

'IT'S BIGGER THAN THE BLOCK'

Logan residents push back against gentrification of its residential neighborhoods

By Roberto "Rob" Camacho

It's an understatement to say that Barrio Logan has increasingly become one of the focal points of discussion centering around gentrification in San Diego. In recent years the barrio has faced down the threat of gentrification, which is all too familiar in many inner-city neighborhoods throughout the country.

Having gained a newfound popularity amongst younger, more affluent outsiders drawn to the neighborhood due to its rich history and vibrant culture; there has been a cultural and economic resurgence with the influx of both new restaurants, bars, and a myriad of other businesses opening their doors in the barrio catering to people flocking to the community.

This recent shift has not come without its costs however. As Barrio Logan has found itself smack dab in the middle of the city's latest culture war; long-time residents have largely been the ones tasked with the burden of bearing the brunt of gentrification and economic displacement that threatens the character, integrity and livelihood of the neighborhood.

That being said, Barrio Logan is perhaps one of the most vocal and aggressive communities in regards to pushing back against the tide of gentrification, which has already consumed many of San Diego's neighborhoods.

Back in June, dozens of community members staged protests in front of Chicano Art Gallery; which was forced to shut their doors due to rent hikes. Chicano Art Gallery is just the latest to suffer the fate of being shut down; others such as Mesheeka, the Chrch, Glashauss, and Union Barrio Logan are just a few among many that had to leave for various reasons.

These businesses however, are merely the canaries in the coalmine in regards to gentrification in Barrio Logan. They are the businesses that are visible, the

storefronts, shops and galleries which generate a significant portion of the cultural and social capital that so many gentrifiers wish to latch on to.

While most public demonstrations regarding gentrification in Barrio Logan have largely been reactionary and hyper focused on a few select businesses and cultural hubs; they fail to address the larger overlying threat that gentrification poses to the community. That being the erosion of Barrio Logan's residential neighborhoods; which will undoubtedly be the biggest contributing factor to the change of the community's character and very soul.

Unlike popular businesses, which have established and loyal clientele to sound the alarm of their closure, rarely do the individuals who can no longer afford rising property taxes or increasing rent rates have the same support system. Unfortunately, more often than not these properties are silently ceded to the hands of outside entities, to people who do not care about the community, let alone its residents.

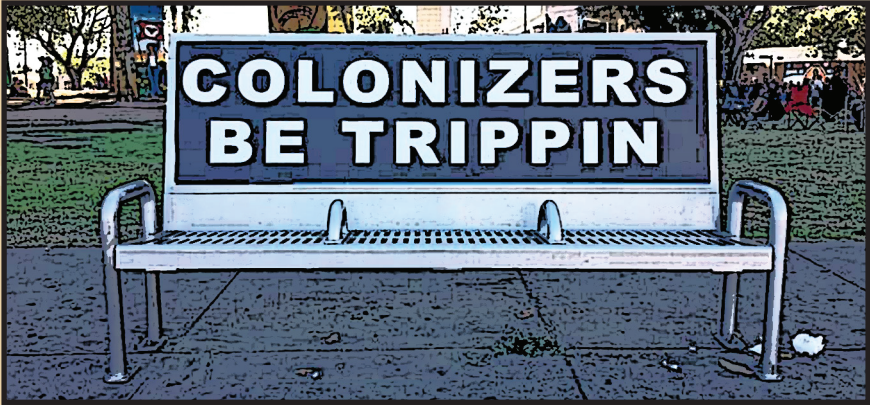
Fears of gentrification and other economic proxies as a means to commodify the neighborhood are nothing new of course. Joanie Lopez, a Barrio Logan resident and member Unión del Barrio lamented the challenges residents face in combatting gentrification.

"We have to understand how gentrification works. The perpetrators are most often middle-class and upper class... There are big banks, investment firms, and long-term speculators who are the real culprits," Lopez said.

Additionally, Lopez added, "the new resident 'colonizers' as some would say, come and take over that community and they say that they 'discovered this up and coming neighborhood.'"

Lopez also bemoaned the lack of organized resistance beyond one-off marches to ward off gentrification in

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the Barrio. “We have been an easy target because we are not as organized as we need to be. We might not be able to overcome the fact that we can’t afford to buy property, especially in San Diego, but imagine the power we could have if we were organized.”

Lopez also detailed her own struggles to remain in the neighborhood, which is rapidly becoming unaffordable. “I’m a long-term resident, I can attest that my rent has gone up,” she complained. “Just this month, it went up \$69 in [my] low-income apartment. If it wasn’t for the financial aid and SSI I receive, I probably wouldn’t be able to continue living here.”

While Lopez has managed to remain in the neighborhood some have already been forced to leave. Ramel Wallace, a local Hip-Hop artist who operated the church and recording studio The Holyfield on Logan Avenue before shuttering its doors due to escalating rent increases offered up his thoughts on gentrification in the broader neighborhood saying, “the thing about gentrification is sometimes you don’t really notice that it’s taking place while it’s happening.”

Wallace elaborated on the neighborhood’s slowly changing character saying, “gentrification is like deforestation, they’re going to keep getting rid of the trees but it’s not going to make the land better. The people are like the trees, and once you get rid of the trees a lot of times they don’t necessarily come back. These people moving in are going to turn the neighborhood into what they don’t want it to be.”

Wallace and Lopez are not alone in their sentiments, to many residents it all but appears that new transplants want all the character and culture that gives neighborhood its own unique history and character, but don’t want the original residents that give it ex-

actly that.

Needless to say, the fear of displacement runs very deep in Logan. The neighborhood is no stranger to outside forces displacing its residents and fundamentally changing the fabric of the community.

The prospect of physical displacement at an even greater magnitude and far more insidious manner than past methods is not so much a distant memory but, in actuality, a very real and palpable fear as gentrification threatens to slowly price out original residents and effectively economically efface the entire neighborhood and broader community completely.

Nobody wants the Barrio to be transformed into another North Park. And at the end of the day the erosion of Logan’s residential neighborhoods is what will ultimately change the character and soul of the community.

Barrio Logan has already been victim to urban development once before; and residents will be damned before they let it happen again under their noses without a fight.

However, it will take a considerable amount of disciplined organizing and concrete action on the ground advocating for new rent control measures at both the state and local level, especially considering that Barrio Logan will almost certainly face stronger and wealthier adversaries (such as the tech industry) from outside the community in the future that won’t be easily intimidated or frightened away.

It’s going to take more than just a few marches, petitions, and yelling angrily at people to protect San Diego’s historic barrios. It’s going to take year’s of hard work by all of the stakeholders.