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The city in the country: wilderness gentrification and the rent gap

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Abstract. In this paper I explore the efficacy of applying Neil Smith's theory of the rent gap to rural gentrification in New York State's Adirondack Park, making three central claims. In the first place, although the underlying impetus for both rural and urban gentrification (namely, the maximization of profit on the part of a variety of gentrifying agents from individual owner-occupants to large-scale developers) is essentially the same, some fundamental differences between the determination of what constitutes 'undercapitalized' ground rent in the city and the wilderness leads to subsequent differences in the geographical expression of gentrification in each area. In the second, the unique land-management practices instituted by the State of New York in this region have set up the conditions for a singular type of disinvestment not typically found in the city, rendering disinvestment a central aspect of Adirondack gentrification but in a different way than the disinvestment which anchors Smith's argument. Finally, I argue that the 'postproductivist' theories which have recently gained currency in the extant rural gentrification literature are not applicable to the empirical realities of Adirondack land use, suggesting that rural areas themselves may be sufficiently differentiated to render the idea of an overarching, homogeneous 'rural gentrification' suspect and pointing to the need for a more refined and specific set of labels to indicate a variety of landscape-specific gentrification models in the hinterlands.

Country, n.
The circumurban region inhabited by the quail, the trout, the deer, and the armed granger. It is a region of romance, where the Golden Age still lingers, as in the earth's green prime, when Virgil sang and the gods mingled with men and maidens.
Metropolis, n.
A stronghold of provincialism.
Rent, n.
An outrage, imposed by blood-sucking vampires on virtuous sons of toil.
Ambrose Bierce, *The Devil's Dictionary*

Introduction

The dichotomy between urban and rural studies is a curious one. Despite a few extraordinary exceptions which specifically trace the material and discursive relationship between the metropole and the hinterland—William Cronon's *Nature's Metropolis* (1991), Leo Marx's *The Machine in the Garden* (1964), and Raymond Williams's *The Country and the City* (1973) spring immediately to mind—urban and rural scholars tend largely to keep to their own epistemological pumpkin patches, comfortably sequestered in the midst of their respective canons, despite the myriad ontological ties which bind such landscapes together. One notable recent development bucks this trend: the emergence of a field of 'urban political ecology'. The moniker suggests that, although there was nothing intrinsically *rural* about the older political ecology, there was something vaguely *unurban* about it, to the point where a new, distinctly city-based political ecology has emerged as a hybrid urban subspecies which has borrowed liberally from lessons learned in the countryside. Indeed *urban* political ecology often seems like the same old political ecology with a mere change of address.

If urban theorists have found much of value in the study of (ostensibly) nonurban nature, then it makes sense to ask whether rural theorists might do well to borrow a leaf from their urban cousins, particularly when historically *city-based* phenomena begin to manifest in the hinterlands. Such has been the case with gentrification, a process long assumed to be a distinctly urban process but which has begun to appear with increasing frequency in rural areas. Scholars of rural gentrification have accordingly begun to evaluate the efficacy of applying urban social theory to the countryside. This paper pushes such analyses further, exploring in depth the application of a classical concern in urban gentrification—the theory of the *rent gap*, as postulated by urban geographer Neil Smith in a series of arguments which have become a veritable watershed in debates about the 'revitalization' of the inner city—to gentrification in the countryside.

Smith (1979a; 1979b; 1987; 1996; 2002) argues that the rent gap can be fully understood only by examining the flow of capital into and out of the built environment on multiple scales. Urban gentrification manifests most visibly at the local level, as dilapidated low-rent neighborhoods are transformed into polished high-rent havens for the middle class through a process of disinvestment and reinvestment which results in the displacement of lower income tenants (1996, pages 51 – 74). However, this localized transformation is in fact the product of uneven development, and specifically the shifting of capital investment in both a sectoral and a geographical sense, occurring at several larger scales, from the regional to the national to the global (pages 75 – 91). In short, the phenomenon typically associated with gentrification—that is, the 'revitalization' of a particular neighborhood—is merely the tip of the iceberg: it is the most conspicuous manifestation of broad shifts in the process of capital accumulation which far exceed the result itself in both time and space.

In order to evaluate the relevance of the rent-gap theory to gentrification in the countryside, it is therefore necessary to compare the urban and rural contexts not only in terms of local cycles of investment and disinvestment in the built environment, but in terms of their divergent roles in the broader process of uneven development. In this paper I attempt to do so, using the Fulton Chain region of the Adirondack Park as a case study. I argue that the peculiar logic of Adirondack gentrification—which has less to do with the region's broadly *rural* character than with its specific status as a state-regulated *wilderness park* with a unique set of political ecological restrictions on investment—has resulted in a distinct spatial expression of the rent gap (and, subsequently, a unique geographical distribution of the gentrified housing stock) not typically seen in the city.

Rural gentrification: a brief look at the literature

Although typically a term associated with the urban setting (M Phillips, 2000, page 1; 2004, pages 6 – 7), a distinct literature documenting gentrification in the countryside has emerged over the course of the past three decades. This literature is more fully developed in the United Kingdom than in the United States, based for the most part upon a series of rural gentrification case studies in the Welsh and English countrysides [Little, (1987), Phillips, (1993; 2000; 2002; 2004), D P Smith, (2002a; 2002b), D P Smith and D A Phillips, (2001); see Friedberger (1996), however, for an interesting US exception]. In general, this literature concerns itself with four primary issues:

1. shifts in the class structure of rural Britain, often focusing on the 'colonization' of the British countryside by an exurban or suburban, middle class of homeowners who seek to create a lifestyle organized around the consumption of 'nature' and/or rurality, and the subsequent displacement of working-class rural residents as a result of rising local land and housing prices (Cloke et al, 1995; M Phillips, 1998a, 1998b; Urry 1995);

2. shifts in the rural capital accumulation process, and especially the theorization of the 'postproductivist' rural landscape, in which industrial or agricultural production gives way to service-oriented accumulation regimes, including residential real-estate development, often including the conversion of formerly industrial structures such as barns into residential housing units (Lowe et al, 1993);
3. shifts in the composition of the rural British housing stock, including patterns of ownership, the impact of state housing policies, and the material makeup of the housing stock itself (Bowler and Lewis, 1987; Richmond 1987);
4. rural gentrification as an object of theorization, particularly in areas (such as the Gower peninsula in Wales) where investment in residential plots affording rustic or pastoral ambience yields significant returns to a variety of developer types (Little, 1987; M Phillips, 1993; 2000; 2002; 2004; D P Smith, 2002a; 2002b; D P Smith and D A Phillips, 2001).

