

"Revitalization"

Revitalization and gentrification are two words that go hand in hand, and the ongoing projects to transform the Los Angeles River from a concrete flood channel into a scenic green space have ushered in a whole new conversation on what will happen to the neighborhoods surrounding the river. Amir Khafagy wrote an article titled *Gentrifying the Los Angeles River* for Jacobin Magazine in August of 2018 discussing the possible outcomes of these projects. Although the article presents valid concerns and ample sourced-evidence, I couldn't agree with the position the paper was taking due to its obviously pronounced bias against redevelopment initiatives, selective use of sources, and reluctance to fully express the potential positive benefits of a revitalization to the river.

The article was written to flesh-out the discussion on potential changes to the land adjacent the Los Angeles Riverbed once it has been "transformed" from an eyesore to a welcoming public greenspace. In 2007 the city of Los Angeles approved a "1.3 billion master plan to reimagine an eleven-mile stretch of the river" from a grey concrete flood channel to a multi-use space that would enhance the surrounding neighborhoods and overall quality of life for those living in the area.¹ The author brought up how this large project is creating a "speculative economy" for wealthy developers targeting lower-income communities, and that gentrification will displace residents once this project is completed. He offers interviews from community activists and statistics about how rising rents will price-out many of the long-term residents of the impacted communities. Also, the author includes some statements from the dissenting side of the article such as developers and Mayor Garcetti, who expressed positive affirmations of the project.

One reason the article does not fully address the intricacies of redevelopment in an urban area like Los Angeles is the author's choice to write the article with a pronounced anti-development bias. The bias is evident in the choice of sources used, as well as how the article is worded. The sentence structure showcases blatant anti-development rhetoric in various parts of the article including a sentence early on where the Khafagy states the beautification project may be a "trojan horse for gentrification".¹ This type of speech influences the reader into forming a negative opinion on the project, as gentrification and the related effects on a community are usually perceived negatively. But this "trojan horse" statement does not address the process of gentrification as a multifaceted process, but rather scapegoats the project as the driving factor. Eric Garcetti, who is both mayor of Los Angeles and a native Angelino, was quoted saying "I think that if we did nothing with the river, those forces of high rent, of displacement would still be here".² The current climate of the real estate market and the affordable housing crisis of Los Angeles speak larger volumes on the reason for the potential displacement of communities along the river, but the author would like to convince the reader that this revitalization project is the primary force of gentrification.

Another reason the article did a poor job of explaining the situation in a holistic manner was the selective use of sources to add credibility to his specific narrative. The author included a plethora of sources related to the projects, but the degrees to which he utilized some sources as opposed to others led me to believe there was a concerted effort to influence the reader into believing a certain opinion over another. The most heavily utilized source in the article was interview content from Sissy Trinh, founder of the South East Asian Community Alliance (SEACA), a grassroots organization that focuses on gentrification and displacement in the city of Los Angeles¹. Sissy was a credible source but given her position as head of the organization, her

strong bias against any sort of project that could bring about gentrification was pronounced. She was quoted heavily throughout the article with snippets of text that painted the picture that the communities were among the “poorest in the city” and that everyone living in these areas would be displaced because of the plans¹. Khafagy failed to include any positive information about the project, and rather focused on exploiting the negative consequences would come about from the project. An example being the La Kretz family, who own a large piece of land along the river and plan on having it developed into a subdivision.¹ Sure, the wealthy will be profiting off this project, but the author does not mention the thousands of people who have lived in the neighborhood for generations and will see the value of their homes increase, or the increased aesthetic and environmental benefits they will see as a result of these plans.

The major flaw of the article was the one-sided discourse on the project. The author did not include the plans the city has to protect the community currently living there, how these neighborhoods are receiving massive injections of capital that have historically been absent, or even opening a discussion on how this project getting passed was partially the result of gentrification already happening in these riverside neighborhoods. The author’s negligence to address these vital components of the bigger picture watered down the legitimacy of his stance on how this project was ultimately a bad thing. His anthropocentric focus on the native populations of the neighborhoods is an important one, but he fails to also see the project from an eco-centric lens where the benefits would greatly outweigh the cons.

Although the article ultimately raises many important questions for discussion, the devil’s advocate position is an important one to be voiced in order to come to a more comprehensive, holistic end goal. That being said, Khafagy failed to incorporate the dissenting view in his opinion piece and might have left many readers feeling alienated if they had a differing

viewpoint than his. He may have done a better job at achieving his goal of convincing people of the negative consequences of the project if he also wrote about the positive effects. Overall, the message of the article was so clear to the point of being of being dividing, and this style of writing contains too much bias to be included in any comprehensive discussion regarding this project.

Works Cited

1. "Gentrifying the Los Angeles River." *Jacobin*, www.jacobinmag.com/2018/05/los-angeles-river-gentrification-revitalization-displacement.
2. "Efforts to Restore the Los Angeles River Collide With a Gentrifying City." *Sierra Club*, Sierra Club, 29 June 2018, www.sierraclub.org/sierra/2018-4-july-august/feature/efforts-restore-los-angeles-river-California-collide-gentrifying-city.