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Case Study

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Promises Made, Communities Lost: The Story of Little Jamaica

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Abstract

This case study examines the socio-spatial impacts of the Eglinton Crosstown LRT on Little Jamaica, a historic cultural and commercial hub for Toronto's Jamaican diaspora. Drawing on James C. Scott's theory of authoritarian high-modernism, the study argues that state-led urban redevelopment, combined with speculative real estate investment, has accelerated gentrification, displacement, and cultural erasure in the neighbourhood. Using a qualitative case study methodology, the research is based on four semi-structured interviews with Black business owners, faith leaders, and community advocates directly affected by redevelopment pressures. Findings reveal that prolonged infrastructure construction, rising rents, exclusionary planning policies, and insufficient municipal support have contributed to the closure of local businesses, residential displacement, and the weakening of community networks. The study also examines how public-private partnerships and transit-oriented development policies often prioritize investor interests while marginalizing local voices in planning processes. At the same time, the research highlights form of community resistance and resilience through Black churches and grassroots advocacy organizations supporting affected residents and businesses. This study contributes to scholarship on racialized redevelopment, anti-Black spatial restructuring, and the unequal consequences of infrastructure-led urban change.

Keywords:

Little Jamaica, Gentrification, Urban Redevelopment, Displacement.

How to Cite This Article

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Introduction

Since the 1950s, Little Jamaica has served as the premier cultural and commercial centre for Toronto's Jamaican community. In recent years, however, the neighbourhood has been transformed by the prolonged construction of the Eglinton Crosstown LRT and intensifying real estate speculation. The City of Toronto have reported that these developmental pressures have contributed to the displacement of more than 140 businesses and numerous residents (City of Toronto, 2022, p.6). Consistent with these concerns, one report found that Little Jamaica experienced a 13% population decline between 2006 and 2016 (Lewis, 2022). This paper examines Little Jamaica as a case study of state-led urban redevelopment, asking how large-scale infrastructure projects contribute to gentrification, the displacement of residents and businesses, and the erosion of cultural identity. This paper asks: How do state-led development projects, combined with speculative development, contribute to gentrification, displacement, and cultural erasure in Little Jamaica?

Overarching Scholarly Framework of the Project

James C. Scott's (1998) concept of authoritarian high-modernism provides the theoretical framework for this case study. High-modernist planning privileges technocratic expertise, centralized control, and abstract rational order, often at the expense of what he calls the *Métis* the situated knowledge of local communities and its effects are especially damaging when paired with strong state power and weak civil society; in such contexts, redevelopment can produce displacement, marginalization, and cultural erasure (Scott, 1998). This lens is apt for understanding the transformations experienced in Little Jamaica, where the Eglinton Crosstown LRT has been accompanied by the displacement of more than 140 businesses and many longtime residents and a broader remaking of the neighbourhood's social and cultural fabric. Building on this, the analysis foregrounds the lived experiences of Black business owners, faith leaders, and community advocates to show how a planning regime presented as modernization can function, in practice, as a vehicle for cultural loss.

Methodology

This study adopts a qualitative case study design to examine the socio-spatial effects of the state-led Eglinton Crosstown LRT redevelopment project in Little Jamaica. The project is grounded in the lived experiences of four community members most directly affected by gentrification, displacement, and cultural erasure because of such state-led development projects. The empirical basis of the study consists of four in-person semi-structured interviews with purposively selected community stakeholders, many of whom are often absent from official planning narratives.¹ They include two long-standing business owners—James and John the latter whom represents regional property interests as the Business Improvement Area chairman; Lawrence, a Baptist Minister whose church, although not located in Little Jamaica, has existed in a comparatively gentrified neighbourhood in Toronto and whose interview provides an illustration as to how Black churches have provided help and resilience to not only members of the affected community but to the broader Black diasporic community; and Laura, a senior member of John Howard Society, a Canadian non-profit organization that provides support programs to ex-inmates and justice-involved people.

Furthermore, this study employs an interpretive, reflexive methodology to understand the socio-spatial impacts of the Eglinton LRT construction on Little Jamaica. The analysis is organized around culturally and socially significant sites in Little Jamaica to connect individual experiences to broader structural processes. To ensure empirical rigour, this paper triangulates participant testimony with academic literature on large-scale infrastructure and redevelopment. This approach bridges individual lived experiences with broader structural processes, acknowledging that while the four interviews provide essential depth, they require the supplementary evidence of scholarly and grey literature to sustain the paper's wider structural claims. As such, it incorporates evidence from municipal and provincial government reports and policy documents. Throughout the paper, efforts are made to clearly distinguish between findings derived from interviews, evidence drawn from secondary sources, information reported in media sources, and the author's own analysis and interpretation. Lastly, while this project was conducted as a senior seminar capstone and therefore did not require formal REB approval, all interviews adhered to research ethical guidelines, namely informed consent and participant anonymization.

