The Gentrification Towards Afro-American Urban Cowboy Reflected in Ricky Staub's *Concrete Cowboy* (2020) Movie

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Abstract

This study aims to analyze the gentrification that eliminates the urban cowboy community reflected in Ricky Staub's Concrete Cowboy (2020) and the impacts of gentrification on the urban cowboy community reflected in Ricky Staub's Concrete Cowboy (2020). The study employs a descriptive-qualitative approach to scrutinize Ricky Staub's Concrete Cowboy (2020) as its primary research objective. The research method's data analysis includes watching, reading, identifying, classifying, simplifying, and selecting. The research method involves displaying, explaining, and interpreting the data. The researcher analyzes the data using Gentrification Studies by Rowland Atkinson. The results of this research have shown that there is a process of elimination of the black urban cowboy community through gentrification with developers entering the Fletcher Street Stables area in Ricky Staub's Concrete Cowboy (2020). The impact of gentrification on urban cowboy communities can also be seen in Ricky Staub's Concrete Cowboy (2020), including four data on displacement and eviction, four data on community conflict and crime, four data on racial segregation, and one data on homelessness.

Keywords: *Gentrification, Urban, Black Cowboy, Concrete Cowboy*

Introduction

In social studies, gentrification is portrayed as a socioeconomic problem in urban areas, but as the level of gentrification increases in various regions, many academics in the urban sector argue that this problem is not only related to socioeconomics. Gentrification occurs when an area attracts wealthy individuals, leading to an increase in property prices that the original community cannot afford, due to the process of upgrading the area and creating regional dynamism. This is characterized by the presence of new immigrants and developers who invest in urban development.

Gentrification is a good opportunity to advance commodities in urban areas. However, this problem has become a major concern in empirical debates, where there is a gap between actual and potential value (Smith, 2013: 275). This means that gentrification has a significant impact on poor communities, which

indirectly causes the forced eviction of low-income residents from their previous neighborhoods and can lead to poverty. In addition, gentrification causes cultural shifts and confrontations between developers and native residents.

Gentrification is also related to racial differences, resulting from much segregation between blacks and whites. Like the case in the city of Philadelphia, this city has an approximately 44% black population, where segregation between blacks and whites in the city is very high (Hwang, 2020: 366). Consequently, gentrification in this city is more widespread in black neighborhoods than in white neighborhoods. The area that shows significant gentrification is Fletcher Street Stables, the neighborhood of the urban black cowboy community. This situation is reflected in the movie released in 2020 on the *Netflix* platform entitled *Concrete Cowboy* which is produced by Ricky Staub.

Literary Review

Sociology of Literature

The sociology of literature includes literary expressions that can take the shape of social issues such as politics and economics, as well as incorporating a large number of individuals in every social event. Literary sociology also investigates the link between the notions of culture and structure as well as how they interact with each other.

Wellek and Warren said that literature is a social institution as an expression of society, and it is considered that literature becomes a mirror of the social circumstances at the time (1956: 94). Furthermore, all literary works employ language as their medium. Literary language is used to express the entire life of society, to transmit, describe, and reflect on the social conditions that exist in society at a certain time and location. In other words, literature and society must be connected.

Moreover, literature occurs in the social context as part of the culture, particularly the environment, because every literary work mirrored in society contains every aspect of the individual, such as the racial system, the economic system, and the political system. All of this is referred to in the literature as

sociological phenomena that occur in our daily lives. Sociological literature should assist us in resolving social issues (Wellek and Warren, 1956: 105).

According to Swingewood, sociology is the study of social life which discusses a variety of social relations including religion, economics, politics, and ideology (1972: 11). Sociology has the potential to address all the challenges of existence in our planet. Moreover, the sociology of literature serves as a clear representation of several elements of social organization, familial dynamics, socioeconomic tensions, rates of marital dissolution, and population characteristics.

Gentrification

Gentrification as a process of changing the lower-class population into an aristocratic class in urban areas (Glass, 1964: 18). This includes the rehabilitation of less-than-adequate areas, the transformation of rentals into ownership, an increase in property prices, and the movement of working groups from the middle class just arrived.

