

## The Future Is In Growing Together... Otherwise It May Be A Slow Individual Decline.

By James Russell

Panel I: Affordability and dislocation in Colorado Cities



This essay is a critical reflection on Panel 1's Presentation of affordability and dislocation in Colorado Cities on October 25, 2019, as part of the conference titled *Squeezed out: Challenges of diversity and affordability in Colorado communities*. The participants were, Elizabeth Garner, Irene Aguilar, Matilde Garcia, Korkut Onaran and Brian Muller.

It is not to anyone's surprise that Colorado has grown significantly in the past two decades. We can feel and see these growth pressures in a multitude of different ways. If you frequent downtown often you might recognize this growth by the now common characteristic of the cranes that have proliferated the Denver skyline. For those who may have been living in one of the older larger apartment complexes you might recognize growth by the loss of your view of the mountains or constant rising in rent prices. If you happened to leave further in the suburb's growth might feel like the creation of shopping community closer to your home, or larger houses popping up in your neighborhood. If you lived in the rural areas, Colorado's city center growth might look like a decrease in population and services in your community. The point being, growth can come in a variety of shapes, forms and scales, all of which is dependent on your perspective. To accurately access the growth in Denver I point out some of the figures brought to our attention by Irene Aguilar- a former state representative and current Director of Denver's NEST. NEST stands for Neighborhood, Equity, Stabilization Team. Their goal is identified communities that are experiencing or have experienced a drastic change in characteristic and try to encourage the stabilization and growth of residents who want to continue to live in the communities that they were raised in. In the presentation by Irene Aguilar it was stated that from 2000 – 2017 Denver seen an influx north of 150,000 people. Which is approximately a 27% population increase. Which is significant! Median income increased \$39,317 to \$65,224 which is a 66% increase. Denver is the 2<sup>nd</sup> largest boomtown for millennials. With the change in character and income of the new residents to the City, it is no surprise that the surrounding environment changed to match the new purchase power and demand for services. However, what about the people who were living in the homes before new tenants arrived? What happened to the stores that were serving a diverse and ethnic population before whole foods and ink coffee arrived? Sometimes we forget or not Intune to the fact that a community was existing before our arrival.

The question becomes what does that mean for the residences who made Denver their home, before the influx of people? With a limited increase in the amount of living unit, we cannot assume that there is a new home for all the new people. Which means there is a strong chance that a newly development home in an older neighborhood most likely came at the expense of a dislocated tenant. Guess speaker Matilde Garcia, member of the Mujeres Emprendedoras Coopertative, gave a testament of how life was like before new residents moved in and what she

is trying to accomplish in order to remain in the community she grew up in. This language may not be unfamiliar for many of you who have come from a smaller community or a community that offer shared resources. She stated that before all the growth, she uses to know her neighborhood use to be a community. A community where most if not all the neighbors where known, families where able to grow and prosper and resources for those in need where readily available both via other neighbors or the city and state level. In her experience this changed very quickly as housing prices escalated. People started to move out and with them, there connections to the community.

When asked why she thought the community changed she mentioned that a large reason for this change was that people who were renting the home quickly got priced out and were forced to relocated to a less developed and often times more affordable area. However, it feels like starting over all over again for those families.

Matilde then spoke about the power of a Co-op. A Co-op or Cooperative is a business that is owned and operated by and for the benefit of its members. A cooperative is formed when several people identify an unmet need and band together to supply said need often times utilizing the resources of the many to mitigate the individual costs. Matilde's Co-Op Mujeres Emprendedoras or woman's Entrepreneurs was born out of the need to fight involuntary displacement in the Westwood neighborhood. They believe that through financial interdependence and economic opportunities, people can have the opportunity to remain in their existing communities without fear of displacement. The Coop started with 5 woman and have now grown to 13 women from 7 different families. These women focus on catering services, development of salsa's jewelry creation, and the education and empowering of women. While they have seen substantiate growth, Matilde expressed there are still common barriers for women and especially women who's first language is not English. Some of these barriers are the lack of financing and business knowledge, non-communicative/ difficulty in the regulation and start up process for business. All of which leads to a stressful and bureaucratize business process that in many cases detour potential entrepreneurs.

Irene accented this point by stating that is why the nest team was created. It was to help understand the trails and tribulations afflicting a vulnerable population and streamlining the process to give them the resources and skill set that are needed to survive. In Specific NEST has goals to In crease access to opportunity, Economic Empowerment, Build Wealth, Stabilize housing, Build more affordable housing, Stabilize homeowners, land banking, Community organization, and Reorganize Developer agreements.

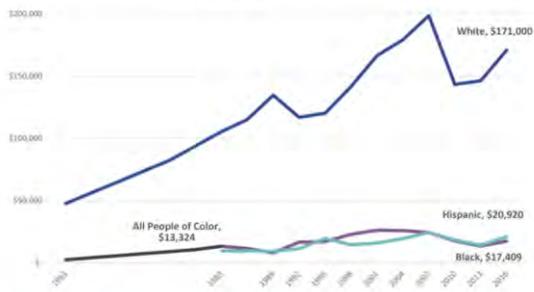
To better understand that displacement is more than just an economic issue, I conclude with some power images from Irene's presentation that I believe speak for themselves. If you have the opportunity to visit next year's session, I recommend it, you have a good time, learn a few things and come to understand, there are not easily solutions to these comprehensive solutions. However, by working together we can growth! Otherwise you one day might find that you have become he vulnerable population!

### Root Cause: Income Inequality



Source: WDI world (2017). See w2018.world for data series and notes.

### Median Family Wealth by Race and Ethnicity 1963 - 2016



### Areas Vulnerable to Gentrification

UPDATE: Based on 2015 Demographic Data  
Source: American Community Survey