This literature shares some fundamental commonalities with the present paper—in particular, the applicability of urban-based gentrification theory to rural gentrification, as well as the potential heterogeneity of gentrification in different types of rural settings—with one important exception; the bulk of this literature emphasizes *consumption* as the motor force of rural gentrification, even going so far as to point to uneven consumer preference as constitutive of the fundamental difference between rural and urban gentrification.[1] Darren Smith and Debbie Phillips, for example, have coined the term "greentrification" to signify the crucial importance of nature consumption in the rural gentrification process which, from their perspective, "stands in contrast to the 'urban' qualities which attract in-migrant counterparts in urban locations" (2001, page 457). Indeed, this penchant for consumption-side explanations for rural 'revitalization' has been acknowledged within the literature itself (D P Smith, 2002a, pages 445–446).

An exception to this rule is the work of Martin Phillips, whose research has gone the greatest distance in applying 'production-side' theories of urban gentrification to the rural setting. Although his considerable contributions in the literature are too extensive to reiterate in their totality here, he has made two important points which have direct bearing upon this paper. First, Phillips has investigated the possibility of a rural rent gap, documenting significant returns on investment in devalorized residential housing in the Welsh Gower (1993, pages 129–130). Second, Phillips has drawn attention to the potential parallel between 'postproductivist' theories of the countryside and the cycle of the disinvestment and reinvestment which underpins the rent gap in the urban setting, arguing that rural gentrification might plausibly be understood as a revalorization of landscapes "which have become seen as unproductive or marginal to agrarian capital, and indeed a variety of other rural capitals" (2000, pages 5–6; see also 2004, page 14). These two lines of thought are particularly relevant because they are analogous to the dual scales of gentrification emphasized by Neil Smith in the urban setting.

Gentrification in the Adirondack region shares many commonalities with rural British gentrification as described in this literature, including the discursive construction of 'nature' and 'rurality' both by consumers and by producers of gentrified housing, the manifestation of class formation and struggle in the residential housing sector, and the displacement of local residents as a result of investment in gentrified housing. But there is one important element present in the Adirondack case which goes

[1] The split between consumption-side and production-side theories of rural gentrification is not (yet) as polarized as the one which characterized the urban literature following Smith's introduction of the rent-gap concept. For consumption-oriented critiques of Smith, see Bourassa (1993), Caulfield (1994), Hamnett (1991), Ley (1986), and Mills (1988), among others.

largely unaddressed by the British research: the significance of the *material* production of nature by the state management of the local landscape in creating the conditions within which investment and disinvestment in the rural built environment occurs in the first place. In order to understand why the political ecology of the Adirondack region matters so much to the gentrification process, it is necessary to review the unique state land-management policies which legislate the production of nature in this part of the world.

Gentrification and the production of Adirondack nature

The Adirondack Park is a Vermont-sized swath of wilderness in upstate New York, stretching from the Mohawk Valley to the Canadian border in a rough oval. In addition to mountains and forests, the Adirondack Park is full of water, containing an estimated 2800 lakes, 3000 miles of brooks and streams, and more than 1200 miles of river. Most significantly, the Adirondack Park is a human-occupied reserve encompassing portions of twelve counties and nearly one hundred townships which over 135 000 year-round residents call home. Just under half of the park's six million acres are owned by the State of New York and protected from development by the state constitution. The remainder of the park's acreage lies in private hands, yet this too is protected by state law, as described below. The park's state and private lands coexist side by side in a sort of patchwork quilt, with various municipalities containing different ratios of each.

The State of New York draws upon a weapon frequently wielded by city governments in the production of urban space in its management of private property in the Adirondack Park: zoning law. The state's Private Land Use and Development Plan, overseen by the Adirondack Park Agency (APA), divides all private property inside the Blue Line into six zones categorized by permissible building density, as indicated by table 1. In addition to density guidelines, the Plan also outlines acceptable primary and secondary uses for each particular zone. The hamlet designation is typically assigned to the small villages scattered across the Adirondacks, which had already undergone significant development when the plan was put into practice in the early 1970s. Because there are no density restrictions within the hamlet zone, the plan had the ultimate effect of channeling new construction into those areas where the bulk of the region's development had already taken place, and away from those swaths of open space lying between the more densely settled areas of the park. In order to enforce this system, the APA instituted a permit system through which many residential construction projects located in any zone save hamlet must pass in order to gain state approval.

As a result of this legislation, more than three million acres of private property in the park are categorized by the state into six zones. Of the total park acreage, including state land, the hamlet zone comprises 0.93%, moderate intensity 1.77%, low intensity 4.69%, rural use 17.63%, resource management 26.98%, and industrial 26.98%. Only the first four categories are intended for residential development; resource management is

Table 1. The six zones into which the Adirondack Park Agency divides all private property inside the Blue Line (source: Adirondack Park Agency).

Classification	Density guidelines
Hamlet	none
Moderate intensity	500 principal buildings per square mile
Low intensity	200 principal buildins per square mile
Rural use	75 principal buildings per square mile
Resource management	15 principal buildings per square mile
Industrial use	none

reserved for forestry-related activities, and industrial use means just that. As a result, at present, roughly 25% of the entire Adirondack Park is available for residential development, with less than 1% of it available for unrestricted development.

