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# Canada - A Long Way to Go: What Sparkles Does Not Always Shine

A Study of Segregation and Gentrification in the Neighbourhood of Runnymede-Bloor West Village as it Relates to the Wider City of Toronto

## Abstract

This paper is an ethnographic and sociological study of the neighborhood of Runnymede-Bloor West Village, identifying trends and drawing conclusions based on statistical data, academic theory, and notes taken during research trips. It is also worth noting that this study was conducted in January of 2020 before the Global pandemic was declared. Focusing on gentrification, segregation, and inequality, I identify that this neighborhood is part of a growing trend in Toronto of the increasing severity of all three of these issues. Runnymede-Bloor West Village is quickly becoming one of Toronto's wealthiest neighborhoods, with the average household income increasing substantially. While this will certainly make real estate agents happy and will probably provide the city with more property tax, it also has the effect of pushing less affluent people out, as increasing living costs make their continued residence in Runnymede-Bloor West Village unaffordable. It also influences the local businesses, as businesses that do not cater to the new influx of affluent residents go out of business, either because their customer base has left or because they can no longer afford to pay their rent. I also identify the increased segregation of the neighborhood, as the racialized character of income inequality in Toronto results in people of color being priced out. Finally, I recommend that the solution to much of this increased inequality is the building of more affordable housing and restrictions of the building of unaffordable housing. Much of this will require the actions of a progressive, engaged local government. Hopefully, these steps will be able to halt or even reverse the trend of an ever-increasing cost of living, provide the local businesses with customers who do not have to spend most of their income on housing costs, and provide a short term solution to the issue of income and ethnicity-based segregation in Toronto.

**Keywords:** Toronto, Gentrification, Segregation, Affordability, Runnymede-Bloor West Village

## Résumé

Cet article est une étude ethnographique et sociologique du quartier de Runnymede-Bloor West Village, à Toronto. Cet article souligne les tendances et tire les conclusions basées sur des données statistiques, sur les théories académiques et sur les notes prises lors de voyages de recherche. Il convient également de noter que cette étude a été menée en janvier 2020, avant que la pandémie de la COVID-19 ne soit déclarée. En mettant l'accent sur l'embourgeoisement, la ségrégation et l'inégalité, j'identifie la contribution de chaque quartier torontois à la croissance de ces trois problèmes. Runnymede-Bloor West Village, dont le revenu moyen des ménages augmentant considérablement, devient de plus en plus l'un des quartiers les plus riches de Toronto. Certes ça aidera des agents immobiliers et la ville elle-même, mais les personnes moins fortunées sont maintenant forcées à partir, car l'augmentation du coût de la vie rend leur résidence à Runnymede-Bloor West Village inabordable. Ce profit pécuniaire de la ville a également une influence sur les entreprises locales. Les entreprises qui ne peuvent pas répondre aux besoins du nouvel afflux de résidents aisés font faillite, soit parce que leur clientèle est partie, ou soit parce qu'elles n'ont plus les moyens de payer leur loyer. J'identifie également l'augmentation de la ségrégation dans le quartier, car le caractère racialisé de l'inégalité des revenus à Toronto entraîne l'éviction des personnes de couleur. Enfin, je recommande que la solution à une grande partie de cette inégalité accrue soit la construction de plus de logements à prix abordables et la restriction de la construction de logements à prix inabordables. Une grande partie de cette solution demandera les actions d'un gouvernement local progressiste et engagé. Espérons que ces mesures permettront d'arrêter, ou bien d'inverser la tendance à l'augmentation constante du coût de la vie, de fournir aux entreprises locales des clients qui n'ont pas à dépenser la majeure partie de leur revenu en frais de logement, et de fournir une solution à court terme au problème de la ségrégation fondée sur le revenu et l'origine ethnique à Toronto.

