supporting those seeking to "modernize" Atlanta with specific changes to zoning and to the development approval process that promoted urban redevelopment growth in ways that significantly altered the fabric of LGBT neighborhoods.

The interviews in this case study indicate that the process of gentrification is viewed by LGBT people as a mixed blessing. To those early residents who invested their own hard work and capital into gentrifying neighborhoods, the rise in housing values appears justified, even if accompanying changes have resulted in both diminished tolerance for visibly queer people and greater hardship for LGBT businesses, institutions, and moderate-income LGBT people. However, there is clearly a trade-off between personal gains from the high property values in better-established neighborhoods and the community benefits from having an inclusive and affordable queer space that welcomes most, though not necessarily all, of the LGBT community. The current embrace of commercial culture by the LGBT community has heightened the internal contradiction of exchange value versus use value that earlier neighborhood change produced (Lauria and Knopp 1985). The decision by some LGBT people to realize their profits gained through gentrification by selling their houses has opened the door for white upper-middle-class households to consume the accumulated neighborhood capital built with sweat and grit. The status of what was once viewed as queer space has been undermined by the commodification and "heterosexualization" of these spaces where heteronormative social norms have replaced the more inclusive ones in the former gayborhood.

A second and more serious finding is that while many LGBT people still seek to satisfy a number of social needs in traditional enclaves (including entertainment, access to the "marriage" market, social life, and support), those neighborhoods have become increasingly unaffordable as residential locations for many LGBT individuals. The dispersal of the LGBT community by resurgent gentrification is the kind of displacement predicted by some gentrification scholars (Marcuse 1986). This dislocation increases the vulnerability of traditional LGBT institutions and restricts the ability of LGBT people to organize resistance to challenges facing their community, to train future leaders through involvement in neighborhood governance, and to elect local officials responsive to LGBT concerns. Without a concentration of LGBT residents, businesses, and institutions, many neighborhoods traditionally associated with the LGBT

community are far less likely to persist as queer-friendly in the near future. The interviews support the finding that LGBT-focused businesses in traditionally LGBT-identified commercial zones still function as important nodes for that community, but their longevity is threatened by development pressure. These institutions are especially important in the lives of the most marginalized LGBT individuals, including people of color and transgendered people, who are frequently more visible and more concerned with safety and tolerance. The loss of LGBT social support systems also has a detrimental impact on people at both ends of the age spectrum—LGBT youth and retired individuals living on fixed incomes.

The disappearance of these commercial concentrations because resurgent gentrification has raised rents, limited expansion possibilities, shifted the neighborhood demographics, and caused a diffusion of their customer base may be the ultimate harbinger of the LGBT enclave's demise in Atlanta. At the same time, political mobilization has devolved to the politics of the personal—the preservation of property values and neighborhood enhancement issues—making it more difficult to organize around broader LGBT issues. This shift may reflect the bargain that LGBT people with capital have made, namely, to ignore certain aspects of the gay liberation political agenda in exchange for economic integration into the metropolitan housing market.

The third finding of this case study is that the longing for queer community persists. Younger and poorer LGBT people continue to involve themselves in old-style, sweat-equity gentrification, partly due to reasons rooted in LGBT culture, and partly due to the desire to access lower-cost housing. These efforts are often accompanied by a wider community-building mission that seeks to form new LGBT-identified communities, even as the older versions of such neighborhoods are undergoing change. Despite these challenges and claims to wider social and structural integration within metropolitan Atlanta, many LGBT persons crave the acceptance of queerness that they imagine LGBT neighborhoods afford. In the interviews, many residents expressed a desire to separate "integration" from "assimilation" with respect to the LGBT community in Atlanta. The premise that areas outside the traditional enclaves have now become "safer" for LGBT residents is being tested in the Atlanta suburbs that are experiencing a new round of LGBT gentrifying activities. Evidently the aspiration of queer-identified people for community and spatial identity remains a powerful force in spite of the overall assimilationist trend.

A fourth finding is that issues of class and race continue to matter in Atlanta. The adverse effects of gentrifying activities, including those undertaken by LGBT people, have the greatest impact on extant communities and households with less access to capital than even many young LGBT people possess. Furthermore, the clash of cultures within neighborhoods that frequently accompanies gentrification remains a significant source of discord both within neighborhoods and among LGBT people. The spread of traditional gentrifying activities into a

different constellation of suburban and African American neighborhoods has caused racial tension and class conflict, highlighting the limits of integration and assimilation. LGBT people with access to capital continue to have the widest spectrum of residential choices. Nevertheless, the ongoing suburbanization of moderate-income LGBT persons undermines LGBT institutions through the scattering of their audiences across the metropolitan region. There are a cascading series of consequences as LGBT people move outwards in a search for tolerant spaces within which to create new communities, often at the expense of lower-income residents of these areas who are usually ethnic minorities.