Although the use of the term 'rural gentrification' is not yet as widespread in the United States as in Britain, in the past several decades scattered references to gentrification have begun to appear in the literature on rural housing produced by scholars, nongovernmental organizations, and governmental agencies in the USA. Anthropologist Janet Fitchen, in an article on homelessness in upstate New York, notes that "the stock of low-cost rental housing has been diminished by development, rural gentrification, and inadequate public investment" (1991, page 177). The Housing Assistance Council, a nonprofit rural development corporation, states that rural homelessness can be related to "gentrification, whereby people from neighboring urban areas relocate to obtain cheaper housing or vacationers build second homes, both of which result in rising housing costs for local residents" (1991, page iv). A state-sponsored study of the Adirondack Park conducted in the late 1980s remarks that "Many older buildings in the Park have been purchased, gentrified and resold at high prices, making affordable housing some Park communities hard to find" (New York State Commission on the Adirondack Park in the Twenty-First Century, 1990, page 31). And a recent report by the APA states that "The issue of 'gentrification' and the ability of long-time Adirondack residents to maintain a quality and affordable lifestyle is an aspect of community welfare worthy of monitoring" (APA, 2001, page 11). Gentrification in other words, is an increasingly recognized phenomenon in rural America, and particularly in the Adirondack region. Ethnographic research conducted between 1999 and 2001 in the Adirondack town of Webb, located in the central-west portion of the park, revealed a housing crisis bearing all the hallmarks of rural gentrification as described above. Webb therefore provides an ideal local test case for comparison with the urban setting.

Webb is part of a region known as the 'Fulton Chain of Lakes', a series of eight lakes stretching end to end from the southwest to the northeast. The vast majority of the town consists of undeveloped forest land, largely because of the political boundaries which divide it. Any given township within the Blue Line is comprised of some ratio of state-to-private land; in Webb the proportion is roughly seventy to thirty. Some 22% of the town is designated as resource management under the auspices of the APA and lies in the hands of a few large landowners—primarily timber companies and sportsman's clubs. Although this 22% is privately owned, it is not designated for residential construction and lies largely undeveloped. Altogether then, only 6% of all the land inside Webb is available for residential development. Of this, less than 0.5% is designated as hamlet and therefore available for unrestricted development (see table 2).

This geopolitical arrangement has profound implications for capital investment. In terms of absolute space, Webb is large—in fact, at 466 square miles, it is the largest township in New York State. But, because of state zoning laws, only 2 square miles are available for the unrestricted capital investment in the built environment. Another 30 square miles are available for limited development under the designations of moderate intensity, low intensity, and rural use. Within the town, fixed capital tends to be

Table 2. Residential private property in the town of Webb (source: Adirondack Park Agency).

Category	Percentage of total	Square miles
Hamlet	0.45	2
Moderate intensity	1.51	7
Low intensity	1.21	5.6
Rural	3.5	16

clustered in two primary hamlets—Old Forge, which lies at the far southwest corner of the Chain, and Eagle Bay, which lies at the northeast corner of Fourth Lake. Local commercial settlements of shops, restaurants, and hotels also tend to be clustered in these more densely populated hamlet areas. The rest of the town's housing stock lies along the shores of the Chain, with a small outlying settlement to the north around Big Moose Lake. Both the topography of the town (particularly its abundance and arrangement of open water) and its geopolitical configuration have contributed to the problem of rural gentrification.

Gentrification in the Fulton Chain manifests in terms both of residential sales prices and of residential rent levels. Gentrified Adirondack towns are characterized by a dual rent market. On the one hand, rental units may be seasonal, which generally means they are rented for short periods of time by the transient population of tourists who pass through the Adirondacks occasionally but do not make their year-round homes there. On the other hand, rental units may be permanent, meaning that they are rented on a monthly basis by locals who live and work year round in the Park. As a general rule, seasonal units garner far higher rents than permanent ones; they are typically rented by the week or season for anywhere from five to ten times the going rate for a permanent dwelling. With miles of wilderness, including an abundance of open water, Webb has attracted a great deal of capital investment in seasonal homes. Year-round, affordable rental housing has become increasingly scarce as less and less capital has been invested in permanent rental units for the local working class. At the same time, the produced scarcity of private property engendered by state landownership has sent residential real-estate prices (particularly on lakefronts) well beyond the capacity of most local wage earners.

In recent years, the problem of gentrification has become so pronounced that Webb cited affordable housing as one of its most urgent concerns in a recent "Master Plan" report:

> "Housing, particularly for the local workforce, is a critical issue in the Town of Webb ...". New housing construction and remodeling remains strong, yet this relates primarily to the construction of recreation and seasonal homes at relatively high prices. Local realtors report that in Webb recent average values for waterfront homes are $200,000 or greater, while 'off water' homes recently averaged around $85,000. Compare these values to those reported as average sales prices by the Herkimer County Chamber of Commerce for other communities, ranging from a low of $46,375 in Herkimer to a high of $82,610 in Frankfort. Similarly, a recent search of housing listings from a four-town area, including Forestport, Remsen and the Booneville area just west of Webb, showed only 6 lists for homes below $80,000 ... . Homes are being built, yet consistently, year round residents, employees and employers cite a lack of available moderate or affordable homes as a growing problem in Webb ..... Any genuinely affordable housing is rare and briefly on the market. Even the Town's one mobile home park has seen increased occupancy by winter recreation enthusiasts. Also, property that appears affordable is often only suitable for warm weather occupancy, given the predominance of seasonal residences in many neighborhoods of Webb ... . There is very little, if any, affordable housing for the current local work force, and there is expected to be an increasing need for such housing as the demand for year-round local work force grows" (Master Plan Advisory Committee, 2002, pages 21 – 22, 46).