**Mots clés:** Toronto, gentrification, ségrégation, abordabilité, Runnymede-Bloor West Village

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### Introduction

When I first arrived at Runnymede-Bloor West village, I was greeted with the sights and sounds that are familiar to any resident of Toronto. As I walked east along Bloor street, shivering in the late January cold, I observed the many shops and restaurants that form the core of what is known as Bloor West Village. These businesses were as diverse as the city of Toronto prides itself on being. There were restaurants from all over the world: Japanese, Mexican, Indian, Thai, Italian, French. Many of the windows displayed advertisements for events that celebrate Toronto's multicultural identity: "Ukrainian cultural festival next month!", "Indian street food in a week!", "Irish dance lessons sign up today!". Walking north on Jane revealed a residential area that seemed to be the picture-perfect vision of the Toronto middle class lifestyle, with large houses, nice lawns, and a car in every driveway. At first glance, Runnymede-Bloor West Village appears to be everything that Toronto projects to the world: multicultural, affluent, and open for business.

However, closer inspection reveals that this image is only part of the story and that the reality is more complicated and less perfect for a magazine advertisement. In many ways, Runnymede-Bloor West Village is a microcosm of many of Toronto's problems. For every successful immigrant-owned business, there is a business that has failed and closed up shop. For every diverse local, there is an increasingly segregated neighbourhood. Everywhere the price of housing, food, and electricity climbs as the creeping effects of gentrification make themselves felt. In this paper, I will study the effects of the intersection of gentrification and segregation in the neighbourhood of Runnymede-Bloor West Village, compare it to trends in Toronto at large, and try to see if the neighbourhood follows the trend or is an exception to it. I will first walk through much of the literature on this topic and its related concepts, namely gentrification and segregation in Toronto. I will then use firsthand observations and publicly sourced data from Statistics Canada and Toronto's neighbourhood profiles tool, found on its website, to analyze Runnymede Bloor West Village and make conclusions. Finally, I will make recommendations based on my findings and the findings of experts.

### Literature Review

Gentrification is a prominent theme in the findings of this paper, and therefore, a review of the

material I collected on gentrification is in order. Of particular importance is that the definition of gentrification has been expanding. Gentrification scholarship has traditionally been focused on the neighbourhood, primarily analysing how the influx of affluent people has resulted in the local cost of living going up, displacing the less affluent population of the neighbourhood in the process (Billingham, 2015, p. 77). There is a belief that while this is certainly a worthy approach to the topic of gentrification, other avenues of research can also be justified, such as a more macro approach to the topic. This approach observes patterns of gentrification across an entire city or region, documenting patterns of 'supra-neighbourhood' gentrification. This is often due to the policies of regional and municipal governments, meaning that there is a need for gentrification scholars to study their policies in addition to the policies of neighbourhood officials (Billingham, 2015).

One of the key findings in regard to gentrification in Toronto is that the larger municipality is divided into three cities, split along income lines. City number 3 is where Toronto's less affluent live - primarily located in the suburbs, far from the downtown core. City number 1 is the opposite: much of the city's wealth is concentrated here, and it is located in or near the downtown core and Toronto's subway stations. City number 2 is between these two extremes, and it is where the middle-class lives (Hulchanski, 2011, pp. 3-5). There was a time when city number 2 was by far the largest area in Toronto, but recent research, documenting housing costs and income levels, has shown that as wealth pours into Toronto from the outside world and concentrates in certain areas, city number 2 has shrunk dramatically, being replaced by city number 1 in some cases but mostly by city number 3 (Hulchanski, 2011, pp. 3-5). This demonstrates that Toronto is experiencing an increase in income inequality and its subsequent polarization, as the city divides itself between clearly identifiable rich and poor areas and the middle class shrinks.

Research demonstrates this is due to a disinvestment in some areas, mostly the suburbs, and investment in others, mostly in the downtown area. Furthermore, the investment in the downtown area typically comes in the form of gentrification (Hwang & Lin, 2016, pp. 10-13). This dynamic has the effect of polarising the city even more, as the effect of gentrification force those with lower income to leave the downtown area for the cheaper suburbs, and higher property values and more amenities attract higher income people to the downtown area from the suburbs

(Lehrer & Wieditz, 2009, pp. 143). This begins a cycle: investors are attracted to the affluence of the downtown area and away from the suburbs, their investment adds to the gentrification of the downtown area, their disinvestment from the suburbs makes them poorer, and the richer and poorer population sort themselves accordingly (Walks, 2013, p.2).

