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Columbia University – INCITE

The Relationship between Gentrification and Protest

This study analyzes the relationship between gentrification and social movements in Harlem. Drawing on quantitative data starting from the 1980s until the present, as well as qualitative data reflecting the emotions and insights of residents, this study seeks to apprehend the influence which gentrification has on social movements and vice versa. We believe gentrification affects two aspects of social life that could either stimulate or suppress social movement. The first is the conditions necessary for subsistence, including living conditions and income. Then there is the organization of the community, especially the local minority cultural organizations and clubs, social cultural or religious gatherings and such. Through our design, we hope to show the different ways that gentrification can affect social movements.

Introduction

Since the 1980s, the “Village of Harlem,” as older residents still call it, has become a 21st-century laboratory for integration. Class, wealth and race are at the center of the changes in the neighborhood. Lured by stately century-old brownstones and relatively modest rents, new faces are moving in and making older residents feel that they are being pushed out. This process of change in the well-being and composition of neighborhoods is referred to as gentrification.

These changes are never without conflict. There have been protests, and anger directed as much at the idea of the newcomers and old residents as at them personally. Further, gentrification has likely affected different aspects of social life that make protests more likely. We are yet to discover whether gentrification increases or decrease social movements, but the possibility of a relationship between them is intriguing and could help address many questions in sociology concerning social movements and inequality.
A move of just a few miles can necessitate significant adjustments. Again and again, newcomers, many of whom are white, and older residents, who are typically black, describe one phenomenon: If the old-timers do not like the idea of the new arrivals, once they get to know them as individuals, much of the animosity fades away. Social integration is one of the key things that is affected by gentrification and public investment and can influence whether protests occur.

On the other hand, it seems that collision has never been more aggressive. For example, there was a heated battle over the re-zoning of 125th Street, causing residents to organize, shouting “Save Harlem” or “Save Black Harlem”. Further, the New York Times' reported in 2008 over conflict between old and new Harlem residents over drumming and festivities in Marcus Garvey Park. Some consider it the soul of black music, while others regard it as noise. Finally, in recent years there have been protest marches in reaction to shootings by police.

What is occurring in Harlem is part of a wider trend across the nation reshaping poorer black enclaves like the Fillmore District in San Francisco, Bronzeville in Chicago and Columbia Heights in Washington. New investment and change economic landscapes affect the well-being and organization of local communities, possibility leading to new grievances and reason for protest.

**Background and Significance**

Over the past few decades, Harlem, a borough of New York City, has undergone a gradual process of gentrification. Soaring rent prices have driven out lower-class residents as middle class or upper middle class people move in. Before the 1970s, Harlem was known for its highly concentrated black population, as well as the high rates of poverty and crime. Government housing programs created tenements and apartments for low-income communities. On the sides of the streets located all kinds of small grocery stores or dollar stores. Abandon houses and broken windows are not rare in this part of the city.

Starting in the 1980s, however, Harlem became the target of real estate companies and middle class people. As the housing prices of downtown Manhattan grew to exceptional heights, New Yorkers began to move to more affordable places near Manhattan,
including many lower income blocks. Harlem at first was not the best choice because of its high poverty and crime rate, but slow and steady development led to its resurgence. From Harlem, people could get to their workplace in downtown Manhattan in 20 minutes and housing prices were much cheaper. According to this highly profitable situation, more and more new and better houses were built, and chain stores such as Dunkin Donuts, Wholefood, CVS, Staple, etc. started to rush in to this potentially profitable district, competing with local businesses like dollar store and groceries. At the same time, the population of white people in this district also increased. In this melting pot of ethnic groups, all kinds of issues emerged creating topics for sociologists to study.

Gentrification has affected many cities throughout the world and sociologists have studied its impact on a wide number of issues, including displacement, prices, the well-being of residents and local culture. However, perhaps understudied in the literature is how gentrification affects social movements, and how it affects the frequency and efficacy of collective action. Social movements include a variety of group activities, organized or not, that mainly focus on social or political issues. The forms of social movements include public speech, protest, riot, etc. Social movements are intriguing topics for sociologists to study, because they don’t simply emerge from nothing, but rather through social dynamics. When people start to gather and protest or even riot, it shows to society as a whole that there are people who are not satisfied by their living condition, and that the dissatisfaction makes them angry. And if these issues aren’t resolved through targeted policy intervention, the consequences can be disastrous.