As the above statement suggests, housing and labor markets are intricately connected in several regards. Local wage levels act as a barrier to homeownership for the local working class, and those levels have not kept pace with the rising real-estate prices described above. At the same time, the region's booming second-home construction industry, fed by the gentrification process itself, ensures that workers in this sector are in high demand, yet with little affordable year-round housing to be had, capital too feels the strain of gentrification as businesses must frequently offer company housing to lure labor to the area (or to entice native workers to stay). Gentrification also manifests in the rental market. In the nearby hamlet of Raquette Lake, some 10 miles northeast of Webb and the eastern terminus of the Fulton Chain, there have been no year-round, affordable rental units on the market since at least the late 1990s. Workers who have lost their lousing, or who have recently moved to the area with no prearranged housing agreements (with their employers, for example, or with kin already living there), have been forced to double (or triple) up with other local workers in order to avoid long commutes from other hamlets.

The rural gentrification process described above shares some fundamental commonalities with urban gentrification. Both are driven by particular types of capital investment in the residential real-estate market, and both result in displacement for lower income tenants. Yet there are some significant differences between the way in which capital investment in gentrified housing occurs in this region and the way it typically occurs elsewhere, both in the urban context and in other rural spaces. Below, I discuss these discrepancies through the window of the rent gap. For the sake of clarity, I will henceforth refer to the housing crisis that characterizes the Fulton Chain as *wilderness gentrification* in order to set it apart from both urban gentrification and the rural gentrification described in the UK literature.

Gentrification and the rent gap: the local scale

The rent gap, in technical terms, is the difference between the *actual* ground rent an owner currently makes on a rental property and the *potential* ground rent that could be made if the property were put to what realtors call its "highest and best use"—in other words, the use which will garner the highest return (N Smith, 1979a; 1996). The rent gap in this sense constitutes a theoretical condition but, in real-world terms, it might be described as the moment in the gentrification process when the economic futility of continued investment in a neighborhood whose tenants cannot afford a level of rent exceeding the cost of upkeep becomes abundantly clear to landlords. Physical decline due to the removal of capital from the built environment tends to occur on a neighborhood-wide scale, for as a single building deteriorates, the potential sale price of neighboring buildings also decreases, giving nearby landlords, who are likely facing the same conditions, further incentive to disinvest. During the course of this decline, the gap between actual and potential ground rent increases to the point where residential real-estate prices bottom out, and the built environment of an entire neighborhood deteriorates until individual properties can be bought for a song. This is the moment at which gentrification becomes a distinct possibility. If speculators begin to purchase such extremely low-cost properties in anticipation of increasing market values down the road, effectively setting off a new wave of neighborhood-wide investment, then the gentrification process has been triggered. Developers base this investment decision on the gamble that the current low-income tenants can be replaced by higher paying renters, whose rents will more than offset the price of purchase and improvements. Because older buildings tend to require more investment as time wears on, particularly to upgrade plumbing, heating, roofing, and electrical systems, whereas newer houses generally require lesser investments because of technological improvements in construction materials and methods, gentrification tends to occur in older neighborhoods first, which helps to explain its geographical location in the inner city.[2]

[2] For examples of how the rent gap has been operationalized empirically, see Badcock (1989) and Clark (1987).

So what difference is there between this pattern of investment in the urban gentrification cycle and that of the wilderness? The disparity springs from the mechanism which draws capital toward one particular location as opposed to another in each of these landscapes. According to the rent-gap theory, that mechanism is a pronounced disinvestment in inner-city neighborhoods, indicating an undercapitalization of ground rent, which acts as the 'magnet' for reinvestment. In essence, disinvestment creates a vacuum by acting as a sort of gravity well, pulling capital toward landscapes that are 'underused' in rent-generating terms. It is a different story in the wilderness, largely because of the kind of rent that is being capitalized. What gets produced in the process of urban gentrification is *residential space*. What gets produced in the process of wilderness gentrification is *recreational nature*. The production of gentrified housing in the Adirondacks has little to do with the construction of permanent residential abodes; indeed, the vast majority of gentrified housing lies empty for the majority of the year because it is only occupied on a temporary and sporadic basis by tourists—as evidenced by the fact that in the year 2000, 2818 of Webb's 3833 housing units (a full 74%) were classified by the US Census under the 'seasonal, recreational, or occasional use' category (US Census Bureau, 2000). A different type of rent is being maximised in the Adirondack setting. Proximity to schools, central business districts (CBDs), and workplaces is for all intents and purposes irrelevant in wilderness-investment decisions, whereas proximity to wilderness areas, and particularly lakefronts, is paramount. Without the production of nature upon which ground rent in the Adirondacks is predicated, there is no reason for the occupant of gentrified housing to be in the area at all, and therefore no purpose for investment on the part of the developer. It is not so much that there is an *absence* of a gap between actual and potential ground rent in the wilderness setting, but that the *geographical expression* of that gap differs because disinvestment in a particular cluster of older, centrally located dwellings is not the defining factor of undercapitalization to begin with. Undercapitalized land in the wilderness might instead be defined as undeveloped shorefront property, or, alternatively, developed shorefront property that is rented year round to the local workforce for low house rents rather than seasonally to tourist consumers for higher house rents.

Urban and wilderness landlords are compelled to court different kinds of renters. The potential consumers of gentrified housing in the city typically hail from the middle or managerial classes of the urban economy whose lives are bound up with the 'service' market produced by the shift to post-Fordist capital accumulation (Harvey, 1990). They are, above all, *permanent* residents who make homes of gentrified buildings. The potential consumers of gentrified housing in the Adirondacks are visitors. Wilderness landlords of gentrified housing do not rent permanent homes, but occasional retreats. Under such conditions, it is not sufficient for landlords to offer simple living space as the commodity for sale, for the local pool of available renters cannot *consistently* afford rents which offset the price of either new construction or costly renovations, nor are there enough of them to justify large-scale investments in structures such as apartment buildings. In order to profit from gentrified housing, wilderness landlords must offer a commodity which attracts outsiders, and in the Adirondacks, that commodity is nature—wilderness, lakes, hiking trails, snowmobile trails, charismatic megafauna, open space, and the like. Importantly, the tenants of gentrified wilderness rental housing need not *necessarily* have any greater economic means at their disposal than the local population. They may spend higher amounts on wilderness accommodation than they would on permanent residential housing, but only for a very brief period of time—for some, perhaps a single trip per year. Thus, although consumption is of course an important aspect of wilderness gentrification, the wage differential between housing consumers in the rental market is insufficient to explain completely the process in and of itself, because wilderness landlords may profit from renting gentrified housing to consumers of equally modest means—just more of them, with quicker turnover. Therefore, if the purpose is to seek some explanatory 'motor force' of gentrification in the wilderness, then rent profits are the most likely culprit.

