Greenberg’s *The Disaster Inside the Disaster* illustrates to us that money meant for redevelopment after crises was instead used to improve up-scale, predominantly white neighborhoods. Checker’s *Green is the New Brown* tells us that necessary redevelopment and remediation on the North Shore was stalled until economic opportunities presented themselves. It is clear that this money is not being used right and they don’t really care – okay, how many times have we heard the same argument regurgitated over 9000 different ways? The basic point is, the poor and minority groups are being neglected and forced out of their neighborhoods and we have to do something about it.

So, what do we do? Eric Jaffe, in his article “How Parks Gentrify Neighborhoods and How to Stop It” says we just need to be “green enough”. That is, we don’t improve these neighborhoods to the point where they will be gentrified but, if we make smaller improvements like community gardens, they won’t be.

Okay, but, like, what’s “green enough”? Can we supply a definition for it after we figure out what “affordable housing” is? And who enforces whether an improvement is too green/not sufficiently green? If an area is remediated and ends up becoming gentrified despite being “green enough”, do we just sort of shrug our shoulders and say, “Whoops, gentrification, better luck next time”? Jaffe suggests that the community needs to play a central role in deciding what is green enough, but, as we can see from the readings, if Bloomberg wants something, he’ll get it approved regardless of the community’s concerns. As we also saw in the Willets Point video, it didn’t matter how many people came and protested Amanda Burden’s plans, the motion was still approved.

So, this concept of “green enough” leaves me skeptical. Can the lower-class actually have nice things? Rick Rybeck’s comment on Jaffe’s page says, “This phenomenon is not limited to parks. Any public amenity (better schools, better transit, better police & fire protection, better roads) will have the same result... if those public facilities and services are well-designed and well implemented, they will inflate the price of nearby land”.

This puts us in a bit of a quagmire when we can’t really control the development and our attempts to do so can be snaked around (again: what is affordable housing?). What needs to be done, maybe, is that we need to put development in the hands of the community. Perhaps there is some way to elect an official (or, better yet, a council), a
local person, to oversee projects in their own districts, who would then be allowed to use X amount of public money. That way, the community can decide what is “green enough”, and have it carried out the way they want. Additionally, if the person overseeing the project is a member of the community, he/she will be directly responsible for, and affected by, the results of the project.

Of course, this could also be worked around potentially. But, I don’t think the concept of just hoping the city makes the poor neighborhoods green enough is plausible – as we read in the articles, that money isn’t even being spent properly. If there’s anything we’ve learned in this class, it’s that political gibberish like “the greater good” have different meanings to different people. We can’t rely on vague terminology that can be twisted until it means nothing more than “radda radda radda”.

Additional Works Used:

Response says:
May 5, 2015 at 5:02 am
Hi XXXX,
Great post, I think you’ve really honed in on one of the key takeaways from these articles, namely the link between economic disparities and vulnerability to a stunted recovery from environmental disasters.

That being said, I disagree with your takeaway that this issue is synonymous with the issue of gentrification. While in Checker’s article it does seem that the economic forces governing gentrification are impeding the recovery process, in my opinion that itself is the problem, and that the agencies offering aid should be more focused on the aid aspect rather than economics. The gentrification problem is a wholly different issue in my opinion, and even if the poorer neighborhoods were “green enough” it seems that, according to Checker, this still wouldn’t stop aid agencies trying to jack up real estate prices. On the other hand, it appears that according to Greenberg’s article, the dearth of aid in poorer neighborhoods post-disaster stems more from the far greater political sway wealthier neighborhoods have on the government, which prioritize them for aid. In any case, both agree that poorer neighborhoods are not being treated equally.