Findings

Commercial and Residential Displacement

James, the owner of a local tailor shop, has operated his business since 1973 and reiterated that the LRT construction project has displaced both local businesses and residents. On the commercial side, James describes his business

¹ To protect participant privacy and comply with ethical research standards, all interview participant names have been replaced with pseudonyms. Any identifying organizational or contextual details have been limited to those necessary for analytical purposes. The author obtained informed consent from all participants prior to conducting interviews, and participants were informed of the academic purpose of the study and their right to withdraw at any stage of the research process.

and those of his neighbours as “a huge part of our lives, [it’s] our identity,” and expresses that “this sense of identity, history is being removed due to the LRT.” James reports a substantial decline in patronage due to construction-related barriers, specifically the loss of parking and reduced foot traffic. He reiterated that this consequence is seen in other small businesses: “a lot of other businesses that relied on foot activity ended up closing for good. In the first 5-10 years, the revenue has dropped 60%. The store was very empty.” Furthermore, James identifies the loss of the community’s Jamaican reggae culture as a key indicator of neighbourhood decline. He observes that this culture once fostered social cohesion, and argues that as these cultural pillars have eroded, the community’s collective sense of identity and unity has diminished in tandem. On the residential side, James has mentioned that the construction project has attracted capital investment, wealthy renters and real estate development. While he concedes that gentrification “brings life back to the community,” the new housing stock is inaccessible to current tenants, many of whom have been displaced by unaffordable rental costs. As a result, with many historical businesses and homes being slowly replaced, James expresses significant apprehension regarding the long-term social consequences of this shift: “I am worried that Little Jamaica will cease to exist.”

In a separate interview, the Chairman of the Little Jamaica BIA, John, provided a meso-level analysis of the Eglinton Crosstown LRT’s socio-economic impacts. He emphasized that the prolonged construction has disproportionately harmed local businesses, a situation exacerbated by systemic municipal neglect and a lack of political will to provide adequate support. John recounted how routine construction-related activities such as mandatory hydro installations led to water trucks from companies like Seaway Water Supply parking directly in front of his salon, obstructing both visibility and customer access. The persistent presence of heavy machinery, including excavators, dump trucks, and cement mixers, routinely blocked storefronts and littered the area with debris, further deterring pedestrian traffic. Additionally, unsanitary conditions introduced by portable toilets and construction workers congregating to smoke near business entrances degraded the public-facing environment of such businesses. Collectively, these disruptions not only undermined the operational capacity of small businesses but also signalled a broader pattern of neglect by municipal authorities, who failed to implement mitigation measures or offer adequate support. Reflecting on the accumulated harm, he concluded: “This is not something I would ever wish on my worst enemy.”

John further addressed why Little Jamaica experienced disproportionate impacts from the LRT project compared to other communities along the corridor. John offered a qualitative answer. First-generation Jamaican immigrants run most small businesses, many of whom face language and digital literacy barriers. These challenges were exacerbated during the COVID-19 pandemic, as emergency relief initiatives like federal aid and Metrolina’s “Transit Expansion Construction Mitigation Grant Program” required complex digital applications. This effectively precluded many local owners from accessing relief intended to offset construction externalities. Though Canadian data is sparse, international research finds that language barriers impede immigrant access to social support systems,

contributing to a 39% disparity in public assistance uptake compared to native-born populations (Ochieng, 2013; Narayan, 2023). These intersecting barriers offer a compelling explanation for the disproportionate harm faced by Little Jamaica's business community.

The Commodification of Little Jamaica

In another interview of a hair salon owned by the chairman of the BIA, John critiqued the City of Toronto's reliance on tokenistic gestures, pointing to Reggae Lane, an alley commemorating Jamaica's reggae culture (Parris, 2019). While visually celebratory, he critiqued the absence of substantive aid for businesses and residents most impacted by the Eglinton LRT construction. He noted that Reggae Lane is currently a hub for drug use by those who have been displaced because of the LRT construction. Also, the mural of colourful crayons at the Crosstown LRT station adjacent to his salon purports to reflect the "diverse and rich cultural mosaic" of Little Jamaica (see Appendix J). However, this mural built without community consultation and Jamaican representation illustrates the effort to "internationalize" Little Jamaica, further showcasing the tokenism behind Reggae Lane. Their critique exposes how the state co-opts terms like "diversity" in urban planning to promote a façade of inclusivity to appeal to the "creative class" and transform such cultural spaces into marketable and consumable commodities for profit (Tuyen, 2023; Terzano, 2014). His testimony foregrounds a profound erosion of trust in institutional actors like the Government of Ontario and Metrolina, rooted in repeated project delays, opaque communication, and a lack of clear accountability due to the blurred boundaries between public agencies and private partners like Crosslin.

Gentrification and Policing

An interview with Laura, a director at the John Howard Society, highlights the collateral harms of the Eglinton LRT project, particularly regarding the social control of vulnerable populations. Laura identifies the LRT construction as a catalyst for local homelessness, noting a subsequent rise in the criminalization of unhoused individuals by the Toronto Police Service. This trend is evidenced by a growing number of individuals entering the correctional system without a fixed address, a pattern that underscores the structural nexus between housing insecurity and criminalization (JHS, 2022). This precarity is intensified by the confluence of speculative real estate development, LRT construction, and the lingering economic effects of COVID-19. While municipal data reports 700 to 800 newly identified homeless individuals monthly, rates of transition into stable housing remain disproportionately low (Habibinia et al., 2023).

