

Talking life and the sociological imagination with jude Lombardi

The **Gentrification (k)NOT Movie** was born out of conversations jude had at the Station North Arts Café with owner Kevin Brown, who has been working in Station North for years. In 2002, Station North Arts District became the first designated arts district in Maryland. jude and Kevin felt the need to explore what was happening in the neighborhood which housed MICA and a burgeoning art scene, as well as changes happening all over the world in cities, often through arts-driven by development. Her film is meant to provoke questions about change and transformations: What is healthy neighborhood change? What is lost when a place is redeveloped? How might we prevent gentrification from happening during revitalization of a neighborhood?



I spoke with her about home and place and teaching, the parts that make a life. Hope you can join us at the BMA on March 19th for the screening and conversation.

What is home to you?

Home is where I live when I am not out in the world. It is a safe, warm, loving space that every human being deserves to experience on a daily bases. My home is in Baltimore and has been since my birth.

Can you tell me a bit about your classes when you teach sociology?

When I taught sociology, the scientific study of one's own society and all that this entails (I know, that's a lot), my favorite activity was encouraging students to develop a "sociological imagination."

The term "**sociological imagination**," one of the most popular terms in sociology, was invented by C. Wright Mills (1959). He wrote a book on the topic by the same name. A sociological imagination is a way of looking at how one views the world, oneself, and their society. It's about exploring one's own biography within a historical context, nested in traditions, beliefs and other cultural artifacts. It makes a distinction between [when is] a "personal trouble" and "public issue[s]," and how they might intersect.

Not only is developing a sociological imagination about the biographical in a historical context, it is about exploring the "social" structures, or not so "social" structures that we co-construct and maintain through our language, beliefs and actions. It's about living in a milieu—a system—and how the elements of that system might orient how one thinks, perceives and acts. It's about understanding one's self and our relations with "others," not necessarily like us.

As one person states in the *Gentrification (k)NOT Movie*, "How you view gentrification depends on where you sit." That is, one's position and positioning in the society in which they live affects one's life choices and life chances.

Finally, when developing a sociological imagination, one's sense of responsibility and

ability for generating a society they desire emerges. Including how one's thoughts, wants and actions might make a difference that makes a difference (human agency). It is a model for exploring and designing the constraints and possibilities for generating a society one desires to be an element of. ([Interview with Lombardi, Sociological Imagination](#))



How is this connected to understanding gentrification?

Today, gentrification is happening worldwide—locally, nationally and globally. It is a public issue. Once I developed a sociological imagination I had little choice but to work in ways that improve the society I live in. That is one reason why I became a social worker, then a therapist, then a professor and then, a filmmaker. The films I make are about people trying to make a difference in the society in which they live.

The word gentrification was originally designed by British sociologist Ruth Glass to point at a particular dynamic that emerges when a “gentry” of people move into a neighborhood (1964). It was meant to connote a process by which during the revitalization of a neighborhood the residents who live there—through no fault of their own—can no longer afford to live there and are eventually displaced.

What I noticed was in our daily discourse the term gentrification had lost its original meaning. As I say in the movie, “If you think it means one thing and I think it means another than how do we design revitalization in ways that prevent it—gentrification—from happening?” My intentions when making the movie were to explore the meaning of the term ‘gentrification’, to educate people about its original meaning and to offer possible ways for designing the revitalization and development of our neighborhoods so that people are not displaced from their homes.

What might a healthy change to a neighborhood look like?

The *Gentrification (k)NOT Movie* explores a variety of elements for creating healthy neighborhoods. In the movie I quote former Baltimore City Health Commissioner Peter Bellenson, MD, citing four basics for generating a healthy neighborhood: decent schools, decent housing, access to a living wage—work, and health. Mindy Fullilove MD, talks about the importance of generating social networks for sustaining healthy neighborhoods. She also offers a distinction between healthcare and disease management, arguing that

90% of our money goes to disease management while only 10% goes toward healthcare. Thus putting the cart before the horse. Fullilove is the author of 'Rootshock' is a term she adapted from gardening, which describes the loss of one's personal ecosystem when our networks are destroyed and displacement happens.

What is a city of the future?

I cannot say what a city of the future looks like. What I can say is what I desire. What I desire is space where there is participation by all when making decisions and designing our city. Be aware when there is participation by all conflict will emerge, it is natural. It is how we deal with our conflict today (violence) that is unnatural. So this requires, among other things, our ability and a desire to participate in deep conversations embracing our conflicts as opportunities for generating something new.

What is one of your favorite spots in Baltimore?

One of my favorite spots in Baltimore is the Stadium Place, home to over 400 senior citizens of mixed income. It is an affordable housing community that emerged where the historical Memorial Stadium was once located. Stadium Place is featured in the *Gentrification (k)NOT Movie* as a prototype for revitalization without gentrification.

Stadium Place sits in the middle of a historically diverse set of neighborhoods known as Waverly, Homestead, Edner Gardens, Montebello and Coldstream. All of which were — by order of the mayor —involved in the planning and re-development of this huge piece of land now known as Stadium Place.

How did this happen? What were the elements that allowed for this community to come into being without displacing any of its neighbors or neighborhoods?

For more information about Stadium Place and its history, come see the *Gentrification (kNOT) Movie*.

Judith (jude) Lombardi, LCSW-C, Ph.D. is a graduate of the University of Maryland School of Social Work (1981) and a social worker who went back to graduate school, then taught college-level Sociology for over a decade. She now makes documentary movies about people doing what people do.

The Gentrification k(NOT): A Film Screening and Conversation about Displacement in Baltimore is on at the BMA on [March 19, 2016 @ 1:00 pm](#), as part of the BMA's monthly Open Hours program.