I believe the motive for investing in Adirondack properties because of their proximity to wilderness amenities often outweighs the importance of disinvestment in the decision to gentrify. Geographical patterns of investment are therefore likely to differ in the wilderness. If gentrification in the urban setting has historically tended to commence in the inner city and proceed outward, following patterns of disinvestment in the built environment, there is no reason to expect the same in the countryside. Wilderness landlords seeking to capitalize ground rent do not necessarily have a lot of incentive to invest in lots in the middle of an Adirondack hamlet, no matter how devalued, unless the hamlet contains a developable body of water. The hamlets of the Fulton Chain region vary in this regard. In Webb the gentrified housing stock can be found along those areas of lakefront, inside or outside the hamlets of Eagle Bay and Old Forge themselves, which have not been designated by the State of New York as untouchable open space. The geographical expression of Adirondack gentrification therefore differs from that of its typical urban counterpart.

If anything, gentrified housing might be expected to occupy landscapes *away* from the hamlets themselves, with the exception of developed shoreline within their midst. One possible conceptual solution might be simply to shift the geographical scale of gentrification from 'distance from inner city' to 'proximity to water', with developable lakefront as the geographical center of gravity for investment. But the situation is more complicated than that, because Adirondack landlords capitalize not only on nature itself, but on *access to nature*, when weighing investment decisions. Lakes open to motorized navigation might prove more profitable than those that do not. Lakes which do not freeze in the winter, and therefore cannot be crossed by snowmobile, might prove less profitable than those that do. Lakefront properties which are surrounded on three sides by state land, and are therefore inaccessible by road (and this condition describes much of Raquette Lake on the far western end of the Fulton Chain), might fall somewhere in between. The geography of wilderness ground rent cannot be reduced to a simple 'proximity to water' formula any more than it can be reduced to 'proximity to CBD'. It is not, in the end, the *reasons* for investment that set Adirondack gentrification apart from urban gentrification, but the geographical expression of that investment, which simply does not proceed in the same linear fashion outward from some central stock of devalorized housing near the center of town.

It is important to note that Smith himself has conceded that the pattern of urban gentrification described above, whose target comprises older inner-city housing, is likely to be merely one wave in the historical development of a gentrification process which will continue to seek out similarly profitable conditions in urban areas farther dispersed from the CBD:

> "Empirically, gentrification has indeed tended to hug the city center, at least in the early stages, but ... as these first areas are recycled, other areas offering lower but still substantial returns—or at least presenting fewer obstacles to reinvestment—would be sought out by developers" (N Smith 1996, page 69).

In his latest work on urban gentrification, Smith [following the model established by Hackworth (2000)] frames the central-city investment described above as the second of three phases (*sporadic* in the 1950s, *anchoring* in the 1970s and 1980s, and *generalized* in the 1990s) in the historical development of gentrification (N Smith, 2002, page 440).

He cites the outward diffusion of gentrification as a fundamental characteristic of the third stage, in which gentrification becomes generalized as a ubiquitous urban strategy no longer restricted to North America, Western Europe, and Oceana, nor to the housing stock which flanks the CBD:

> "as gentrification near the center results in higher land and housing prices ... districts further out become caught up in the momentum of gentrification .... The more uneven the initial outward growth of capital investment and the more uneven the disinvestment in these newer landscapes" (2002, page 442).

If the key factor in devalorization is the aging of the urban built environment, then as the housing stock in *outer* neighborhoods grows older, requiring larger and larger outlays of capital to maintain, those neighborhoods will present further opportunities for the cycle of disinvestment and reinvestment that is constitutive of the rent gap, thus providing the potential to displace the rent gap further outward. The generalization of gentrification might, therefore, bring the spatial expression of urban gentrification closer to the sort of scattershot arrangement of the gentrified housing stock exemplified by the Adirondack case.[3]

Beyond the local: gentrification and uneven development

Beyond the issue of the extent to which devalorization versus any other factor 'pulls' investment toward a particular location, there is a more fundamental question about the existence and location of urban-style disinvestment in the countryside to begin with. There is little evidence to suggest that any part of the Webb housing stock underwent a wave of disinvestment similar to that found in the inner cities of core nation-states after World War 2. On the contrary, the available real property data for the region[4] indicate a fairly brisk pattern of investment in the postwar period which merely intensified in the 1980s. Ethnographic interviews conducted between 1999 and 2001 in the Fulton Chain region point to the same conclusion: people who lived on the Chain from the 1950s through the present do not report a period of housing decline in which the built environment was falling into disrepair. Nor do county or town statistics demonstrate any spate of wholescale property abandonment (resulting in reclamation from tax arrears) on the part of owners, which is often an indicator of disinvestment in the urban setting.

In order to understand why localized disinvestment may not have occurred in this region, consider the flip side of Smith's local arguments about the rent gap: uneven development at a broader scale. Urban disinvestment, he argues, is intricately connected to the process of suburbanization, which Smith sees less as a decentralization of capital as an agglomeration on a wider scale as the urban sphere itself expands. The "explosive expansion of urban space" in the 19th and early 20th centuries, as well as the subsequent postwar urban decline and capital flight toward the low-rent margins, are an expression of capitalism's tendency toward equalization and differentiation (N Smith, 1996, page 84). The relationship between the city and its own periphery, therefore, is crucial in understanding the process of gentrification:

> "The investment of capital in the central and inner city, then, caused a physical and economic barrier to further investment in that space. The movement of capital into

[3] The geographical expression of gentrification in the British countryside, as described by the literature reviewed above, is unclear. Although Phillips (1993) documents a significant return on disinvested housing, he does not attempt to *map* this rent gap. Similarly, although temporary rental housing may be present in gentrified areas of rural Britain, there is little discussion of such a phenomenon in the available literature.