The Black Church: A Source of Resilience and Support

Despite these harrowing realities experienced by Little Jamaica, the interviews have revealed a resilient undercurrent of hope rooted in community-based resistance, embodied by institutions like the Black Church. At a historical Black church in Downtown Toronto, its senior pastor, named Lawrence, emphasized the institution's role as a vital pillar of support and resistance for

marginalized communities facing displacement. Reflecting on his extensive experience with the Regent Park revitalization project,² Lawrence noted that while his congregation is not located in Little Jamaica, the challenges of gentrification and the subsequent erosion of state-provided social safety nets are pervasive and thus functions as a comparative case for this study. He argued that the Church serves as a critical proxy for state support, providing a necessary continuum of care for unhoused and displaced populations across Toronto's gentrifying neighbourhoods. Through strategic partnerships with organizations like Evergreen (single motherhood support), Matthew's House (refugee support), and Youth Unlimited (homeless youth support), the church extends a continuum of care providing essential goods such as diapers, baby food, clothing, and water, and offering sanctuary space, free of charge and irrespective of religious affiliation. This multifaceted model of care redefines the Church's function, transcending its traditional role as a place of worship to become an active site of civic engagement and community care.

Discussion

The interview at local tailor shop exemplifies how the Eglinton Crosstown LRT has accelerated residential and commercial displacement in Little Jamaica. James warned that these shifts threaten to erase the neighborhood's Jamaican cultural identity by replacing its historically Black population with wealthier, often white newcomers a process of state-sponsored gentrification masked as urban revitalization. His account aligns with urban planning literature. Lewis (2022) conceptualizes financialization as treating housing as a profit-generating asset rather than a human right, whereby landlords and investors maximize returns through rent increases, evictions, and redevelopment (Lewis, 2022). In Little Jamaica, this manifests in the City of Toronto's EGLINTON connects planning framework and developers' exploitation of the neighborhood's rent gap.

The EGLINTON connects study, undertaken by the City of Toronto between 2012 and 2014, is a long-term urban planning initiative designed to shape development along the 19-kilometre Eglinton Crosstown LRT corridor under the guiding themes of "Building, Greening, and Travelling Eglinton" (Gordon, 2018). Its executive summary articulates a vision grounded in neoliberal urbanism, advancing gentrification through "infrastructure renewal" to bring 76,000 new residents through a combined public and private investment of up to \$15 billion (Gordon, 2018). Harrowingly, this report does not mention any policies that will support original residents. Moreover, the stakeholder categorization reflects a top-down, technocratic model of urban planning that sidelines community input. Internal stakeholders those directly influencing the project's vision, policy development, and implementation include bodies such as the technical advisory committee and city divisions like Toronto Water and the Toronto Parking Authority. In contrast, residents are classified as external stakeholders, excluding them from substantive decision-making processes. Also, while the project claims to uphold community consultation, these efforts are structured more as public relations exercises than genuine participatory planning (Gordon, 2018). This

² See Brail and Kumar (2017) for a detailed discussion of the Regent Park revitalization, widely regarded as one of the largest urban redevelopment and gentrification projects in North America.

framing marginalizes their voices and reflects the high-modernist vision that imposes investment-driven rationalities onto complex, lived urban realities. By privileging financial and bureaucratic actors, EGLINTON connects positions Little Jamaica as a site of capital accumulation rather than a culturally rich and community-rooted space.

Furthermore, Smith's (1996) rent gap refers to the difference between the rent a landlord is currently earning and the higher rent they could earn if the property were redeveloped to its "highest and best use" (Smith, 1996). Decades of disinvestment in Little Jamaica suppressed rental values, creating ideal conditions for rent gap exploitation. The Eglinton Crosstown LRT has increased the area's real estate value, prompting a surge of interest from private developers. These actors have sought to capitalize on the widened rent gap by acquiring undervalued properties, undertaking renovations, and significantly raising rents or reselling at inflated prices, thereby accelerating the displacement of long-standing Black residents (Lewis, 2022). Major landlords such as Empire Communities, Starlight Investments, and the Blackstone Group exemplified this acquisition strategy and drove residential displacement in Little Jamaica. Blackstone a global investment firm that owns real estate assets entered the Canadian real estate market through a joint venture with Starlight to acquire its first Canadian portfolio, which included several properties in Little Jamaica (Lewis, 2022). The construction of the Eglinton Crosstown LRT increased the area's potential rent, which triggered a wave of speculative investment and fueled a buying frenzy among these two groups seeking to capitalize on the anticipated appreciation of land values. Before the LRT's announcement, landlords held approximately 20% of all units sold in Little Jamaica; by the start of construction in 2011, this figure had nearly doubled, and today, they control over 60% of the real estate market in Little Jamaica (Lewis, 2022).

