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From "London: Aspects of Change" (1964)

Ruth Glass

One by one, many of the working class quarters of London have been invaded by the middle classes—upper and lower. Shabby, modest mews and cottages—two rooms up and two down—have been taken over, when their leases have expired, and have become elegant, expensive residences. Larger Victorian houses, downgraded in an earlier or recent period—which were used as lodging houses or were otherwise in multiple occupation—have been upgraded once again. Nowadays, many of these houses are being sub-divided into costly flats or 'houselets' (in terms of the new real estate and jargon). The current social status and value of such dwellings are frequently in inverse relation to their size, and in any case enormously inflated by comparison with previous levels in

their neighbourhoods. Once this process of 'gentrification' starts in a district, it goes on rapidly until all or most of the original working class occupiers are displaced, and the whole social character of the district is changed. There is very little left of the poorer enclaves of Hampstead and Chelsea: in those boroughs, the upper-middle class takeover was consolidated some time ago. The invasion has since spread to Islington, Paddington, North Kensington—even to the 'shady' parts of Notting Hill—to Battersea, and to several other districts, north and south of the river (The East End has so far been exempt). And this is an inevitable development, in view of the demographic, economic and political pressures to which London, and especially Central London, has been subjected.

Box 2 Ruth Glass



Plate 6 Ruth Glass. Photograph from Ruth Glass' Obituary in *The Times* 9th March 1990.

Ruth Adele Glass [née Lazarus] (1912–1990), sociologist, was born on 30 June 1912 in Berlin, Germany. She embarked on a degree in social studies at the University of Berlin, and published a study of youth unemployment in Berlin in 1932 (reprinted in *Clichés of Urban Doom*, 1989), but following the rise of the Nazis she left Germany in 1932 before completing her degree. She studied at the University of Geneva and in Prague before arriving in London in the mid-1930s, where she resumed her sociological studies, at the London School of Economics. *Watling*, a study of a new London County Council cottage estate in Hendon, on the outskirts of London, published in 1939, established her reputation as a social scientist.

From 1940 until 1942 Ruth Glass was senior research officer at the Bureau of Applied Social Research, Columbia University, New York, and was awarded an MA degree. She returned to Britain in 1943 and became involved in town planning, as lecturer and research officer at the Association for Planning and Regional Reconstruction. From 1947 to 1948 she was a research officer for Political and Economic Planning, she returned to academic life in 1950, to University College London, which remained her academic base for the rest of her life. In 1951 Ruth Glass became director of the social research unit at University College and she founded the Centre for Urban Studies in 1951, becoming director of research in 1958, a post she retained until her death. Although she was a key figure in establishing urban sociology as an academic discipline, publishing *Urban Sociology in Great Britain* in 1955, Ruth Glass opposed the idea of research for its own sake. A Marxist all her life, she believed that the purpose of sociological research was to influence government policy and bring about social change, and to this end she involved herself in political debate. She had a passion for justice and fought hard for those she believed to be oppressed. She studied housing problems in London, editing *London, Aspects of Change* in 1964, and publishing *London's Housing Needs* (1965) and *Housing in Camden* (1969). She gave evidence to several government committees and inquiries, most notably the royal commission on local government in Greater London (1957–60). She invented the term 'gentrification', giving warnings about the squeezing of the poor out of London and the creation of upper-class ghettos.

Source: *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* (<http://www.oxforddnb.com>)