There are a few studies we can look at to help understand how gentrification in Harlem might affect collective action. Roger Gould, in his book Insurgent Identities, shows how transformations to the city landscape of Paris, and the displacement of workers and their families as a result, changed the basis on which workers organized to protest. Another study by Juta Kawalerowicz and Michael Biggs looks at the recent London riots in 2011. In the period of disorder, the police lost control of parts of the city for four days where rioters looting shops, threatening the life of commoners and targeting the police to attack. The destruction caused by the riots costs 50 million British pounds, and more than 3,000 people were arrested. Using geo-located data, authors show how rioters in London were more likely to come from from economically disadvantaged, non-
gentrifying neighborhoods where investment was low, but ethnic fractionalization was high.

These two cases show how the distribution of wealth in a city affects social movements; and in particular the Paris case shows how changes to the wealth landscape can bring changes in the nature of those movements. Gentrifying Harlem is a place where different ethnic groups from different social classes encounter each other and outcomes are divided depending on background. It is intriguing and necessary to study the relationship between gentrification and social movements, that maybe we can find a way to avoid disorder and people from different backgrounds can live peacefully with each other.

**Design**

Our basic framework has gentrification as the X variable and social movements as the Y variable. Following the ideas outlined in the abstract and literature review, we propose two hypotheses concerning the relationship between gentrification and social movements. On one hand, gentrification might lead to more social movements as a result of the investment of community infrastructure and pressures on people’s life. An alternative hypothesis is that gentrification will lead to less social movements as displacement breaks apart communities or with increasingly stable social environment because new business and public works provided more employment. We expect to find a positive relationship between social movements and gentrification, but our study is designed to test for both possibilities. To understand the general relationship between gentrification and social movements and its underlying mechanism, we use quantitative research and qualitative research. For the quantitative component, we use a variety of data sources: counts of social movements (specifically protests) taken from the GDELT protest public dataset (gdeltprojet.org), data of rent prices and income by city block taken from the Census and information about institutions and infrastructures by block, such as the number of community centers. For the qualitative component, we use recorded interviews with residents in Harlem.

**Quantitative Research**
In our study, the quantitative component is a block-level geographic analysis. We collect public data on changes of income, rent, living conditions, infrastructure and displacement of population from about 1980 to 2015 to capture gentrification and the number of protests to capture social movements.

We have found Census analyzed by professionals Richard Schaffer and Neil Smith:

The 1980 census data reveals that only 262 households in central Harlem had incomes above $50,000. (These results can be found in the table below.) After 1980, new construction and renovation began in eastern section above 96th Street and western section in Hamilton Heights leading to increases in the number of households with high incomes.

For the Y variable, we would focus more on the locations, sizes and topics of protests in particular. One famous protest, reported by Daily News, happened in 2014 concerned justice following the shooting of an African American with the goal of discharging 'racist cops'. Demonstrations began in Harlem, where 400 people gathered at Malcolm X Blvd. and Central Park North for a “Dream4Justice” march to the United Nations. “It's not fair that, after decades of marching, we don't have justice,” said Linwood Childs, 19, a University of Maryland student, who is African-American. “It's hard for me to even speak about it because it hurts so much.” New York City Councilman Jumaane Williams said that the protest held on Monday was 'the best of the traditions of Dr. King to raise and elevate the consciousness of people.'

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Table 1. Statistical Profile of Central Harlem Population and Housing, 1980</th>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Central Harlem</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>Percent population black</td>
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<tr>
<td>Per capita income ($)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Percent high-income households (&gt;$50,000)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Percent low-income households (&lt;$10,000)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Percent college graduates (adults with &gt; 4 years of college)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Median contract rent ($ per month)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Percent managerial, professional, and related occupations</td>
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<tr>
<td>Private residential property turnover rate per year, 1980–84 (%)</td>
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<td>Population change, 1970–80 (%)</td>
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<td>Percent housing abandoned</td>
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Sources: U.S. Bureau of the Census (1972, 1983); City of New York, Department of City Planning (1981); Real Estate Board of New York (1985).
Another recent example is the “Black Lives Matter” march in Harlem, which honored nine people murdered in the mass shooting in South Carolina. After dozens of people gathered outside a state office building on 125th Street for a vigil for the members of Emanuel A.M.E. Church who were shot and killed by a white supremacist in Charleston, demonstrators began marching and chanting through the streets of West Harlem.