There has also been research into segregation in Toronto. Toronto is rightly regarded as one of the most multicultural cities in the world, with 48 different ethnic groups containing more than 5000 members each (Qadeer, 2003, p. 27). Segregation in the city is not based on overtly discriminatory practices, as any form of explicitly discriminatory practices by landlords and realtors were made illegal in Canada by the adoption of the charter of rights and freedoms in the 1960s (Bloc & Galabuzi, 2011). Nevertheless, Toronto has a good deal of segregation that is driven by economic factors such as the more subtle forms of discrimination present in the job market.

Studies have shown that racialized workers only make 0.81 cents for every dollar earned to those who are not racialized. This number is even more pronounced for racialized women (Block & Galabuzi, 2011). Additionally, racialized immigrants were shown to make less than non-racialized immigrants, disproving the argument that this is simply newcomers struggling in a new country (Block & Galabuzi, 2011). This is likely related to findings that indicated racialized people in Toronto were far more likely to find work in insecure, low paying jobs than they were to find work in jobs that offered better pay and job security (Block & Galabuzi, 2011). This may be because of the biases held by many employers in Toronto. For example, a study found that employers were less likely to hire someone if their resumes had a non-English name and contained experience from outside the country. Employers justified this by citing concerns about language ability, with no evidence of such language issues in the resumes they were provided and not having conducted any interviews (Oreopoulos, 2011, pp. 157-158).

The result is that the patterns of gentrification take on a racial character. Since immigrants and racialized people have lower incomes on average due to the factors we have just discussed, they are subject to the pushes and pulls of Toronto's steadily increasing income-based polarisation, with those making less relegated to some parts of the city and the wealthy concentrating in others. Furthermore, the influx of affluent non-racialized people into diverse neighbourhoods that are classed as city number 2

causes gentrification. This dynamic makes the cost of living unaffordable for the generally less affluent racialized residents, forcing them to move to neighbourhoods in Toronto that are classified as city number 3. Therefore, as gentrification causes city number 2 to shrink, city number 3 is becoming more racialized, city number 1 is becoming increasingly non-racialized, and segregation grows.

### Methodology

Research for this paper was conducted in a few ways. The first was a trip to the neighbourhood of Runnymede-Bloor West Village on Sunday, January 26<sup>th</sup>, 2020, to make observations and write down my initial interpretations. This method was important, as it is all too easy to get a distorted view of a place by just looking at statistics. For example, if one was to just look at statistical sources like Statistics Canada, one would not have known that the neighbourhood has a variety of businesses along Bloor and at major intersections. It was also a good way to get a spatial understanding of the area, observing what the buildings looked like, what kind of people were out and about at the time, and the kind of aesthetic those who make decisions for the neighbourhood wish to project to the world.

The main drawback of this method was weather related, as it was cold and rainy on the day of my study. This not only had an effect on my personal discomfort but also likely reduced the amount of people walking about on the street. This forced me to be a little more proactive, observing people through the windows of restaurants and other establishments. This required a bit of subtlety and probably altered my first impressions of the area. It is also entirely possible that the nature of physically observing an area was challenging as well. While I tried to cover an area that was diverse, I may have missed some areas that would have given me more insight.

The other method employed for this paper was the gathering of statistics from online sources, like Statistics Canada and the neighbourhood profiles on the City of Toronto's website. These sources of data were a fantastic way to either confirm or correct the impressions I got when I went to the neighbourhood. They also served as a way to reveal things that were not immediately obvious and to explain and give context to some of the observations. The data that was available online was excellent when describing the neighbourhood's demographics. There was a

cornucopia of data concerning statistics like income levels, housing costs, ethnicity, gender, and family structure. However, there was not a huge amount of data available that pertained to the businesses that cluster along Bloor Street and some of the major intersections. Some data can be tangentially linked to them, such as building rental prices which can be linked to their financial success, but there is little data to be found about them specifically. I found StatsCan to be of limited utility. I could not find a way to get data on the neighbourhood level and was only able to find data about the city of Toronto as a whole. It could therefore really only be used to compare the data found in the Neighbourhood demographics tool to the city in its totality.