The redevelopment of 1603 Eglinton Avenue West exemplifies the convergence of the EGLINTON connects planning framework and the strategic exploitation of Little Jamaica's rent gap, wherein state-sanctioned planning tools enable private developers to accelerate racialized displacement under the guise of urban improvement. The project proposed an 18-story mixed-use condominium initiated by Empire Communities, which exceeded Toronto's zoning regulations (Spurr, 2018). However, it was approved through Section 37 of Ontario's Planning Act, a policy lever that permits developers to exceed zoning limits in exchange for "community benefits" (Planning Act, 1990). In this case, community benefits included free transit passes and the display of artistic murals that respected the cultural vibrancy of Little Jamaica were promised (Switzman, 2015, p. 27). However, there were no affordable housing or equitable provisions like the first right of return policy like the one the tailor shop owner proposed which would prioritize original residents accessing redeveloped units and serve as a mechanism to offset residential displacement. Consequently, the dramatic residential transformations and developments triggered by the Eglinton LRT have skyrocketed housing prices by 121% over five years and catalyzed a shift from traditional low- and mid-rise housing to high-density condo developments. With most new units designed for single residents and professionals, the current

demographic dominated by racialized single-parent families is excluded (Mohamed, 2021).

Moreover, the Chairman of the Little Jamaica BIA provides a telling high-modernist explanation for this harm lies in the City of Toronto's deliberate policy decisions. While providing inadequate and culturally insensitive support to Little Jamaica, the government offered substantial financial and legal support to other historical neighbourhoods such as Kensington Market, also known as Little Italy. The case of Kensington Market illustrates the City of Toronto's will to intervene when cultural and commercial interests align with municipal priorities. RioCan one of Canada's largest real estate investment trusts proposed building a three-story Walmart in Kensington Market (Skinner, 2013). City officials rejected the proposal because it contravened the Official Plan's mandate to preserve "designated neighbourhoods," which are meant to experience gradual, context-sensitive change with minimal disruption to traffic and parking (Loney, 2013). The City invoked the interim control bylaw under Section 38 of the Planning Act, which allows municipalities to temporarily freeze development and conduct a land-use study to assess the harms to Kensington Market's cultural and economic integrity (Government of Ontario, 2019). Ultimately, RioCan's development proposal in Kensington Market was withdrawn (Clemencia, 2014). These are the same tools the Little Jamaica community has pleaded for to shield their community from the onslaught of development but to no avail. Despite 116 active commercial development applications in Little Jamaica, the Toronto government has remained inert, revealing a stark disparity in how state protections are applied and whose heritage and livelihoods are deemed worth preserving (Samuel, 2021).

This inequity is also pronounced by looking at the directly adjacent Cedarvale community, where visible signs of investment such as modern townhouses signal a markedly different urban experience (See Appendix I). This stark contrast further reveals the government's differential deployment of policy tools to protect specific neighbourhoods from speculative redevelopment. Cedarvale, situated beside the Eglinton West subway station, qualifies as a Protected Major Transit Station Area (PMTSA) and falls under Amendment 557 of Toronto's Official Plan (City of Toronto, 2022). This mandates that new residential developments within PMTSAs include 5–10% affordable housing rising to 8–22% by 2030 to address housing unaffordability among low-income residents (Elvidge, 2021). Despite Little Jamaica's proximity to the same subway station, it was excluded from Inclusionary Zoning (IZ) protections in 2021 (Beattie, 2021). This exclusion has also weakened "right to remain" policies, which require developers to find places for low-income people to live (Habibinia et al., 2023). City officials justified this by underscoring that mandating affordability requirements could deter prospective developers from investing in the area (Beattie, 2021). This rhetoric raises critical questions about equity in planning: why do neighbourhoods facing similar conditions receive unequal policy support, and who ultimately benefits from these decisions? This rationale signals their prioritization of investor interests over the survival of Little Jamaica. The decision garnered criticism that transit-oriented development will accelerate displacement and cultural erasure without enforceable affordable housing mandates. Therefore, the exclusion of Little Jamaica from municipal policy but its application to other

communities exposes how ostensibly neutral policies reinforce systemic inequities and reveal a high-modernist vision of development that decides who belongs and who does not.

Therefore, as Bledsoe and Wright (2019) explain, gentrification constitutes a form of modern colonialism where Black geographies are erased and repurposed through urban revitalization. Capital accumulation through specific spaces depends on anti-Blackness, which frames Black neighbourhoods open for occupation and control (Bledsoe and Wright, 2019). Similarly, the concept of racial banishment captures how such high-modernist policies expel racialized populations not just from housing but from their sense of belonging. Unlike displacement, which assumes relocation, racial banishment exposes how private developers and the state collude to displace marginalized groups from their homes, subordinating the human right to housing to capitalistic, market-driven profit (Roy, 2019).

The Critique of Public-Private Partnerships

John's interview as the hair salon owner reflects the critique of Public-Private Partnerships (P3s), which are characterized by the tension between the public sector's duty to advance the public good and the private sector's imperative to maximize profit. While P3 models are justified for their efficiency and risk-sharing, the literature identifies persistent tensions between public accountability and private-sector confidentiality. Krawchenko and Stoney (2011), for example, show in their analysis of Ottawa's Lansdowne Park redevelopment how "demands for commercial confidentiality" (p. 74) can conflict with "transparency and citizen engagement" (p. 82), raising concerns for democratic oversight. Similarly, Agyenim et al. (2017) argue that P3 structures may institutionalize barriers to disclosure, as private actors often operate under contractual exemptions that limit access to information on public spending and decision-making.

