

Response Paper: David Harvey's "*Contested Cities*"

David Harvey argues that nineteenth century urbanization was more geared to improving the standard of living than the urbanization effort of today. While I do not disagree with the assessment that this reform movement benefited the population greatly, the initial quality of life in early urbanized areas was extremely poor, so any improvements had massive effects on the lives of all inhabitants, beyond class. As the standard of living in most modern western cities is already relatively high any further improvements are associated with higher costs. Due to this, most gentrified areas often come with a prohibitive cost for large portions of the population. Which sparks social divide. Following Harvey, this is further fueled by the decreased dependance by capital and industry on a large local workforce. One of Harvey's main arguments that cities are a product of the processes running the city, while quite theoretical at a first glance opens a new perspective on how cities transform and evolve. I agree with the basic idea that looking at cities as a "passive, neutral container of processes" is too simplistic. This idea, originally applied to space/time by Newton, Descartes, and Kant, does not account for the processes in the city. These processes themselves shaping the city and the interactions an interdependencies between the city evolving and activities taking place in the urban environment is not considered with this basic theory. Harvey's analogy of space-time continuum to explain the urbanization process and social impact is a great starting point for discussion. It opens the mind to the fact that there are different theories on how processes and their surrounds influence each other, specifically in the urban environment. However, to me this overcomplicates the idea of each process is not in a vacuum but has the capability to influence and be influenced by all other processes as well. Harvey's further critique of nineteenth-century urban master planning was the belief that a good city design could avoid future social problems. Here is main issue Harvey takes is that good planning does not

automatically account for the processes that take place within and therefore shape an urban environment. On the topic of environmentalism Harvey makes an excellent point, cities have historically rarely been viewed as part of the environment. Based on the fact that more than half of the worlds population today lives in urbanized areas it is curious why urban cities are only recently part of the environmental discussion. It seems that Harvey is arguing that both natural and constructed environments should be considered part of the overall environment. In conclusion, Harvey offers the convincing argument that urban areas are not only important but possibly the most important settings for vital political and economic processes shaping communities and environments. Therefore we should not wait and expect an instant solution but start the long process of healing.