Additional information and context were found by looking up the policies of the City of Toronto and their effects in academic journals. This provided the wider context needed to have a full understanding of what was happening in Runnymede-Bloor West village, showing what was happening at a city wide, macro scale. This context was important because it allowed me to get a fuller view of the city as a whole, instead of just observing the neighbourhood of Runnymede-Bloor West Village in a vacuum. It also served as a springboard, providing ideas for what to look for in the data I collected. The drawbacks of this were that the unconscious biases of the authors may have shaped my own understanding of the neighbourhood and city, as my own biases were shaped by the data they chose to highlight.

### Findings and Analysis

In some ways, Runnymede-Bloor West Village is quite different from the rest of Toronto. The principal example of this is the neighbourhood's diversity, though perhaps a better way to put it is the neighbourhood's lack of diversity. The vast majority of the residents are of European descent, specifically from the British Isles, and were born in Canada. This can be observed in a few ways.

The image below (Fig. 1) displays the percentage of people living in the neighbourhood who were born in Canada. The green bar signifies the population in the neighbourhood, the grey bar signifies

the number in the city of Toronto as a whole. We can see that a disproportionately large percentage of the population of the neighbourhood was born in Canada: ¾ of the population of Runnymede-Bloor West Village was born in Canada, an outlier in a city where that is true for slightly less than half the population. In fact, this number appears to have grown slightly over the years, with the population of the neighbourhood that was born in Canada increasing by 3% between 2011 and 2016.

### Immigration



Fig. 1<sup>2</sup>

Evidence of the population's European descent can be seen on the map below (Fig. 2). We can see that the vast majority listed their ethnic origin as European.

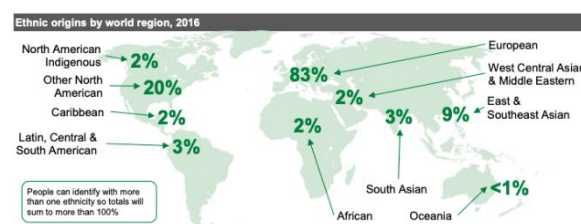


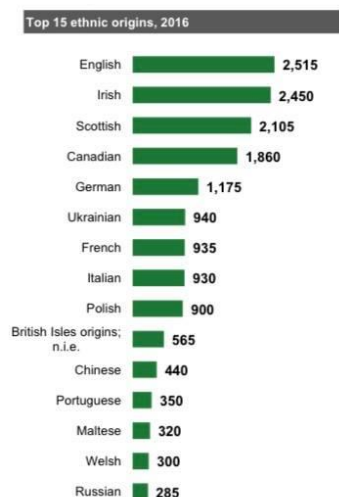
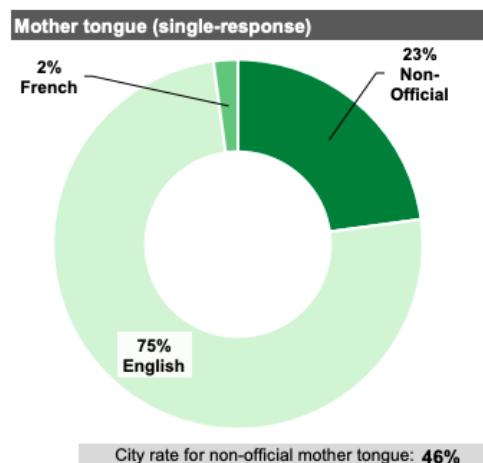
Fig. 2<sup>3</sup>

Furthermore, we can see in the graphic below (Fig. 3) that the population is not only mostly ethnically European but also that a majority are ethnically from the British Isles. Around 79% of the residents listed their ethnic origins as either English, Scottish, Irish, Welsh, or British Isles origins n.i.e (see Fig. 3) for this category). This is not counting those who listed their ethnic origin as Canadian, though due to this area's history of colonization by the British it is likely that at least some of the residents who listed this as their ethnic origin are ethnically British as well. As well, the graph below (Fig. 4) demonstrates the residents'