These dynamics are exemplified in Little Jamaica based on John's interviews. The LRT is overseen by Metrolinx, the provincial crown agency, and executed by Crosslinx Transit Solutions, a construction consortium working in partnership with the Ontario government. Although Metrolinx organized public consultation forums throughout the construction, these were performative public relations exercises rather than meaningful avenues for community input (Gordon, 2018). This critique is substantiated by John's interview, where he recounts that his microphone was muted during several consultations whenever he attempted to raise concerns about delayed timelines or the absence of community consultation regarding the crayon mural installation. This pattern of symbolic engagement is cited as a form of spatial displacement of marginalized populations through a type of "slow violence" perpetrated by the selective romanticization and commodification of a neighbourhood subtly excludes those whose lives do not align with dominant, consumption-oriented schedules (Kern, 2016). In Little Jamaica, the everyday lives of long-term residents are increasingly branded as 'arrhythmic' and incompatible with the neighborhood's commodified image. This shift subtly erases working-class and marginalized realities, masking the

displacement of these communities behind a veneer of “authentic” urban revitalization (Kern, 2016).

Metrolinx's incessant refusal to release information about persistent technical issues, project delays, and collateral harms further advances the scholarly critique of P3s. In 2024, they denied two separate Freedom of Information requests for construction progress reports, citing economic harm and safety risks (Callan and D'Mello, 2024). Also, the Information and Privacy Commissioner of Ontario (IPCO) has challenged claims of commercial confidentiality advanced by Metrolinx and the incumbent provincial government. In one ruling, the IPCO ordered the release of email communications between former Metrolinx CEO Phil Verster and the Premier's Chief of Staff, after rejecting arguments that disclosure would cause “economic harm,” finding no evidentiary basis for such claims (IPCO, 2025). In a separate 2024 decision, the IPCO also required Metrolinx to disclose penalty and liquidated damages provisions in an LRT procurement contract, again dismissing assertions that release would harm the agency's financial interests (IPCO, 2024). Nevertheless, the disclosure of such information has been restricted from public access, with available insights into sensitive Metrolinx materials emerging not through official transparency mechanisms but through leaked documents reported by media sources (CBC News, 2023).

Taken together, these findings and institutional records indicate recurring tensions between transparency obligations and confidentiality claims within P3-governed infrastructure delivery. In this case, interview data and academic and grey literature suggest that community stakeholders experienced limited influence over planning processes, even as formal mechanisms of consultation were presented as part of project governance. This deliberate marginalization challenges the Ontario Government's claim that it will “help people in their everyday lives,” raising the question of whether the construction project serves the public good or private profit (Office of the Premier, 2016).

Gentrification and Policing

Laura's findings has lent preliminary support to the post-industrial policing hypothesis, which posits that contemporary urban policing is not merely reactive to crime but is a derivative of the broader state-led revitalization efforts aimed at transforming socioeconomically marginalized and disinvested neighbourhoods into consumable spaces and managing perceptions of social disorder to satisfy the interests of the affluent newcomers and investors referred to as the “creative class” (Sharp, 2013). To this end, the police administer what is called Order Maintenance Policing (OMP). Rooted in the Broken Windows theory, this type of policing treats minor infractions as precursors to serious crime (Laniyonu, 2017). Laniyonu's (2017) spatial analysis of New York City from 2000 to 2014 empirically demonstrates that gentrification intensifies policing not within the gentrifying tracts themselves but in adjacent communities. This aggressive policing is used to serve the preferences of the “creative class,” who paradoxically seek orderly communities but also wish to avoid the visible presence of aggressive policing, which signals underlying disorder and the

devaluation of the neighbourhood (Laniyonu, 2017). Although Little Jamaica has yet to experience the full-scale gentrification documented in Laniyonu's (2017) study, Laura identifies nascent indicators of this shift, positing that Order Maintenance Policing (OMP) functions as a strategic antecedent for neighbourhood revitalization a topic further articulated in the following section.

Therefore, these developments reflect the broader high-modernist logic critiqued by Scott (1998), wherein centralized, top-down redevelopment projects rely on the state's coercive apparatus to impose spatial order and see their visions come to fruition. In this schema, OMP is not neutral. Instead, it is a mechanism that prioritizes the economic interests of the creative class by managing the perceived risks and nuisances of the local community that would deter their investments.

Community-Based Resistance to High Modernist City Planning

Pastor Lawrence's articulation of the Black Church as a vital community-based agent of resistance aligns with Born et al.'s (2021) scholarly findings, which revealed that, in response to the intensifying displacement of low-income residents in Seattle, Black churches have strategically leveraged their resources such as sanctuary space to protect and support the city's most marginalized populations (Born et al., 2021). As in Little Jamaica, gentrification in Seattle is not a neutral market process but a politically charged, institutionally orchestrated project driven by state policy, urban planning, and private real estate interests under the guise of "urban renaissance" (Born et al., 2021). Therefore, given the Black Church's vital role as a source of moral strength, social support, and communal belonging as well as a refuge for healing and resilience in the face of oppression the church is an essential community anchor that constitute a powerful force of resistance and resilience, countering and mitigating the harms inflicted on Black communities by gentrification (Brewer and William, 2019).

