

Poor Paying a Price for Gentrification

By GEORGE ESPER
ASSOCIATED PRESS

While gentrification has spurred downtown renaissance, it has unintentionally wiped out low-income housing and contributed to homelessness.

The number of apartments renting for less than \$250 a month declined nationally from 9.7 million in 1970 to 7.9 million in 1985, according to a study released last year by the Center on Budget and Policy Priorities, a Washington-based, nonprofit research organization.

The number of renters with incomes of less than \$10,000 annually grew from 7.3 million to 11.6 million in the same period, the study said.

"Taken together, that means that since 1970, there has been a serious **shortage in affordable housing**," said Paul Leonard, the report's principal author. "Gentrification is one of a number of factors that contributed."

Leonard said that he is updating the report to include 1987 and that his initial assessment shows the housing shortage for low-income people is about the same.

Woody Widrow, editor of Shelterforce, the magazine of the National Housing Institute in Orange, N.J., agreed.

"These units either were demol-

ished, converted or rehabilitated and were lost as low-income units," he said. "**When low-income housing disappears, low-income renters are pushed into unaffordable housing. Some proportion becomes homeless.**"

The upside of gentrification is that neighborhoods get fixed up, said Phill Clay, an associate profes-

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WOODY WIDROW

sor of city planning at Massachusetts Institute of Technology. But that doesn't necessarily help the people who have lived there all along. Often, they are minorities.

"So they have to go somewhere else. Often they can't afford it," Clay said, noting that cuts in government housing programs have compounded problems caused by gentrification.

Ian D. Spatz, an official of the National Trust for Historic Preservation in Washington, called gen-

trification "one of the more minor influences on urban neighborhoods."

"Far more important," he said, "is disinvestment, where poor people of all races are removed from their housing because of lack of maintenance and demolition for other purposes such as new construction, highways, skyscrapers and public works projects of one kind or another."

Spatz acknowledged that in some neighborhoods, such as Georgetown in Washington, D.C., and Society Hill in Philadelphia, poor people have been pushed out by the wealthy. But, he said, the numbers are small.

The National Trust for Historic Preservation is doing a great deal to try to revitalize neighborhoods for existing residents, Spatz said.

He cited the Springfield neighborhood in Jacksonville, Fla., which he described as poor with high unemployment and already substantial displacement from demolition.

"The National Trust has been involved in hundreds of projects across the nation where historic housing is being rehabilitated for continued low-income use," Spatz said. "It's easy to try to make wealthy people and historic preservationists out to be the bad guys. The facts just don't support that."