Cultural Daily

Independent Voices, New Perspectives

Nothing Exists in a Vacuum

anthonywash.rosado · Wednesday, February 17th, 2016

"If I love you, I have to make you conscious of the things you do not see."
-James Baldwin

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My name is Anthony Rosado. I am a Queer Boricua Cis-Gendered Man. I was raised between Bushwick and Brownsville, New York City, during the transition from their plights against effects of federally planted drugs, guns, and encouraged violence onto its longstanding residents, into an era where crime was low and cultural pride was high. Resilient, the ancestors of my mother and grandmother's generations nourished the community with love and care so that the safety felt today in Bushwick could be for all to enjoy. I consider this period "The Golden Era" of Bushwick, the '90s: my youth.

Bushwick was Boricua & Dominican@ & Ecuadorian@ & Honduran@ & Mexican@ & many other American@ Latin@ nationalities. Remnants of the Reagan Era were (and are) still present during The Golden Era, but Bushwick Native residents gardened a community of color, culture, support, vibrance, celebration, pride, and so much love.

National systematic modes of oppression were (and are) ever-present. However Doñas, Bodega owners, and other Black (non white) businesses provided the safe haven that was too quickly taken advantage of once the "artist savior" complex infected the foundation the Native Bushwick community built amidst oppressive forces.

Dan Hancox, *Gentrification X: how an academic argument became people's protest*, 12 January 2016:

> This complex has been spreading internationally, and is the foremost cause of the displacement of non-white families who have lived in current and post gentrified neighborhoods for generations. The cultural wealth of these communities are stripped bare as property developers take advantage of "demand and supply: demand for the well-positioned urban space is higher than ever, while the supply of housing options for the urban poor, and the strength and willingness of the state to provide them, is weaker than in decades."

Forces are organizing in favor of gentrification to ensure the revitalization (or social cleansing) and beautification (or whitewashing) of poor, urban communities to the liking of (predominantly white)

“artist saviors” and other hipsters able to afford ever spiking rent prices.

The “artist savior” complex is a mindset many white artists who travel to (what are considered) “urban” communities develop. (Note, “urban” is related to or having characteristics of a city or town. All of New York City is urban, not just non-white communities.) The “artist savior” takes advantage of affordable rent paid to landlords who terrorize Native residents out of gentrified communities. (Note, the white body inherently booms Real Estate value.)

The artist creates art and spreads their fame in the developing cool-pose culture that is BUSHWICK & Shwick & RidgeWick & Jefftown & East Williamsburg & any other word that colonizes “new” and “found” territory. Real Estate agents and “developers” feel a grumble in their stomachs: the need to gain.

Because Capitalism.

And the Gentrification Cycle repeats: the non-white community is perceived as bad and dangerous, gentrifying artists increase in numbers as native residents decrease, the community is perceived as better and safer, gentrifying young business professionals and the mass media notice & transplant & exploit, gentrifying parents move in, the “new” predominantly white community is perceived as good and safe.

As gentrification peaks the interest of people eagerly interested in living amidst the thrills and networks of New York City, non-white people are also a part of the process. The process of gentrification is neither good nor bad. The actions of people involved in the process have positive or negative repercussions for varying groups within the community. Although non-white bodies do not inherently boom Real Estate, there are non-white people investing in parts of the “new” neighborhood that render the outcomes of their actions to be beneficial or hazardous to the community.

I know many non-white people invested in anti-gentrification methods, supporting Black and Native businesses, integrating with Native community members, and building long-term relationships.

I also know non-white people who do not filter their finances within the community; who only support new businesses; who do not integrate with the community; and who steer organizations that claim to produce events for Bushwick, but work in conjunction with the politically correct pro-gentrification agenda.

The “artist savior” has succeeded! As I ride with artist saviors along the L, I hear them cheer, “The community is now good! Let’s stay silent and encourage anyone with little to no experience in this community to leech onto the cultural capital ‘Bushwick’ provides!”

Many “in” the arts scene whisper, “Be silent and consider attending the Fuchs Projects event awarding ‘the 200 most influential people’ who “’transform the conventional’ in the Bushwick 2016 ‘Arts, Restaurants and Bars, Music, Performing Arts, Entertainment, Health, **Real Estate**, Gaming, Design, and Hi-Tech’ scenes.”

Silence is Violence.

Photo by Jonathan Gatlin

Following the week long debate on the Facebook page for Fuchs’ event, I was horrified and ecstatic to have witnessed Ethan Pettit, a white cis-gendered man who owns a gallery bordering Park Slope and Prospect Heights (who does not live in Bushwick), declare my community to be filled with “Latino gangs who shoot each other in the streets” from “breeder famil[ies] that talk in tongue on Sundays” in need of “upgrading the neighborhood [that is] in bad shape dude. It was not just some magisterial Inca civilization.”

Rafael Fuchs, a white Israeli Native photographer who owns a gallery in the part of Bushwick that

borders Los Sures (or what some have re-titled “East Williamsburg”), deleted comments that contained necessary questions like those of Revolutionaries Nicole Brydson and Will Giron. Brydson encouraged public dialogue on the relevance of the list and Fuchs’ methods of surveying worthy artists.