According to Atkinson and Bridge "gentrification appears as a facet of the global forces acting on rapidly urbanizing cities" (2005: 8). Urban regions have experienced significant influx of people due to rural-to-urban migration driven by employment opportunities. Nevertheless, metropolitan regions have several constraints on land availability as a consequence of private ownership claims, leading to a significant surge in urban unemployment and homelessness. Simultaneously, the communications and financial services sectors have expanded in several urban areas, leading to the emergence of a more prominent professional managerial class. Residentially, this has strengthened and broadened the colonial traditions of segregating neighborhoods, since several privileged individuals dwell in gated communities.

Moreover, gentrification is a result of a significant disparity between rental prices. The rent gap refers to the difference between the prospective land rent and the actual land rent, which is determined by the capitalization of land users (Smith, 1979: 545). Investors would reduce the perceived risk of inner-city land when the disparity between current and potential values was significant. This was because there was a greater opportunity for profit by reinvesting in undervalued

land and closing the gap in rental income. Developers will purchase land at a low cost and thereafter sell the completed project at a somewhat higher price. Gentrification served as a means of narrowing the disparity in rental prices.

Impacts of Gentrification

Various studies have proven that the impacts of gentrification are more inclined to the negative side (Atkinson, 2004: 170). Evidence of the negative impacts of gentrification so far can be seen from various issues that have emerged widely in various regions, where many previous studies have found negative impacts in cases of gentrification which mainly impact residential areas. The following are some of the negative impacts that arise due to gentrification:

1. **Displacement**

    The lower-class people will immediately perceive that the culture and community they have established will slowly disappear (Brown, 2014: 8). Even if racial minority groups move voluntarily, they will find areas with the same or worse conditions (Hwang, 2020: 357). This can occur due to racial stratification in the place. As urban change increases, such as housing developments, and the shift of shops and services to new residents, older residents will feel dislocated despite physically remaining in the neighborhood, reflecting racial and ethnic change.

    Crowder and South found that black residents are much more likely than whites to move (2012: 349). This is due to the perspective that predominantly black neighborhoods are valued less than predominantly white neighborhoods (Charles, 2003: 202). However, gentrification is not entirely limited to black communities. Gentrification refers more to an area where residents are financially disadvantaged.

2. **Eviction**

    The other crucial aspect of gentrification is the movement of indigenous people with low social status to wealthier populations through eviction (Atkinson, 2004: 99). This is a common mechanism that causes displacement in gentrification. In share leases, landlords interested in improving the property to rent or sell for higher profits, usually have to offer apartments to institutional investors and developers.

The above conditions cause some people to be pushed out of areas that are being revitalized due to rising prices and they usually move to more affordable housing in various parts of the city. This replacement often occurs through voluntary movement from the surrounding environment by various people, while the new residents consist of those who can afford to live there.

3. **Homelessness**

Poverty and homelessness can be widespread, resulting from long-term residents leaving their neighborhoods due to an inability to pay rent. Gentrification literature specifically addresses the movement of people from one neighborhood to another (Atkinson, 2004: 113). This occurs due to an increase in land and house rents with the intention of lower-class tenants vacating their landholdings. As a result, the rate of involuntary displacement of the homeless will increases.

4. **Community Conflict and Crime**

Another social problem that occurs is the increasing number of beggars on the streets. This resulted in the area experiencing further gentrification. Crime rates in gentrified communities also increase. Taylor and Covington show that assaults and homicides increase in gentrifying areas (1988: 580). However, research in other cities also provides different contexts in which crime rates may vary more.

Gentrification has a statistically and economically substantial impact on the amount of gun violence in areas around recently gentrified blocks. Moreover, drug crimes also tend to increase following developments in neighborhoods affected by gentrification (Porreca, 2023: 237). Gentrification greatly contributes to this instability, as urban redevelopment encourages competition that creates crime through illegal activity.