Finally, the evidence reviewed in this case study suggests that the demise of queer neighborhoods is not a foregone conclusion. For queer spaces to survive, however, organized community action will be required. The planning process to date has been marked by the absence of efforts to recognize and consider the points of view of LGBT constituencies. If instead of trying to create a Miracle Mile, planning efforts had emphasized limits on the demolition of existing housing and placed restrictions on condominium conversion of rental properties that might cause high numbers of evictions, the housing situation for lower-income residents of Midtown and other areas like Inman Park might not have been so dire. The Atlanta City Council continues to debate the merits of inclusionary zoning to ensure that a percentage of new housing should be affordable, but action has not yet been taken. Inman Park has had some success in limiting excessive in-fill development through its Historic District designation. Midtown is considering similar action but has not finalized the details. Had these steps been taken ten years ago, such policies might have been quite valuable in preserving the affordability of some neighborhoods, but at this point property values are already so high that creating a Midtown historic district will at best stabilize the remaining residential properties but is unlikely to increase the supply of affordable housing. However, newly developing LGBT enclaves like East Point and East Atlanta might consider either historic preservation or some other form of explicit planning recognition, such as a cultural overlay district, earlier in the gentrification process. Passage of a nondiscrimination ordinance that explicitly includes LGBT people is a good first step, but including the LGBT community in the planning process is just as critical. The invisibility of LGBT people and their issues in Atlanta's planning documents undermines the longevity of the LGBT community as much as overt discrimination.

Lessons for the Future of LGBT Communities

The Atlanta case is not unique among LGBT neighborhoods and provides several important lessons for planners who wish to preserve and enhance LGBT neighborhoods. A vital question for planners and policy makers is how to ensure the affordability of housing in neighborhoods that provide a measure of safety for more visibly queer or gender-dissonant LGBT people who are most at risk for discrimination. If existing LGBT neighborhoods are not preserved, what will happen to the LGBT organizations and institutions that provide so much support to other vulnerable LGBT subpopulations, including young and elderly people, the poor, and those managing chronic diseases like HIV? Depending on the audience for preservation, several planning strategies exist to achieve these ends, including the recognition of LGBT historical sites to ensure preservation and the designation of an area as an LGBT neighborhood in a general or comprehensive plan.

It may be too late to "preserve" iconic LGBT neighborhoods, but there is time to at least mark the locations of gay landmarks (Dubrow 1998). As new LGBT-friendly gayborhoods inevitably emerge, planners should recognize the existence of this often marginalized community and be aware of their needs for tolerant and safe spaces. The 2010 Census provides a real opportunity to track the spatial evolution of LGBT residential patterns at least for same-sex partners. Planners might consider other data sources to account for the presence of LGBT singles. These findings could then be explicitly incorporated into planning documents, similar to the way that many plans highlight ethnic minorities.

Furthermore, recognizing the central role of LGBT businesses and community organizations is very important. Businesses such as bookstores provide essential community gathering places and are important in establishing and maintaining a sense of neighborhood identity. Limitations on the size of new businesses proposed for in-town neighborhoods might reduce chain store buyouts that directly threaten the small businesses that provide gayborhoods with local color and character. Gay and lesbian bars are also a focal point for these communities and should not be linked to the same adult business category as porno shops and strip clubs. Other cities have used the recognition of their gay districts as a marketing tool for tourists (both LGBT and others). Indeed, some entrepreneurs in LGBT neighborhoods offer tours through the enclave to provide a modest income to themselves as well as other local businesses. To achieve these objectives, some form of collective organization will likely be necessary to protect residents and businesses. Frisch and Servon (2006) suggested that the Community Development Corporation model might enable the LGBT community to leverage protection, and especially when confronted by a planning process like Atlanta's that enables fast tracking for development investors and dilutes neighborhood input.

The demise of queer space is not yet inevitable, but LGBT community groups need to take a more active role to preserve it. As mentioned earlier, LGBT neighborhoods prior to the 1970s were allowed to develop only at the margins of the city, where they were tolerated for a time and then forced to relocate. The motivation for the current wave of relocations on the

surface appears to be economic rather than discriminatory, but as this article has argued, those economic forces have been given a significant boost by planners and city governments eager to make their cities ripe for redevelopment, often at the expense of LGBT individuals and their community institutions. There is still time to preserve, strengthen, and reinvent such neighborhoods, but planners must be responsive to the needs of the LGBT community and not engage in discrimination by omission.

Notes

1. The ephemeral nature of these early spaces was made evident to the authors during the American Planning Association conference in San Francisco in 2007 when they took a tour of queer spaces organized by the Gays and Lesbians in Planning Division and found little or no remaining physical evidence of these LGBT spaces in the built environment (except of course the Castro). Urban redevelopment had virtually obliterated all of the important queer bars and historical landmarks.

2. Although the 2000 Census asked no questions about sexual orientation or behavior, the Census form did ask about "unmarried partners" and recorded the sex of both partners. Many demographers have assumed these same-sex partner households argue are, in fact, gay and lesbian couples (Black et al. 2000; Gates and Ost 2004). However, single gay men, single lesbians, all bisexuals, and all transgendered individuals cannot be identified in the 2000 Census data, although it is estimated that just a quarter of gay men and two-fifths of lesbians are in couples at any given time (Black et al. 2000).

3. Tax allocation districts have been used in ten different neighborhoods in Atlanta. In Midtown, the Atlantic Station Redevelopment has benefited from this process, but since the project site is across the I-75/85 corridor from the main residential parts of Midtown, the authors have chosen not to discuss this project in any detail.

4. See the Midtown Historic Preservation Documents on "Midtown History," "Historic District Process," and "Proposed Midtown Historic District Zoning" at http://www.preservemidtownatlanta .org/.

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