Giron asked, “I am curious as to what your criteria for innovation is, including what metrics and sources you’ll be using to gauge influence and innovation? Also, who are the so called advisors you mentioned who are actively surveying Bushwick? What do those survey methods entail? Do your contacts extend to the long established [Black] community here as well? …What does the selection process look like that determines the final 200?”

Even though Fuchs canceled the event, his refusal to delete Facebook comments by Pettit disproves his claim that he cancelled the event “for the sake of peace in the community… We don’t wish to cause any trauma to anyone and any grief to the community, neither to create a platform that will ignite unnecessary violence. We cannot tolerate any racial and hate notions and comments from anyone. Fuchs projects is an art gallery, not a social organization, and we will continue our program, exhibiting innovative and challenging works in different media, especially photography.”

People gather at events. Events are a social setting. Art galleries organize events.

Galleries *are* social organizations.

The most beneficial outcome of the heavily followed debate was from one of the many passionate peoples commenting in opposition of Fuchs and Pettit. Vakhtang Gomelauri said, “Let’s be honest, he said something that we know many hipsters think but would never dare say.”

The “artist savior” complex presents itself in many forms. Because nothing exists in a vacuum, effects of isolating events like “the 200 list” invite Real Estate agents, “developers,” and landlord terrorism that exploit urban communities for self-gain.

White settlers of the colonies of Brooklyn, Scott and Daniel Stedman, glorified the work of fellow white “artist saviors” in their magazine’s version of a “200 list.” From L Magazine, *On Their Brooklyn: Notable Brooklyn Residents Reflect On Their Chosen Borough*, 14 July 2015:

> “Brooklyn would not be what it is today without the contributions of the untold numbers of people who came here to create art, write novels, publish magazines, promote businesses, and build their lives. These are the people who have helped construct the Brooklyn we know today, the architects of our present and our future. Here they tell us what this crazy place we all call home means to them.
> *What did Brooklyn mean to you, when you first came here to NYC?*
> We were basically kids, just out of college when we came to Brooklyn. It was the magnet that was calling creative types from all over the world. Manhattan was the former epicenter, and all at once, everyone with a dream moved to Brooklyn, and it become the incubator for all of the great artists and makers that have made it the cultural epicenter that it is today. Now people all over the world dream of making it in Brooklyn.”

The only difference between colonialism and neocolonialism is the “artist saviors” perceive themselves as God, giving their selves the right to encourage the excavation of non-white Native residents for the sake of the 21st century’s Manifest Destiny: Gentrification.

The colonial language used by “artist saviors,” exploitative writers, property developers, Real Estate agents, and mass media coddles the guilt felt by willfully ignorant settlers of this “new land.” The hard work of non-white Revolutionaries who actually nourished and blossomed

Brooklyn has been whitewashed.

Bushwick is popular, Because Colonialism.

Because nothing exists in a vacuum, the trials and triumphs of my ancestors during early colonialism are ever-present in our neocolonialist era of gentrification and whitewashing. Nationally considered good for any community, whitewashing is the effect of mass media, Real Estate "development," and white favoritism privileging white peoples the ability to access any relatively "affordable" residence in a new frontier. The opportunities for white peoples to obtain loans are far greater and easier than any longstanding Black resident that has invested in the gentrified community for decades.

Fact: Black bodies do not boom Real Estate. Following white flights of USA's post World War II utopian suburbia, the white "American Dream," Black communities continued to live with rent prices complementary to their ignored and unkempt neighborhoods.

Be they portrayed as disheveled and "ghetto," the deglorified stories of families who nourished their communities with little resources and much opposition won't ever be published in poisonous publications that favor white artists, gentrifiers, and Real Estate agents like Bushwick Daily.

In this modern era of immediate access to all the Internet provides, it is detrimental to consider the source of our information. International happenings can be accessed so rapidly that the information processed is instantly deemed valid.

Who is writing the articles we read? Where are the authors from? What connection do they have to the subject matter written about? What do they gain from covering this subject matter?

There is a dire need for more Black and non-Black POC writers to document these times. When predominantly white bodies document our experiences, our experiences are defined for us and inevitably whitewashed.

In effort to inspire future generations of Revolutionaries, we need to encourage,
publish, and pay the writers of cultures Native to gentrified communities who work diligently to tell the truths of our nowstory, and still survive.

So many gentrifying residents read articles edited and published by founder Katerina Hybenova. But who is she? Where is she from? What connection does she have to Bushwick? How do her actions as an individual impact gentrification in Bushwick?

Why would she publish a racist article that uses census data to disprove whitewashing, and thereafter refuse to edit and publish an article that encourages gentrifying residents to consider whether their actions harm more than help Bushwick?

How do artists impact Real Estate? How does Real Estate impact non-white Native residents of gentrified communities? Should an artist transplant be able to exploit the cultural capital of any gentrified community "for art's sake"?

Is the Fuchs incident reminiscent of ways other "artist saviors" have exotified the name and image of Bushwick?

Yes!