With rich protest data at the block-level, we can look at how gentrification affects both the frequency and content of protests. These examples show that such data is recorded, by researchers and papers, and accessible. However, without data on the organizing process, it is difficult to know how these protests emerged. Therefore, to analyze how gentrification is affecting the organizing process at the ground-level, we propose a second part of the project to interview community members.

**Qualitative Research**

The qualitative component is particularly focused on interviewing. We will use a stratified random sample to find 20 blocks that are gentrified, gentrifying and yet to gentrify neighborhoods. We will then go to community centers and perhaps churches to give people the survey below:

1. What’s your name? Where were you born? What is your race? What is your age?
3. Tell me about the schools in the neighborhood.
4. Are you close to anyone in the neighborhood? Name up to five people you spend time with who live here/attend in this institutions.
5. What’s your current job? How did you choose this job?
6. Have you had to move recently? How come? If not, why are you still staying in the same neighborhood?
7. Is your neighborhood gentrifying? Have there been any changes in income, rent, living conditions, infrastructure or institutions in the neighborhood? If there are, please explain.
8. Have you ever been in a protest or have you ever head of protest? What’s the topic about?
9. How do you feel about living with different races of people? Are you getting along well with each other?
10. What changes are taking place in your community?

Though we don’t have interview data, we found studies that asked similar questions and below, we have quoted some of their findings.

For instance, the Zinc Plate Press Blog notes some fresh plywood at the corner of Frederick Douglass Boulevard and 117th Street: a former tires and rims shop: “My wife passed by the other day and asked two men who looked like they had something to do with the boarded up place what was coming in. They had Italian accents and said a ‘family-friendly’ Italian restaurant is opening soon. While I’m sure gentrification is slowing due to the economy, next door to the Italian restaurant is The Winey and Babe Noir. It’s starting to look like the West Village in West Harlem.”[ZPP]

Much of the comments residents have on our topic point out that the personal experiences differ from the characterizations that are often found in large-scale data analyses. We want to capture this heterogeneity of experience and action at the micro-level, which is lost when the causes of scenarios are stereotyped.

By using qualitative research, we can understand people’s feelings about the existence of gentrification and gather accounts of how it is affecting their community and its organization. If quantitative research is applied, the project can be more general, so that aspects can be applied to other situations where gentrification is occurring. As quantitative and qualitative each has its own strengths and drawbacks, the usage of both can decrease the weaknesses of using a single kind of method more effectively.

**Limitations**

As stated directly above, the interview will be executed at the center of Harlem, and we will randomly sample 20 gentrifying, gentrified and yet-to-gentrify blocks at Harlem. Then we will interview the people living in these blocks, attempting to conduct a sort of comprehensive data and information. This plan, however, demands a enormous amount of effort and time. In addition, various costs are required, including transportation fees, and the money paid to some interviews.
Further, in any interview project relating to gentrification, there are selection problems. People move out of gentrifying neighborhoods and it is difficult to find them and interview them about their exodus. Further, it is difficult to interview people who had participated previous protests because of the difficulty of identifying them.

While operating this project, we did not pay attention to other confounding factors, such as government policies that may affect both our X and Y variables. This may affect our group’s final result; but we are aware of this possibility and would try to address it.

We stated a clear explanation of why we used both qualitative and quantitative methods to design our project, but whether using both methods is better than only one method remains questionable. The retrospective nature of interviews may exert influences on the validity of the data, thus distorting the outcome of the report. Further, we cannot perform interviews in the past, so the best we can do is compliment a cross-sectional interview design with quantitative data over time. It will be difficult to fully integrate the two sides of this study.

Conclusion
As we mentioned in previous sections, the correlation between the level of gentrification and the number of social movements may be positively related, so that higher levels of gentrification will be associated with the more social movements, or a negative relationship, so that higher levels of gentrification will lead to less number of social movements. Therefore, the conclusion of this project still remains tentative and demands more support from actual data and facts. However, the two sided nature of this design ensures an interesting result. Regardless, further study and research on this area is needed.

Bibliography
Works Cited