[4] Including real property transfer reports for 1991 – 2001 and building permit records for 1975 – 99.

> suburban development led to a systematic devalorization of inner- and central-city capital, and this in turn, with the development of the rent gap, led to the creation of new investment opportunities in the inner city precisely because an effective barrier to new investment had operated there" (pages 85–86).

This movement of capital into and out of the built environment in pursuit of profitable investment constitutes the essence of uneven development, which is not merely a *condition*—a snapshot of the capitalist landscape at any given time—but a perpetually-in-motion *process*. This type of capital switching in pursuit of profit occurs not only from one geographical setting to another, but from one sector of the economy to another. Smith argues that such cycles are a product of the boom-and-bust, crisis-prone character of the capitalist mode of production, with heavy investment in the built environment (particularly on the part of financial capital) tending to occur simultaneously with falling rates of profit in the industrial sector, especially in the postwar period, and particularly between 1969 and 1973 and in the late 1980s (page 86). The earlier *locational* capital switch, resulting in the devalorization of the inner city and the development of the suburbs in the postwar period, functioned to steer the capital freed up by the later *sectoral* switch toward the geographical locality of the central urban landscape. Gentrification, in this view, is no mere statistical blip on the radar of capitalism, but a structural component of uneven development at the regional, national, and even global scale. It speaks to the particular role of the metropolis in the location, dislocation, and relocation of capital operating on multiple scales.

The logical question which follows for rural gentrification, including that of the wilderness, is whether some proxy for devalorization through capital flight to the low-rent suburbs might be proposed. The relevance of 'postproductivist' theories of the countryside for the case of Adirondack gentrification comes into play at this point. The ramifications of shifting regimes of rural capital accumulation have been explored at length by scholars of British rural studies, including Goodman and Redclift (1991), Kneale et al (1992), Lowe et al (1993), Marsden et al (1993), Thrift (1989), and others. Martin Phillips discusses this shift in terms of rural gentrification:

> "At a more abstract level, the notion of a 'post-productivist countryside' ... can be interpreted in terms of the shifting valuation of rural land and resources. In particular it can be seen to relate to the de-valorisation of land and building with respect to agricultural capital and its uneven revalorisation with respect to other capital networks. Gentrification can be seen as one form of the revalorisation of resources and spaces which have become seen as unproductive or marginal to agrarian capital, and indeed a variety of other rural capitals" (M Phillips, 2000, pages 5–6; see also 2004, page 14).

Formerly productive agrarian land, in other words, might be understood as 'under-capitalized' in rent-gap terms, and subsequently 'revalorized' through residential real estate development, such as barn conversions.

Can the Adirondack Park be described as a postproductive landscape? What of the Fulton Chain? In a very general sense, the answer to both questions is a qualified 'yes'. Although the primary and secondary sectors of the Adirondack economy are not yet wholly extinct, they have been largely supplanted by tertiary and quaternary activities revolving around the production of nature for tourist consumption as well as a hodgepodge of public service functions. *The Adirondack Atlas* describes the North Country economy in terms of a new regime of accumulation that has all but replaced the old:

> "the old economy of mines, mills, woods-work, and farming, while neither extinct nor unimportant, has to a great extent been replaced by a new economy of hospitality,

professional work, and service. The new economy is still resource-dependent and, to the extent that it requires a supply of developable land, still consumes and depletes resources. But it is no longer, and probably never will be again, primarily based on extraction and manufacturing" (Jenkins and Keal, 2004, page 169).

Farming, in particular, has declined dramatically since the 1960s as a source of income, followed closely by mining and manufacturing (page 126). When employment is broken down by industry, government (on multiple scales) is the largest single employer in the park, providing some 12 000 jobs (out of a workforce of approximately 92 860) while "Agriculture, mining, and forestry, which fifty years ago were some of the largest Adirondack employers, now provide only 700 jobs, less than 2% of the jobs in the Park" (pages 121 – 122). Predictably, the trade and service industries make up the bulk of the rest (providing some 7000 and 11 000 jobs, respectively), with manufacturing (around 3000 jobs) a distant fourth and construction, real estate, and finance combined providing another 3400 jobs (page 122).

Census statistics for the Fulton Chain region reveal a similar though not identical picture (US Census Bureau, 2000). The government on various scales employs a full quarter of Fulton Chain workers. Broken down by industry, the primary and secondary sectors, if taken to include agriculture, forestry, fishing, hunting, mining, and manufacturing, together employ only 6% of Fulton Chain workers. Significantly, construction employs 11% of the working population of the Chain (which is a far larger percentage than that of the park as a whole), as does retail trade. The two largest categories by industry are the arts, entertainment, recreation, accommodation, and food services industry, employing 26%, and the education, health and social services industry, employing 18%. In terms of occupations, incomes, and employers, most workers in the Fulton Chain are in the same boat as their compatriots in the rest of the park: few Adirondack locals *make* things, or extract the resources from the surrounding environment that will be *used* to make things later on, with the significant exception of construction, which employs around 2% of the park-wide working population but 11% of workers on the Chain. Most workers at either scale make a living in the messy arena of the 'service' sector writ large, whether private or public. From the perspective of employment, therefore, both the Adirondack Park and the Fulton Chain can accurately be described as post productive.