<sup>2</sup> Number of people born in Canada living in Runnymede-Bloor West Village Compared in comparison to Toronto, 2016. Source: Toronto's Neighbourhood Profiles tool

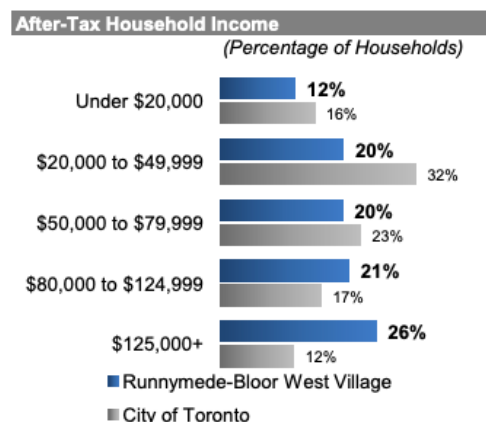
<sup>3</sup> Parts of the world residents of Runnymede Bloor-West Village have listed as their ethnic origin, 2016. Source: Toronto's Neighbourhood Profiles tool

mother tongue. The overwhelming majority's first language is English, and the percentage of people in Runnymede Bloor-West Village whose mother tongue is not English consists of only half of the percentage for the city, further suggesting that the majority of the residents of Runnymede Bloor-West Village were born in Canada or came from a place that spoke English.

Fig. 3<sup>4</sup>Fig. 4<sup>5</sup>

<sup>4</sup> Top 15 ethnic origins in Runnymede Bloor-West Village, 2016. Source: Toronto's Neighbourhood Profiles tool

<sup>5</sup> Residence's listed mother tongue, 2016. Source: Toronto's Neighbourhood Profiles tool



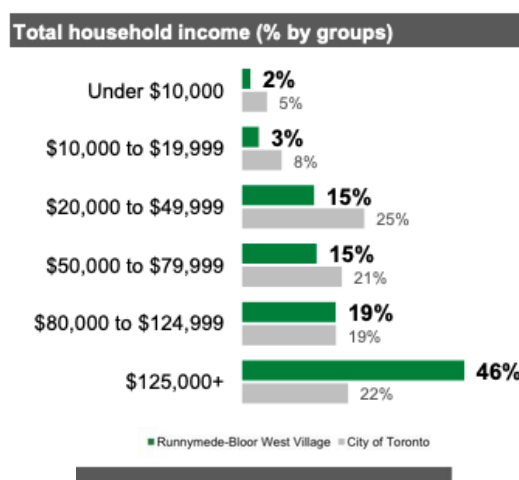
	Neighbourhood	City
Median After-Tax Household Income	\$74,729	\$52,149
Average After-Tax Household Income	\$95,119	\$70,945

Percent of Population in Low-Income (LIM-AT) **9%**

Fig. 5<sup>6</sup>

Runnymede-Bloor West Village is also a higher-than-average income area and is only becoming more so with time. The two images above, (Fig. 5) from 2011, and below (Fig. 6) from 2016, tells this story in the most obvious way. We can see that there are not very many low-income people living in the Runnymede Bloor West Village, and the number has more than halved between 2011 and 2016. Households making less than \$ 20,000, those living at or below the poverty line, went from 12% in 2011 to 5% in 2016. The middle class has also shrunk by a substantial degree, shrinking by 11%: The brackets of \$ 20,000 - \$48,000 and \$ 50,000 - \$ 79,000, or those who have enough to live comfortably but not luxuriously, both went from 20% in 2011 to 15% in 2016. Those doing a little better and able to afford larger houses, making \$80,000 to \$124,000, also went down a little, from 21% in 2011 to 19% in 2016. However, the most dramatic and telling statistic in these two graphs is the bracket of \$125,000+, people who are firmly in the upper income bracket and could consider themselves wealthy. The number of households making over \$ 125 000+ a year has ballooned from 26% in 2011 to 46% in 2016, an increase of 20 percentage points.