Indeed, as outlined in Appendix B, the interview data is drawn from a Black Church in downtown Toronto providing care for folks displaced by the Regent Park gentrification project. To address the absence of a comparable site within Little Jamaica, this study utilizes a downtown Toronto Black church as a comparative proxy, given its shared experience with gentrification-related predicaments. This selection is methodologically justified: the site functions as a trans-local institutional anchor that links Toronto's Black diasporic community across diverse spatial contexts. Furthermore, the church's long-standing service to Regent Park a foundational case study of state-led, public-private gentrification in Canada provides a robust empirical basis for comparison. By analyzing this site, the research captures a persistent model of community-based resistance that operates across the city's gentrifying neighbourhoods, thereby illustrating broader systemic patterns of displacement and institutional response that extend beyond the immediate boundaries of Little Jamaica.

Limitations

This study should be understood as an in-depth qualitative case study rather than a statistically generalizable account of redevelopment in Toronto. Its findings are shaped by four key limitations that warrant careful interpretation. First, the study is based on a small, purposively selected sample of four community stakeholders with contextually embedded knowledge of Little Jamaica. While this design is well suited to capturing lived experiences, the sample size constrains the breadth of claims that can be independently sustained. Several structural conclusions drawn in this paper are therefore triangulated with academic literature, government reports, and media sources rather than resting on interview data alone. Moreover, the small sample may privilege more visible or publicly engaged voices, such as business owners and organizational leaders, while sidelining the perspectives of harder-to-reach populations including tenants, undocumented workers, and displaced residents who have already left the neighbourhood. Second, one of the four interviews, the discussion of faith-based community resistance, was conducted at a Black church located in downtown Toronto rather than within Little Jamaica. As noted in the Methodology, a comparable religious site within Little Jamaica could not be secured. This interview is treated throughout the paper as comparative and supporting evidence drawn from a trans-local institutional anchor that serves Toronto's broader Black diasporic community, rather than as direct evidence from Little Jamaica itself. Third, the absence of quantitative data limits the extent to which the study can differentiate Little Jamaica's experience from that of other neighbourhoods along the Eglinton corridor. Business turnover data, rent trajectories, transit disruption records, and demographic change data would strengthen the analysis and enable more precise claims about the magnitude and uniqueness of the displacement observed. Future research should employ mixed-methods and longitudinal designs that combine interview-based testimony with quantitative indicators across additional sites along the Eglinton corridor, and should include residents, tenants, municipal officials, and planners to clarify whether the processes identified here reflect a distinct local case or a broader pattern of racialized urban redevelopment.

Policy Recommendations

Based on the findings, this paper proposes three priority policy recommendations to mitigate the socio-spatial consequences of the Eglinton Crosstown LRT construction in Little Jamaica. First, the City must extend inclusionary zoning protections and "Right to Return" ordinances to Little Jamaica. As the findings demonstrate, Cedarvale, situated beside the same subway station, qualifies as a Protected Major Transit Station Area with mandated affordable housing, while Little Jamaica was excluded from these protections in 2021 (Beattie, 2021; City of Toronto, 2022). This differential treatment must be rectified by applying this policy equitably to historically Black communities facing comparable development pressures. Second, the government and its private partners must establish dedicated, multilingual construction mitigation funds. As John's testimony reveals, first-generation Jamaican immigrants who run most small businesses in Little Jamaica face language and digital literacy barriers that

excluded them from relief programs during construction disruptions and COVID-19. Construction mitigation funds must include multilingual application support, in-person intake options, and proactive outreach to immigrant-owned businesses, ensuring that bureaucratic complexity does not ignore the Métis. Finally, governments of all levels must provide adequate support to social service organizations and religious institutions that serve displaced populations. As Laura's findings demonstrate, organizations like the John Howard Society are responding to a growing population of unhoused individuals driven by the combined forces of speculative development, LRT construction, and the lingering effects of the pandemic. Lawrence's interview has also illustrated that Black churches have stepped in as critical intermediaries where the state falls short, providing essential goods, sanctuary space, and community care. These institutions require reliable public funding to continue this work, rather than operating solely through charitable donations and volunteer labour.

Conclusion

This paper argues that the Eglinton Crosstown LRT exemplifies high-modernist planning, where state and private actors advance redevelopment under the guise of progress. Although framed as transit-led redevelopment, the project has intensified racialized inequality, displacement, and gentrification in Little Jamaica. Scott's warning remains clear: planning fails when it ignores local knowledge and lived experience.

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Authors' Contributions

The author conceived and designed the study, conducted all fieldwork, interviews, and qualitative analysis. Additionally, the author reviewed the literature, interpreted the findings, and wrote the manuscript in its entirety. The author has approved the final version of the manuscript for submission.

Competing Interests

The author declares that there are no competing interests.

Declaration of AI Use

The author declares that no AI-assisted tools were used in the preparation of this manuscript.