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TEDxBushwick is an exceptional example of exclusionary artistic-gentrification. TEDxBushwick does nothing for the non-white Native community. Despite the promotion of a few non-white businesses, artists, and art organizations, TEDxBushwick silences the traumatized voices of Bushwick Natives. Ironically, two of its lead organizers are non-white. One of the two works for JP Morgan, the insidious colonizers leading Bushwick, Crown Heights, Flatbush, Brownsville, Harlem, The South Bronx, and more communities' new Manifest Destiny.

Last October, TEDxBushwick organized a panel discussion to converse upon varying modes of

creative collaboration. During the event, a white man gentrifying San Francisco and visiting Bushwick (for the event, which seated few non-white and/or Native Bushwick residents amidst the audience of $20 ticket payers) walked up to the front of the room, reaching for and insisting the Black male moderator pass him the microphone.

Taking up space and enjoying the rolling cameras, this man pointed to the panelists, blurting out an accusation that they were not providing adequate modes of proper collaboration. When encouraged to sit down due to his oppressive presence as a white man, he declared race had nothing to do with the situation. The interaction was recorded, but edited out of the video and linked blog post.

The claps following the Native Bushwick resident who stood, looking at everyone in the new bar, asking, “How many people in here are Native to this community? How many are Black or Brown? This is what I face everyday, a white man walking to the front of a room insisting he be given the mic,” were silenced, edited out.

TEDxBushwick might as well be TEDxTED.

While there are many who support the rapidity of gentrification, there are a blessed many working and organizing in opposition. In Bushwick, around New York City, across the united states of america, and overseas in other urban communities organizers are protesting via financial investments, low income family support, event curation, fundraising, and mobilization in streets and venues.

Because nothing exists in a vacuum, published information on the “affordable” prices of rent in Jamaica, Queens by a white writer, deemed accurate by future gentrifiers of Jamaica, mimics hundreds of international articles that pique the interest of “artist saviors,” hipsters, property developers, landlords, and political figures.

Where is this author from? What connection does she have to Jamaica, Queens? What does she gain from publishing this article?

My mother and siblings live in Public Housing in Jamaica, Queens. I will fight as hard for Jamaica as I do for Bushwick, Because of my Ties. My lens is far more valid than that of any white gentrifying writer, Because I am Native.

Mark D’Ottavio, friend and supporter of Rafael Fuchs, is doing more than threatening me in the photos above. He is encouraging white gentrifiers to speak out against hate and consider accountability.

This, I am confident, will inspire said gentrifiers to challenge and question fellow white gentrifiers. Those with white privilege need to use their whiteness in conversation with white peoples to increase awareness, organization, mobility, and revolution. Non-white gentrifiers need to be having conversations concerning class privilege and the exploitation of a community’s image.

Longstanding Revolutionary Richard Martinez responded to the threat saying, “There’s a psychology you’re going to find rampant in this particular group, ‘inverse projection, blind to its projection’.”

I have experienced and witnessed the trauma carried in afflicted bodies. Bodies experiencing physical and emotional displacement, cultural erasure, and a whitewashing of our communities’ hirstories.

HIStorical documentation and longstanding oppressive structures do not simply cause one to feel sad. Tensions in the body are valid. Muscles get accustomed to the trauma. As life continues, weight is added onto sore lower backs and trapezius that carry financial, residential, and healthcare instability. Tired eyes that work long hours to afford the ever-spiking rent in effort to keep the community Black and Latin@ and South Asian and East Asian are not to be ignored.

During this technological era of easy access, ignorance is no longer blissful; it is willful. Because nothing exists in a vacuum, the Fuchs incident is tied to ways Arts in Bushwick has acted as

catalyst to displacement; to Christopher Stout's lacking consideration of Native Bushwick residents for his Bushwick Art Crit Group Artist Lecture Series; to London Kaye's vandalism and Bushwick Daily's favoritist coverage of Rob Abner's terrorism; to June Bar keeping its "99 cent store" sign claiming they haven't the finances to take it down and then buying a projection screen shortly thereafter; to this:

…to council members forcing longstanding residents out of south London to neighborhoods miles from their homes, families, jobs, and culture; to all the "development" that ensures the continuation of non-white bodies' trauma at the hands of state, federal, and international oppressive systems.
How do we move forward?
Love first, ask later.
Engage with community members.
Support Black and Native businesses (shop locally).
Speak out and stand up for fellow residents experiencing terrorism and violations.
Volunteer at community centers.
Do your own research.
Ask yourself, "Do my actions and existence harm more than help the community I now live in?"

Stay awake:
www.BanGentrification.org
www.BeforeItsGone.co
www.maketheroad.org
www.maydayspace.org
www.bhip-brooklyn.org
www.EqualityForFlatbush.tumblr.com
www.furee.org
Reclaim Bushwick
Hope Gardens Community Center
www.NorthBrooklynCoalition.org
www.rsbcc.org

bushwickvendorsmarket.weebly.com/
ptabk.weebly.com
www.BrooklynTheBorough.com
www.BushwickCommunityMap.org

This entry was posted on Wednesday, February 17th, 2016 at 10:13 pm and is filed under Discourse
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