<sup>6</sup> Income levels in Runnymede Bloor-West Village, 2011. Source: Toronto's Neighbourhood Profiles tool

Fig. 6<sup>7</sup>

Despite these differences from the city of Toronto as a whole, the findings appear to show that the neighbourhood follows the trends that have been observed in Toronto, and it is the exception that proves the rule. While Runnymede Bloor-West Village is an outlier in Toronto in terms of diversity, it also shows that it is part of a trend in Toronto: increasing segregation. It is worth noting that there is no evidence that this is due to any overt policies of discrimination on behalf of the city government, property realtors, or local landlords. Instead, the neighbourhood appears to have been shaped by the racial character of income inequality that has formed in Toronto due to the biases, unconscious or otherwise, of employers. Racialized immigrants often struggle to find employment outside of low paying, insecure jobs in sectors like the service industry (Block & Galabuzi, 2011). This is despite the fact that almost all immigrants who arrived under the points system, roughly half of all immigrants to Canada, have post-secondary degrees. Studies show this is not a problem faced by non-racialized immigrants in anywhere near the same numbers (Block, Sheila & Galabuzi, 2011). This means that those with lower incomes tend to be racialized, while those with higher incomes tend not to be. This could be observed during my trip to the neighbourhood; the vast majority of those working in the restaurants and shops were racialized, while their patrons, those with enough disposable income to shop and eat out, generally were not. Therefore, as the neighbourhood gentrifies

dramatically, with people in the highest income bracket edging towards being the majority of residents, the neighbourhood becomes less diverse as well.

This data also shows that Runnymede-Bloor West Village is part of the trend of income polarisation that has been observed in Toronto. As mentioned earlier, the top income bracket, households making more than \$124 000 a year, was 46% of the neighbourhood's population in 2016. That income bracket was 26% in 2011, showing that it has been growing rapidly at the expense of all other income brackets. It is therefore likely that today, in 2021, that that income bracket is either the majority of the households in the neighbourhood or is very close to becoming the majority. This means the wealth is concentrated in the area and pushes lower income brackets out as housing and living costs increase, transforming Runnymede-Bloor West village from city number 2 to city number 1.

The neighbourhood also displays the trends in gentrification that can be observed in the rest of the city. My trip to the neighbourhood revealed that "lower class" businesses, such as hardware stores and fast food restaurants, appeared to be struggling, while "higher class" businesses, such as more expensive restaurants and apparel stores, did not. Much of this could be attributed to the time of day, the weather, and the fact that my in-person survey was conducted on a Sunday. However, while this could explain the lack of customers in the lower-class businesses, the fact that many of the stores seem to have closed permanently suggests that the lack of customers is the norm, not the exception. The neighbourhood can therefore be seen as part of the trend of businesses in gentrified areas either changing to fit the new, higher class clientele or going out of business due to their earlier clientele leaving, because of an increase in building rental costs, or a combination of the two.

What is to be done, then? This paper has identified that as the neighbourhood gentrifies and the cost of owning or renting a house, apartment or building goes up and up, both residents and businesses will struggle to function as more and more of their income goes towards their primary residence or place of business. This has the effect of locking out those who cannot afford to be there, a bar that is getting steadily higher as time goes by. This also has the effect of increasingly segregating the neighbourhood, as

<sup>7</sup> Income levels in Runnymede Bloor-West Village, 2016. Source: Toronto's Neighbourhood Profiles tool

racialized people are locked out of the area due to the economic struggles they face.

In the short term, one of the best ways to deal with the issue of housing costs and racial segregation would be to ensure that affordable housing in Runnymede-Bloor West Village becomes the rule, not the exception. To achieve this, more affordable housing must be built. This would address the problem in two ways. As supply meets demand with housing that is affordable, the housing princes in the rest of the neighbourhood will, in theory, go down as well to compete. It also addresses the struggles of the local businesses. These places are perfectly situated to be the nucleus of a thriving community; there is a variety of restaurants and other places to gather such as clubs and bars, and there are stores of all kinds. They are all within walking distance of each other, and public transportation is close and accessible. All they lack is people. More affordable housing would not only introduce more people to the neighbourhood but would also introduce people who have enough disposable income to spend money shopping and eating out, instead of spending that disposable income on their rents and mortgages. That said, it may not be enough to simply build more housing. It may also be necessary to block the construction of housing designed for higher incomes, as well as block the conversion of affordable housing to unaffordable housing through either extensive renovation or through the simple raising of prices. This would be done to apply further downward pressure on housing prices. This halting of the rising costs of living may also result in an end to the increase in segregation that has been creeping into the neighbourhood at a steady pace. Keeping the cost of living low will act to stop the income based racial segregation that has become a trend in Toronto in the short term. This could act as an acceptable stop gap to address segregation until a more permanent, equitable solution to race-based income inequality can be found.