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APPENDIX A

INTERVIEW SCRIPT FOR JAMES

Date: Wednesday, December 26 at 2:00pm

Location: *Removed to adhere to ethical clarity and participant anonymity*

Hello, my name is, and I'm conducting this interview as part of a capstone research project in a fourth-year criminology course called CRI487: Law, Space, and the City which focuses on understanding how urban redevelopment specifically the Eglinton Crosstown LRT construction has impacted local businesses in Little Jamaica. This interview is intended to help me better understand the economic, social, and cultural challenges faced by Black-owned businesses during and after the construction process, as well as any forms of resistance, advocacy, and community resilience that have emerged in response.

Your insights as a business owner are extremely valuable. The goal of this study is to highlight local experiences and bring greater visibility to the effects of large-scale infrastructure projects on historically marginalized communities. The information you share will be used for academic purposes only, and your participation is entirely voluntary. You may skip any question or withdraw at any time. Your identity will be kept confidential in any published material, unless you have given explicit consent otherwise.

Please know that there are no right or wrong answers. We're interested in your honest perspective, and we appreciate your time and willingness to share your experiences.

Do you have any questions before we begin?

Great, let's get started.

1. Can you tell me about the history of Jamall Caribbean Custom Tailors and its role in the Little Jamaica community?
2. How has the construction of the Eglinton Crosstown LRT affected your business operations, revenue, and foot traffic?
3. Besides the LRT construction, have other real estate developments or city policies impacted your ability to operate?
4. Do you feel that the City of Toronto or the Business Improvement Area (BIA) has provided adequate support to help businesses like yours survive during and after construction?
5. Have there been any financial relief programs, grants, or policy measures offered to help small businesses in Little Jamaica? If so, were they effective?
6. What kinds of support do you think the city or BIA should have provided (or should provide now) to help protect Black-owned businesses in this area?
7. What steps have you had to take to keep your business afloat amid these challenges?
8. Have you received support from the local community or other small business owners to help navigate these difficulties?

9. Are you concerned about further displacement or closures due to continued redevelopment?
If you could make recommendations to policymakers about how to better support businesses like yours, what would they be?

APPENDIX B

INTERVIEW SCRIPT FOR REVEREND LAWRENCE

Date: Tuesday, January 25, 2025, at 4:00pm

Location: *Removed to adhere to ethical clarity and participant anonymity*

Hello, my name is, and I'm conducting this interview as part of a capstone research project in a fourth-year criminology course called CRI487: Law, Space, and the City which focuses on understanding how urban redevelopment specifically the Eglinton Crosstown LRT construction has impacted local businesses in Little Jamaica. This interview is intended to help me better understand the economic, social, and cultural challenges faced by Black-owned businesses during and after the construction process, as well as any forms of resistance, advocacy, and community resilience that have emerged in response.

Your insights as a Pastor and community leader are extremely valuable. The goal of this study is to highlight local experiences and bring greater visibility to the effects of large-scale infrastructure projects on historically marginalized communities. The information you share will be used for academic purposes only, and your participation is entirely voluntary. You may skip any question or withdraw at any time. Your identity will be kept confidential in any published material, unless you have given explicit consent otherwise.

Please know that there are no right or wrong answers. We're interested in your honest perspective, and we appreciate your time and willingness to share your experiences.

Do you have any questions before we begin?

Great, let's get started.

1. How has First Baptist Church historically served Black communities in Toronto, particularly in response to economic and housing challenges? In what ways has the church provided support to Black individuals and families who have faced structural barriers to housing, employment, and economic stability?
2. From your perspective, how has gentrification particularly the construction of the Eglinton Crosstown LRT and surrounding real estate projects affected Black residents and businesses in the community?
3. Have you observed increased displacement of congregation members or community members due to rising rents, property taxes, or other economic pressures?

4. What specific initiatives or programs has First Baptist Church implemented to support individuals and families affected by gentrification?
5. Has the church engaged in advocacy or policy discussions with the City of Toronto regarding gentrification, affordable housing, or displacement? If so, what has that engagement looked like?
6. How do faith-based principles shape the church's response to social and economic injustices caused by municipal policies?
7. Do you see the role of the Black church expanding in response to increasing urban redevelopment pressures? If so, in what ways?
8. What policies or actions do you believe the City of Toronto should implement to better protect Black communities from the negative effects of gentrification?
9. How can institutions like First Baptist Church collaborate with other community organizations to provide more effective support and advocacy?

APPENDIX C

INTERVIEW SCRIPT FOR JOHN

Date: March 13, 2025, at 12:00pm

Location: *Removed to adhere to ethical clarity and participant anonymity*

Hello, my name is, and I'm conducting this interview as part of a capstone research project in a fourth-year criminology course called CRI487: Law, Space, and the City which focuses on understanding how urban redevelopment—specifically the Eglinton Crosstown LRT construction has impacted local businesses in Little Jamaica. This interview is intended to help me better understand the economic, social, and cultural challenges faced by Black-owned businesses during and after the construction process, as well as any forms of resistance, advocacy, and community resilience that have emerged in response.

Your insights as a business owner and community leader are extremely valuable. The goal of this study is to highlight local experiences and bring greater visibility to the effects of large-scale infrastructure projects on historically marginalized communities. The information you share will be used for academic purposes only, and your participation is entirely voluntary. You may skip any question or withdraw at any time. Your identity will be kept confidential in any published material, unless you have given explicit consent otherwise.

