

Event: Radius Panel, "Housing Dynamics and Displacement in Cambridge"
4/28/15

I attended Radius's panel on "Housing Dynamics and Displacement in Cambridge", or gentrification for short. The panel was about how large corporations - including MIT - are bringing absurd amounts of development to Cambridge and Somerville and in the process displacing families that have been in the area for generations. I also learned about how housing assistance works in the forms of mobile vouchers and public housing and how those systems have changed over the years, as well as the work various community organizations are doing to try and mitigate the detrimental effects of gentrification, since stopping it from happening does not appear to be an option.

Current efforts to address this problem seem to revolve around community organizing. Efforts including trying to change policy - for example, increasing the percentage of units per residential space that must be available at prices affordable to low-income families - and trying to work directly with contractors to ensure that all developments bring some benefits to the community. I was surprised to learn that MIT could make a big difference by providing housing for a much higher percentage of our grad students. The surprise stemmed from the fact that I'd never heard of anyone pushing MIT to do that before.

I didn't go to the event explicitly because I'm concerned about gentrification in the Cambridge area - I live in a dorm and I'm leaving Cambridge in a month when I graduate. I went because I am moving to San Francisco to be part of the tech industry that is gentrifying the city like crazy, and I wanted to learn how I could fight that, or at least try to avoid being part of the problem. I came away from the event thinking that this isn't something that I can work on as an individual, but I can find organizations in San Francisco analogous to the ones in Cambridge and work with them.

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Spring 2015

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