Employment, however, is only one window through which to view the concept of a postproductive landscape, and can only tell us so much about the implications of particular accumulation regimes for gentrification. One significant silence in these data is land use. A multinational corporation such as International Paper, for example, might lock up thousands of acres of land while employing fewer people to log them than were required a century ago, or none at all in order to allow for regrowth. The logging industry has become far less labor intensive with the advent of technologies from the chainsaw to the motorized skidder, which have rendered the concentration of manpower manifested by the 19th-century lumber camps essentially redundant. Mechanization, in other words, has meant that dozens of men are no longer required to log hundreds of acres. In addition, the advent of scientific forestry management, as well as state laws enforcing particular kinds of lumbering practices, have affected the way in which this particular type of resource extraction is carried out, as have an assortment of shifts in the markets for various types of wood and wood products. Changes in both logging practices and lumber markets can in turn have a profound effect upon decisions to hold, sell, log, lease, or let lie vast stands of forest—effects which are not necessarily reflected in employment statistics. Other industries, such as agriculture, fishing, or mining, might reveal similarly unique trajectories. It is important, therefore, to distinguish between a postproductive *economy* and a postproductive *landscape*, the former referring to the manifestation of accumulation regimes in economic terms (from wages to profits to employees to capital investment), the latter referring to the manifestation of accumulation regimes in geographical terms (as the amount of land being used for that particular purpose as opposed to others). Although a certain amount of overlap is to be expected, the concepts are nonidentical, and pertain differently to the theorization of rural gentrification.

Postproductivist theory might be described as relevant to Adirondack gentrification only in the event that a shift in accumulation regimes resulted not merely in a change in employment, but a change in land use. Although a wave of large-scale timber tracts in the late 1980s sparked widespread fears of rampant subdivision and residential development in the Adirondack Park, such fears proved unfounded. Adirondack historian Barbara McMartin, who has tracked development on private Adirondack land on a park-wide scale, found that the vast bulk of these timber tracts did not fall into the hands of residential developers in the traditional sense, but became the target of a variety of forest-management schemes ranging from outright state acquisition to easement agreements to TIMOs (timber investment management organizations, which treat timber tracts as investment funds for groups) to nonprofit preservation to sporting-club common-use purchases (McMartin, 2004, pages 199 – 231). The outcome for any transition to landscape postproductivism varied: some tracts continued to be logged by their new owners, and therefore remained in the accumulation regime of resource extraction, whereas others became prime tracts for recreational hunting, fishing, hiking, and boating, and therefore left the primary sector, some of them for good. But the widely feared spectre of widespread conversion of timberlands to residential enclaves has not, at this point in time, materialized. Studies conducted by both the State of New York (New York State Commission on the Adirondack Park in the Twenty-First Century 1990, pages 45 – 47) and nonprofit environmental groups (Residents' Committee to Protect the Adirondacks, 2001, pages 13 – 15) confirm the same trend: large tracts of nonstate forest lands inside the Blue Line continue to be held intact by private owners, particularly by logging firms, precluding their revalorization through subdivision and residential development.

This outcome is interesting for several reasons. According to Smith, the accrual of capital investment in the built environment can act as a barrier to further capital investment, driving capital toward the shallow topography of low-rent districts, variously conceived. The consolidation of vast swaths of timber tracts in the hands of the forest industry might logically be conceived as a similar sort of barrier which acts to deflect capital investment. In theory, the freeing up of such tracts might have signaled a disintegration of that barrier, but for one problem: regardless of how the tracts came to be utilized in terms of value extraction, they remained, in effect, *consolidated*—thereby precluding the rush of residential development capital into the ostensible void. In effect, this turn of events points to a rather glaring weakness in the applicability of postproductivist theory for the Adirondack case: the particular *use* by which a landscape is exploited for purposes of capital accumulation (or, indeed, for any other purpose) is far less significant than the *patterns of ownership* which characterize it. As long as large-scale tracts of Adirondack wilderness remain in the hands of a few landowners, the fragmentation of landscape required for profitable residential development cannot occur.

The continuing phenomenon of large-scale private landownership is relevant to gentrification for another reason. State land acquisition for the Forest Preserve has exacerbated the problem of gentrification, particularly in towns such as Webb, where the state keeps a considerable portion of land out of the realms of both circulation and production, by simultaneously creating a produced scarcity of private property and preserving those scenic vistas which developers find so lucrative for rent extraction on nearby private tracts. In broad social terms, the prevention of investment has a pronounced effect upon surrounding properties, for it serves to protect the potential ground rent that adjacent landowners stand to gain by virtue of the way in which nature has been produced in that particular area. For researchers familiar with recent patterns of rural development this is not news. At least one study (S Phillips, 1999) has established a correlation between higher residential real-estate prices and proximity to protected wilderness in Vermont; other, (Rasker and Glick, 1994) have documented similar patterns near Yellowstone National Park. In the Adirondack Park itself, a study by economists Alexander Roth and Thomas Carr found that "the state's Forest Preserve land creates a positive externality to private land located within one mile which translates into an increase in land value by a magnitude of \$2088 per acre .... Parcels of land located within one mile of state land increase in value by 34 percent ..." (Roth and Carr, 1995, pages 1, 20–21). But in essence, any large-scale landowner (including timber companies) which maintains those wilderness amenities which can be capitalized by adjacent landowners in the form of ground rent can perform the same function, particularly as those inside the Blue Line have little choice but to obey the land-management guidelines set up by the state for the very purpose of preserving the wilderness character of the park.

Despite the absence of localized disinvestment in the Webb housing stock, or the switching of large swaths of land from industrial to residential use in a postproductive sense, the Adirondack region has nonetheless offered an investment opportunity via devalorization on a broader scale. For a developer who typically deals with high-priced real-estate transactions in places like New York City or the Hamptons, the bargain-basement property prices typically found across the Adirondack Park must make the entire place seem disinvested and, indeed, New Jersey fast-food tycoon Roger Jakubowski called Adirondack real estate "the last nickel bargain in America" after snagging the majestic Marjorie Marriweather Post Great Camp for under a million dollars in the mid-1980s (Kunstler, 1989). The large-scale geography of capital investment counts. For buyers such as Jakubowski, or real-estate magnate Henry Lassiter, who purchased 96 000 acres of pristine Adirondack woodland for a mere \$17 million in 1988, the relatively low cost of Adirondack land makes disinvestment at the neighborhood scale a moot point. For large-scale development capital, the highly localized devalorization so necessary to gentrification in the urban sphere is irrelevant in a landscape which has long embodied quite low amounts of capital investment to begin with.