Please know that there are no right or wrong answers. We're interested in your honest perspective, and we appreciate your time and willingness to share your experiences.

Do you have any questions before we begin?

Great, let's get started.

1. Can you describe the primary financial and operational challenges that Black-owned businesses in Little Jamaica have faced due to the Eglinton Crosstown LRT construction?

2. How have rising rental costs, prolonged construction timelines, and reduced foot traffic affected business sustainability in this area compared to other parts of Eglinton Avenue?
3. Has the York-Eglinton BIA documented a significant increase in business closures in Little Jamaica? Are there any available reports or press coverage that highlight these trends?
4. From your perspective, what have been the long-term implications of these disruptions for the economic viability of Little Jamaica's Black-owned businesses?
5. The City of Toronto and the Government of Ontario have implemented financial relief programs for businesses affected by LRT construction. Were Black-owned businesses in Little Jamaica able to access these funds equitably?
6. What specific bureaucratic, financial, or policy-related barriers have prevented Black business owners from securing compensation or financial relief?
7. Would you say that government policies and legal frameworks functioned more as displacement tools rather than protective mechanisms for local businesses? If so, can you provide specific examples?
8. What role has the York-Eglinton BIA played in advocating for business owners who have been negatively affected by construction and gentrification?
9. Based on your observations, why was Little Jamaica disproportionately affected compared to other areas along the Eglinton corridor?
10. Have there been any targeted policy interventions or protections for businesses in wealthier, non-Black communities along Eglinton that were not extended to businesses in Little Jamaica?
11. Are there legal, zoning, or heritage-related protections that could have mitigated the economic harm experienced by Black-owned businesses in this area? If so, why were they not implemented?
12. What measures should be taken by municipal and provincial governments to support the recovery of Black-owned businesses in Little Jamaica?
13. From your perspective, what policies or financial support systems need to be put in place to ensure that culturally significant business districts like Little Jamaica are not displaced by urban redevelopment projects?
14. What lessons should policymakers learn from the experience of Black-owned businesses in Little Jamaica to prevent similar patterns of economic displacement in future infrastructure projects?

APPENDIX D: 1603 Eglinton Avenue West



Courtesy of Joseph Choi, personal photograph.

APPENDIX E: Examples of Closed Businesses





Courtesy of Joseph Choi, personal photograph.

APPENDIX F: Water Trucks Blocking Store



APPENDIX G: Public Toilets and Debris In Front of McDonald's Store





APPENDIX H: Construction Trucks In Front of Store



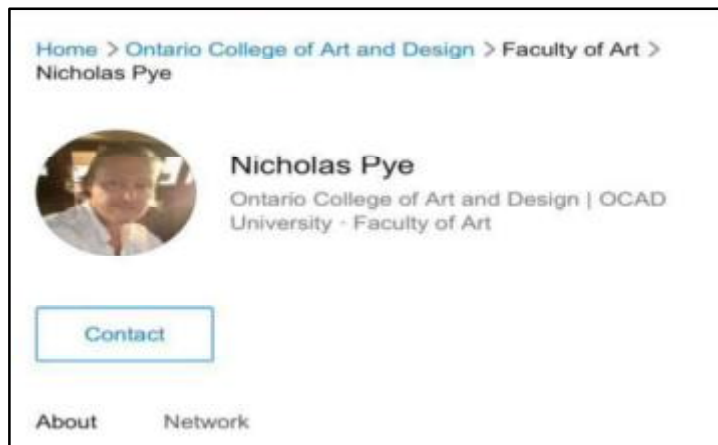
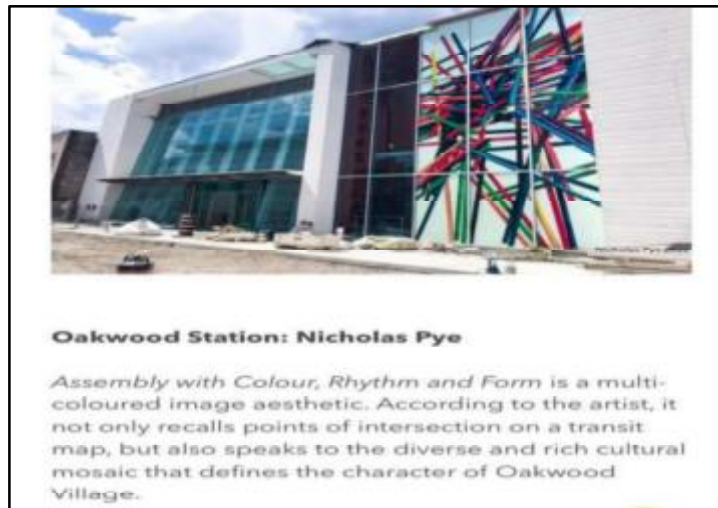


APPENDIX I: Cedarvale Community



Courtesy of Joseph Choi, personal photograph

APPENDIX J: Crayon Mural on the LRT Station



Courtesy of Joseph Choi, personal photograph.