5. **Racial Segregation**

When racial groups are separated by socioeconomic status, gentrification is related to reduced levels of segregation in inner cities for poor whites and poor Hispanics, but greater levels of segregation for poor black residents (Hwang et al., 2019: 25). Gentrification may be more widespread in black communities, or perhaps it is more likely to displace and re-center

impoverished black people. They also discovered that gentrification is linked to greater segregation of black renters and owners from whites in big cities, which may have a disproportionate impact on black people in inner cities.

Ultimately, while gentrification may integrate some inhabitants along socioeconomic lines, it also segregates black and rich white residents in central regions (Hwang, 2015: 12). These include well-known examples of gentrification, such as Wicker Park in Chicago, Williamsburg in Brooklyn, and the Lower East Side in Manhattan (Hwang et al., 2019: 17).

Afro-American Cowboy

The American cowboy has been depicted as the hero of the American West in dime store novels, Hollywood films, and tall tales (Mullins, 2024: 15). In the beginning, cowboys are cattle herders, then over time, the herdsmen competed to show themselves to be superior in conquering livestock. Nowadays, many people consider cowboying more as a hobby, but in ancient times cowboying was considered an occupation (Mullins, 2024: 20). The American cowboy is depicted in popular culture as a white man in a saddle who can conquer riding animals with his characteristic wearing of a cowboy hat, boat shoes, and saddle.

Cowboys are also known as a culture of showing masculinity, where cowboys will hold exhibitions to show their brave struggle as tamers of wild animals which of course involves violence against animals. Middle and upper-class city residents condemned the brutality of the cowboys. However, it is important to consider what the purpose of violence is for the cowboy himself, they argue that to be a real man, one must learn to control oneself well and channel that aggression into socially acceptable activities (Moore, 2014: 29).

Although the majority were American-born, they were not all white. Various ethnic groups appear to have been disregarded throughout Western history. Historians estimate one of the four cowboys was black, but African-American cowboys are not portrayed in popular narratives. Therefore, the African-American Cowboys show their existence with various performances broadcast through music shows or film productions.

Research Methodology

The research method which is used in this research is qualitative research. Based on Creswell in his books *Research Design* (2006), the qualitative method includes responding to questions in the procedure, collecting data in a specific context, doing comprehensive data analysis from a specific topic to a general topic, and the researcher interpreting the findings. The object in this research is movie with the title *Concrete Cowboy* (2020) directed by Ricky Staub published in 2020. The movie published sentences of subtitle. The types of data that is used are main data which is collected from the dialogue's movie, and supporting data which is collected from some sources, like books, internet, and journal that can support the research. The method of collecting data in this research is by doing observation. The procedures are watching the movie, identifying the data from the scripts and subtitle, classifying data and selecting the data. After the data are collected, the next step is analyzing data by displaying the data, explaining data, and interpreting data.

Finding and Discussion

The research analyzes the issue in this chapter. The issue is about the process of gentrification eliminate the urban black cowboy and the negative impacts of gentrification on urban black cowboy that found in the *Concrete cowboy* movie (2020).

1. The Gentrification of the Urban Black Cowboy Community in Concrete Cowboy (2020)

The urban black cowboy plays a prominent role in Ricky Staub's *Concrete Cowboy* (2020) movie. The movie prominently showcases the African American community within the neighborhood. Before gentrification, Philadelphia was home to an African-American cowboy community, with neighborhoods like the Fletcher Street stables known for their rich cowboy heritage and a strong sense of community.

As gentrification in Philadelphia continues to increase, the fate of Fletcher Street's current stable hangs in the balance. The horse pastures had been developed for affordable housing, so there was no place for horses. The

dilapidated stable could no longer accommodate the cowboys' horses, so they were forced to keep the horses at their residences.

Leroy : **"Developers are comin'.**
            Believe it."
Harp : *"Well, let them come. We'll see what the fuck happens."*
Leroy : *"See what-*
            Okay, that's where I'mma stop you. **See, what happens is you**
            don't own any of this shit. Y'all just rentin'.
            So, that brings me to the next question. What are we doin' about
            it?"
(*Concrete Cowboy*, 2020 00:40:31-00:40:41)

The conversation above shows when Leroy, a city guard, entered the urban cowboy community and declared, *"Developers are comin'. Believe it."* The dialogue implied that the developer was proposing to sell the area to the cowboy community. If the cowboys still refuse, then the developer has the right to threaten and immediately destroy the cowboy area without their consent. The local redevelopment authority purchased many of the existing old homes for resale, citing the new owner's rehabilitation efforts and deeming the area gentrified. However, this problem arises because several residents may be renting the land.