There are some indications that developers have indeed begun to perceive rural American landscapes as profitable investment opportunities. Although it is true that metropolitan populations continue to grow at a faster rate than nonmetropolitan ones, the last twenty years witnessed the beginnings of a demographic recovery in rural America, with nonmetropolitan areas growing by 5.3 million (or 10.3%) between 1990 and 2000; this compared with the 1980s, which also saw rural growth but at a smaller rate (2.7%) and with a smaller overall net gain (1.3 million) (USDA, 2004). And whereas one in four rural American counties declined in population during the 1990s, some have remained stable and still others have seen their populations swell USDA, 2004).

What can account for such uneven development in rural America? The US Department of Agriculture (USDA) contends that "The growth of recreation activity and second homes played a big role, along with the rejection of large-scale urban life, which for many resulted in 'urban flight'" (USDA, 2004). For certain geographical areas, this phenomenon has become so pronounced that the federal government has recently designated such places Nonmetro Recreation Counties (NRCs), where "Increased recreational activity, the appeal of second homes, and the influx of former urbanites into rural areas all create a demand for housing and for an expanded business, service and governmental infrastructure to support it" (Johnson and Beale, 2002, page 12). Importantly, USDA researchers have concluded that population increase in such areas is a product of in-migration rather than natural growth. Some 329 NRCs have been identified to date, constituting 14.6% of total nonmetropolitan counties in the United States and containing 15.6% of the nonmetropolitan population (pages 12–13). Significantly, Hamilton and Essex—the two Adirondack counties which lie entirely inside the Blue Line—number among them. Webb (though not the entire county, which is split by the park border) certainly falls within this recreational category.

There is considerable evidence to suggest that in the late 1960s and early 1970s, before the institution of the APA and the commencement of private land management by the state, outside large-scale developers recognized the undercapitalization of ground rent on undeveloped private property in the park as a lucrative opportunity for capital investment. In Webb, for instance, a development company called Great Northern Capital launched a plan to buy some 10 000 forested acres near Old Forge in the early 1970s, develop them into 5000 luxury estates, dam a branch of the Moose River, and build several golf courses and marinas (Terrie, 1997, page 167). This scheme was only one of a host of large-scale development plans which circulated across the Adirondack region during this period (Browning 2002, page 49; Graham, 1978, pages 248–249; McMartin, 2002, pages 32–34; 2004, pages 198–199; Terrie, 1997, pages 167–170) on the heels of a similar development boom in Vermont across the Champlain Valley. Such large-scale development plans, however, were stymied by the advent of the formidable permit process instituted in the early 1970s by the APA, and subsequent lawsuits brought by large-scale developers against the state which challenged this process were uniformly rejected (McMartin, 2004, pages 199–200), effectively affirming the power of the state to determine the scale of development on private Adirondack property.

The State of New York, through its land-management practices on private property in the Adirondacks, has therefore helped to engineer a unique kind of disinvestment by allowing residential development to go forth at a scale which precludes developers from devouring the very resource that allows for maximum rent capitalization in the first place: wilderness. Although the state certainly did not *prevent* development from occurring with the institution of the APA Act, it did act to hold down the *scale* of development, effectively discouraging corporations which profit precisely from economics of scale from bothering to pursue Adirondack ventures. The investment activities of lesser capitalists (including local owner-occupants who subdivided their land for seasonal rental purposes), operating in a market whose profits derive from the small-scale development of individual rental properties, were curtailed to a lesser extent by state regulation, because they pursued projects which are acceptable within the density-limit rules set by the APA. Corporations which profit from the production of hundreds or thousands of rental units at a time were essentially precluded from triggering the sort of large-scale development which might have threatened rent profits through overdevelopment. I would propose that, if a limited degree of Adirondack development represented the capitalization of an undercapitalized resource, unbridled wilderness development could ostensibly have led to further undercapitalization at the point where sprawl itself began to drive down property prices. This singular form of state-engineered disinvestment through density restriction in fact helped to contribute, however unwittingly, to the problem of gentrification in the Fulton Chain.

Conclusion

The ideas presented here are based upon the fundamental assumption that capitalism operates the same regardless of what sort of landscape it is working upon. Profit-driven competition compels the continual process of capital accumulation in both rural and urban industries, including real estate. Yet I would add an important caveat to this assumption: capital accumulation may be forced to conform to peculiar conditions in certain settings if it is to take place at all; thus, even though the underlying mechanism remains constant, the process itself may take unique historical trajectories in different geopolitical situations, resulting in an uneven geographical expression of a similar underlying logic. In this case, the 'peculiar conditions' are a direct result of the production of Adirondack nature by the State of New York. This is a very specific peculiarity: rural spaces are not merely different from cities, they are different from each other. Gentrification manifests differently in the Adirondacks than in many typical urban settings not simply because the location is *rural*, but because it is a *park*, with a unique set of legislative restrictions on capital flow into the built environment.

If the city cannot teach us precisely what goes on in the countryside, it can, at the very least, inspire us to ask particular questions of it, and ultimately to inquire how far below the surface their conspicuous differences truly run. This is not to suggest that there is no difference between the city and the country. Cities are, of course, different from places like the Adirondacks, with a multiplicity of quantitative densities which add up to qualitative singularities. In the end, it is not the geophysical *result* of capital accumulation which unites the urban and the rural—and the gentrification of both—but the underlying logic of the process itself. The opening up of both routes—the one which pulls political ecology into the city and the one which pulls urban social theory into the hinterlands—leads us in turn to call into question the old modernist shibboleths which reify the purported solidity of the boundaries between the landscapes themselves, and to postulate a more dynamic and dialectical synthesis based upon something that both hold in common: the levying of rent under the capitalist mode of production.

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