Commodifying Culture, Displacing Creators

"Regeneration," displacement, and Black Atlantic music in Lewisham, London

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Greetings & Research Questions

Research Questions

- How is culture constructed and produced in official urban regeneration discourses?

- How does Black Atlantic music reflect the governance of culture and space?

Methods

- Discourse analysis of London Borough of Lewisham's cultural-related policies/plans 2001-present, particularly as they relate to "urban regeneration"

- Musicological Discourse Analysis of interviews and music produced by Lewisham residents

Musicological Discourse Analysis

- Developed by Dr Monique Charles in her doctoral research of grime's origins
- Transcends genre and considers role of place, history/shared experiences in musical development
- Interviewing 20 musicians under Black Atlantic/Afrodiasporic umbrella (DJs, R&B, soul, garage, jazz, grime, spoken word, experimental)
  - How/where they got started in music
  - What kinds of places were important
  - How that has changed over time
- Aware of ambient noise, samples used, lyrical content and imagery, music video settings
- Attending gigs

Urban Planning in Lewisham

Construction Enquirer (2020)

London Councils (2016)

Londonist (2019)

LEAN (2020)

News Shopper (2021)

Lewisham Black music history and culture

- Blues parties, shebeens
- Sound systems and youth clubs
  - Permeates into other musics
  - Intergenerational mentoring
  - Cross-cultural exchange
  - Public music education services and groups
- Source of education, empowerment, and resistance against white supremacy

Fox & Firkin

Moonshot Centre

Steamdown at Matchstick Piehouse (Vinyl Factory 2018)

Saxon Sound System

Midi Music Company

Culture Commodification

- Criminalisation and surveillance (Form 696) of Black musicians and events, venue closures, licensing restrictions
- Culture associated with regeneration/rebranding area
  - Flagship buildings
  - Increase land value
  - Attract new residents/businesses
  - Tourism
- Praises "multiculturalism" without naming constituent parts

Deptford Lounge

"Culture has defined our city through the decades, from reactionary punks in the 70s to grime music today. As well as great transport and roads, London also needs its soul. It needs culture and creativity."

Justine Simons OBE
Deputy Mayor for Culture and Creative Industries

Quote from Mayor of London's Culture Strategy (Greater London Authority 2018)

Trinity Laban

Language of "regeneration"

- Puts a positive, glossy spin on racist, anti-immigrant rhetoric
  - "toxic cultures" of "inner city" estates
  - Problematizing and criminalizing young Black people ("deprived")

- Equates condition of the built environment with the people who reside there
  - Low self-esteem and ambition

- Commodifying culture at the expense of its creators
  - "creative clusters" in Deptford, New Cross, Lewisham deliberately increase land value

Alternate Vocabularies - Black Public Sphere

- Violence of state-led gentrification/displacement is euphemised ("decanting")

- Residents at risk of displacement are patronised ("vibrant community")

- Need to differentiate with more precise vocabulary of the Black public sphere
  - Differentiate from the euphemisms for displacement, eviction, social cleansing
  - Describe people as they describe themselves and more specific terms
  - Rather than "marginalized," counter-public, countercultural, alternative public spheres

- Formalizing and commodifying cultural forms by outsiders including local government
  - Emphasis on spaces and "placemaking" rather than people
  - Aspirational, hypothetical outsiders rather than existing locals
  - Private investment (especially real estate developers) and time-limited schemes
  - Ignores intersecting housing, transportation, infrastructural needs for existing residents