This is also shown in the urban cowboy community. They previously rented land on Fletcher Street at an affordable price. As expressed by Leroy, *"See, what happens is you don't own any of this shit. Ya'll just rentin',"* indicates that cowboys, as low-priced renters, have no right to refuse and must be ready whenever a developer comes to demolish their residence. The developers would not give the cowboys another chance to stay because the area they want must undergo repairs in a short time.

Nessie : **"Time passed and one by one they got shut down."**
Cole : *"Why?"*
Nessie : **"Real estate."**
(*Concrete Cowboy*, 2020 00:38:35-00:38:40)

The dialogue above occurs in front of the stables held by an urban cowboy community. The urban cowboy community shared stories about how developers took over their land for real estate purposes shown in Nessie's dialogue, *"Time passed and one by one they got shut down."* The developers believed that the urban stables needed to be updated due to their rundown appearance, but they

failed to offer suitable housing for the cowboys and their horses. The developers simply asked for the land they purchased at a lower price.

New real estate developments carried out by developers often displace land occupied by poor residents. They were evicted without adequate compensation and without getting adequate alternative housing. This triggers resistance from the poor residents, who in this case are the urban cowboy community. Although new development often brings improved facilities and services, low-income residents are unable to enjoy these benefits, because they have been displaced.

2. The Impacts of Gentrification on Urban Black Cowboy Community in *Concrete Cowboy* (2020)

Below is an analysis of some of the negative impacts of gentrification that have occurred in the urban black cowboy community as shown in the *Concrete Cowboy* (2020) movie:

Displacement and Eviction
> *Nessie* : ***"And that's how all these stables popped up."***
> *Rome* : *"See, you got **31st Street, you got 32nd, you got Cobb Creek**."*
> *Harp* : *"Yup."*
> *Esha* : *"**Markoe Street. White House**."*
> *Rome* : *"And the number one on that list, **9th and Tioga**."*
> *[Group laughs]*
> (*Concrete Cowboy*, 2020 00:38:01:00:38:21)

The conversation above occurred when the people were still gathered in front of the horse stables. Nessie reveals that not all of this community was formed from Fletcher Street, which is shown when Nessie said, *"And that's how all these stables popped about."* It can be explained that Fletcher Street was formed due to the arrival of several urban black cowboys who moved from various cities in Philadelphia.

As shown in the dialogue above, *"31st Street, 32nd, Cobb Creek, Markoe Street, White House, 9th and Tioga"* are some of the areas that are also experienced cases of gentrification. As an area occupied by minority groups, urban cowboys had to move to various places. This can happen because the lower class of society is mostly black cowboys and black cowboys are an ethnic minority so they are more easily affected by migration to urban areas. This condition supports developers in driving out urban cowboys.

Homelessness

> *Harp* : *"The only home I ever known was … on the back of a horse."*
> *Harp* : *"They're all bricks and beams right now, but you still here, ain't you? You still here?"*
> *Man* : *"Yeah"*
> *Harp* : *"**Let them take the stables. Let them cause they can't take who we are as a people.** Home ain't a place, it's a fam. That's what make us cowboys."*
> *Cole* : *"So what we gonna do then?"*
> *Harp* : *"Well, shit, we gonna do what we always do. We gonna ride."*
> (*Concrete Cowboy*, 2020 01:42:33-01:43:16)

This conversation occurred when the developer officially evicted the stables belonging to the urban cowboy community. Harp and the other members could only watch the eviction process, there was nothing else the cowboy could do. As Harp said, *"Let them take the stables"*, no matter how hard they try there will be no results. All they can be sure of is that in reality they still have each other.

The dialogue *"Let them cause they can't take who we are as a people"* shows that no matter how much the developers take away their stables, the cowboys will still live even without a roof. The urban cowboy community believes that what they call home is themselves and their horses, as long as urban cowboys continue to preserve their culture, nothing will disappear from them.