It is worth noting that this course of action requires the participation of local government, as much of this proposed solution would have to happen through tools like zoning laws to stop the building of, or conversion to, unaffordable housing. There will also be a need for government subsidies and other incentives to encourage developers to build this affordable housing. Alternatively, the local, provincial, or even federal government could develop the housing projects itself, as it was in business of doing until the early 2000s. It would therefore be necessary for the neighbourhood to organise politically and form alliances with other communities to get a government

elected that is willing to be an enthusiastic partner in this endeavor.

Such an approach has been shown to work in other neighbourhoods in Toronto. The Neighbourhood of South Riverdale is a place that, for a long time, was able to resist the gentrification that had radically altered the nearby area of North Riverdale. This was despite a constant media narrative that South Riverdale was economically 'up and coming' and referred to the diverse working-class people who lived there with condescension. There was also a sharp increase in real estate speculation (Walks and August, 2008, pp. 2613-2614). This was accomplished through a range of approaches, but one of the most decisive factors was the actions of the majority progressive city council that came into power in the early 1970s. This new city council ended several 'urban renewal' projects in the neighbourhood that threatened to price out its residents, instituted zoning laws that prevented the kind of development that led to gentrification, implemented rent controls, and opened the planning process to local participation (Walks and August, 2008, pp. 2613-2614). This allowed South Riverdale to remain an affordable place to live for much of the last few decades of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. South Riverdale is also an example of what can happen when such progressive policies are removed. In the mid-1990s, rent controls were removed for vacated properties. This incentivised landlords to evict low-income tenants, replacing them with tenants with increased rent prices. This has been a major contributing factor to homelessness in Toronto (Walks and August, 2008, pp. 2613-14). This example serves as a valuable lesson to Runnymede Bloor-West Village, showing what can be achieved and conversely, what can happen if nothing is done.

It is important to note that addressing the cost of housing is not a silver bullet that will address every issue that can be found in Runnymede-Bloor West Village. There are transformative solutions to the issues of income inequality and racial segregation that have been discussed, that range from attempts at cultural change to address the biases of employers to a guaranteed minimum income. However, these solutions are much grander in scope and require systemic changes that are too far reaching to properly address in this paper. The solution of more affordable housing supported by a progressive city government, on the other hand, is something that can be done relatively quickly and will have immediate, positive effects. Furthermore, it is far easier for people to make positive changes in their lives when they have an affordable place to live. Affordable housing, therefore, serves as a

foundation upon which further positive changes can be made.

### **Conclusion and Recommendations for Further Study**

Runnymede-Bloor West Village is a neighbourhood that is being shaped by the forces of gentrification and segregation that effect the city of Toronto as whole, resulting in it transitioning from a middle-class neighbourhood to an upper class one, pushing out residents and businesses who do not keep up and adding to Toronto's racial segregation through the push and pull of Toronto's race-based income inequality. There is a need for more affordable housing to be part of the solution, at least in the short term. There is also a need to prevent the building of more unaffordable housing, as well as the conversion of affordable housing to housing whose price makes it out of reach of the neighbourhoods' current residents. The cooperation of the local government would be instrumental in achieving this, as the example of South Riverdale demonstrates. In theory, this would be a good solution to the problem of housing unaffordability in the area, and its effect of segregation. However, the effects of introducing affordable housing into an increasingly wealthy neighbourhood should be studied to see if this is indeed the case. It would also be worth looking at if there are social tensions that come with this introduction, or if local businesses will adapt to serve these new, lower income residents, or if they maintain their current practices, making them essentially unavailable to lower income people. This research would allow us to discover if this is in fact a way to address the problem, or if another solution must be found.

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