Megalopolis and Gentrification
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(used in conjunction with GITN 681, Character of Megalopolis:

Introduction

Despite the financial and governmental might of Megalopolis (see Neal Lineback’s article) there has been a consistent movement of people away from its densest population centers, many of which are located near the older heart of the cities. In the last two decades, in fact, the largest areas of population growth in the region have taken place in the counties of Northern Virginia and the outlying areas of the massive New York City metro area.

The population growth of Megalopolis has slowed somewhat in the last decade. (The only state within the region to rank in the top twenty in terms of percentage increase in that time is Virginia, which is ranked 17th.) Yet their stagnation is in no way indicative of the growth patterns elsewhere in the United States: Las Vegas, for example, grew 82.3 percent from 1990 to 2000. Also in 2000, Dallas had a larger influx of people than New York City.

In another important trend, recent data has shown an increase in migration from the suburbs to the more urban areas. An inflow of investment fuels gentrification. Upscale condos are erected, houses are rehabbed. Candle-lit restaurants and stores catering to people with higher incomes displace bodegas and used appliance stores. Rents rise, as landlords realize they can attract professionals and business people as tenants. An area of "valuable city real estate" is cleansed of its working class residents.

This process of moving in, raising property values and simultaneously pushing lower-income dwellers out is called gentrification. In this lesson we will explore the reasons behind urban flight and the newer opposite phenomenon of gentrification.

Grade Level: 9-12, and university

Time Frame: two class periods
Objective

This lesson will help students learn how graphing techniques can be used to understand social issues, to identify trends and to follow the progress of a particular region based on the graphed data.

National Geography Standards

• Standard 1. How to use maps and other geographic representations, tools, and technologies to acquire, process, and report information from a spatial perspective
• Standard 2. The processes, patterns, and functions of human settlement
• Standard 18. How to apply geography to interpret the present and plan for the future

Resources


Instructions

Day One:

Materials:
• graph paper
• ruled paper
• pen/pencil

Procedure:

1. Produce a histogram using data for the metropolitan areas (i.e., New York, Boston, Philadelphia, Richmond) within Megalopolis showing percent change between 1990 and 2000.
2. Produce a histogram using data for metropolitan areas (i.e., Atlanta, Memphis, Las Vegas, Phoenix, and Dallas) outside Megalopolis, showing
percent change between 1990 and 2000. After reviewing these histograms, have students write an essay on the prompt “Why do you suppose major cites in the South/ Southwest have grown at a higher rate than cities in Megalopolis?”

Responses: Assessment
Computers have revolutionized all aspects of American life. As a result of the information age, it is now possible to satisfy most types of business needs miles away from the old economic centers. Megalopolis retains a high proportion of the nation's wealth, and commerce. As communication advances obviate the need for relocation to Megalopolis, will population decline be the result? Or are most cities in Megalopolis constricted by their close proximity to other cities and lack the annexing power of south/southwestern cites?

Day Two:

Materials:
• “Boom: The Sound of Eviction” (video)
• paper
• pen/pencil

Procedure:
Students will watch a gripping documentary about the effects of gentrification. This video is available at: [http://www.boomthemovie.org/](http://www.boomthemovie.org/). After viewing documentary students will respond to the prompt “what are some positive and negative effects of gentrification?”

Responses: Assessment
Positive effects of gentrification include a higher tax base for cities, revitalized inner cores, and lower crime rates in revitalized areas. Negative effects of gentrification are that it displaces lower income workers who depend on inexpensive housing.

Some criticisms of gentrification include the argument that displacement, whether via urban renewal and the bulldozer or by market forces, is an act of force. Some may argue that it is anti-democratic because it denies self-determination to an existing community.

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