Community Conflict and Crime

> *Cole* : *"Can I ask you question?"*
> *Paris* : *"Yeah"*
> *Cole* : *"How you end up in the chair?"*
> *Paris* : *"Couple years ago, me and my brother wen out riding and got into an altercation. Ended up in the hospital. I wake up. He didn't. **Bullet shattered my spine. Now I spend the rest of my life in this chair. Fighting over nothing**."*
> (*Concrete Cowboy*, 2020 00:46:52-00:47:50)

The dialogue above was carried out by Cole and Paris, where Cole asked Paris about the situation where Paris ended up in a wheelchair. In the dialogue *"Bullet shattered my spine. Now I spend the rest of my life in this chair. Fighting over nothing."* Paris said that he had experienced a conflict two years ago, a conflict over land at the end of the road, where a developer wanted land for real estate development which then led to violence. However, what happened was that the cowboys, including Paris and his brother, were shot and died in paralysis for life. In the end, the Cowboys also did not get anything, even though they had made sacrifices, they still could not defend it.

In gentrified areas, shooting incidents can occur due to economic and cultural differences between long-time residents displaced by eviction and new arrivals or developers which can trigger violence. Some areas of Philadelphia experiencing demographic change demonstrate this instability, with wealthier groups attacking poorer groups with violence such as gunfire.

Racial Segregation

> Man 4 : *"That's 'cause you think all cowboys was white. That's some*
>   *Hollywood John Wayne bullshit. Fifty percent of all cowboys*
>   *were Black, brown, bronze, or other color."*
> Harp   : *"You said 50, where you getting them numbers from, nigga?"*
> Man 4 : *"Look it up! Real rap! Even the lone Ranger was Black"*
> Cole   : *"Who's the Lone Ranger?"*
> Man 4 : *"Get the fuck outta here."*
> Nessie : *"No, he's right. **Look, Hollywood has whitewashed us. They**
>   **just deleted us right out of the history books**."*
> (*Concrete Cowboy*, 2020 00:35:56-00:36:35)

The dialogue takes place in front of the Fletcher Street stables where urban cowboys gather. One community member said, *"That's 'cause you think all cowboys were white. That's some Hollywood John Wayne bullshit. Fifty percent of all cowboys were Black, brown, bronze, or other color."* This shows that many people do not consider the existence of black cowboys. White people describe cowboys only as white people, but in reality, black cowboys are also widespread throughout America.

As much as black people try to show their existence through various popular narratives, White people still tries to cover it up. The racial segregation faced by black cowboys is evidence of discrimination in areas experiencing gentrification. This has an impact on various aspects of the lives of urban black cowboys, even in some special areas black cowboys also face this conflict. It can be concluded that the impact of gentrification is also related to racial discrimination which is detrimental to minority groups.

In the dialogue expressed by Nessie, *"Look, Hollywood had whitewashed us. They just deleted us out of the history books."* Showing that black cowboys are often overlooked and ignored in American history. The general image of cowboys in popular culture tends to be dominated by white cowboys. This results in an inaccurate perception of American white cowboys as the main characters. Like the film *'The Lone Ranger'* which is mentioned in the dialogue above, this further

strengthens this depiction. Meanwhile, cowboys from different racial backgrounds are rarely shown.

Conclusion

Gentrification, as represented in Concrete Cowboy (2020) movie, reveals the devastating influence it has had on the urban black cowboy community of Fletcher Street Stables. The gentrification process exacerbates social class disparities that affect displacement and eviction, increased homelessness, community conflict and crime, and racial segregation, particularly prejudice against black inhabitants, as represented in the narrative.

The process of gentrification is bringing significant transformations to Fletcher Street, a tightly-knit community predominantly composed of African Americans. With the arrival of affluent developers, there is an effort to rejuvenate the neighborhood by altering the current surroundings. Due to the escalating cost of living and rising property values, low-income individuals, particularly African American urban cowboy communities, encounter difficulties in acquiring homes and preserving a sense of community inclusion.

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