Gentrification and Music Diversity in Harlem

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Abstract

Gentrification, according to many who experience it, is a threat to local culture. They argue that new businesses, residents and capital challenge pre-existing cultural forms, replacing traditional practices and arts with commercialized alternatives, and even commodifying the traditional practices to make them palatable to a wider, more diverse audience. Few studies however have actually studied the relationship between gentrification and cultural diversity. In this paper, we look at a specific aspect of cultural diversity, musical tastes, and ask: how does gentrification affect the diversity of residents’ musical tastes? We use data, published in the Wall Street journal, on the songs most commonly listened to using digital jukeboxes in each zip code of Manhattan to construct a musical diversity score that is geographically resolved. We combine this data with zip code level data from the American Community Survey. With these data, we perform a multivariate OLS regression, regressing musical diversity on gentrification, while controlling for other zip code level factors. Our results show that recently gentrified or gentrifying neighborhoods tend to have more diverse musical tastes, even when controlling for demographic diversity. Further, the two least diverse zip codes are: one that has been rich for the entire examined period and one that has remained poor over that same period. We had wondered whether the changes brought to neighborhoods by gentrification are due purely to change in the composition of residents or if gentrification has an impact on the tastes and behaviors of residents (a case of selection vs. influence). Since we still see a significant effect of gentrification after controlling for neighborhood composition, it could be that residents living in gentrifying zip codes are influenced by gentrification. However, there are many compositional factors we did not collect data on, leaving our study open to bias. Thus, to understand the mechanisms producing this result, we report some results from a qualitative study conducted by interviewing local residents about their evolving musical tastes in Harlem neighborhoods.
Background and significance

Before 1910, the composition of Harlem residents included mostly white, middle class residents and some notable African Americans. Starting from 1920s, great migration of black people from the south continued due to the effect of Harlem Renaissance, led to a significant growth of black population in Harlem. By early 1970s, the percentage of black settlers had reached to a peak, which was around 95.42% in Central Harlem.

Reports of gentrification began in the mid-1970s in Harlem due to the fact that increasing number of other class and ethnicity groups came in. The population composition table of Harlem from 1910-2006 is shown below:

(Sources: 1910 to 1940, Census Tract Data from National Historical Geographical Information System)
Since results are tabulated from the sources indicated, they may not necessarily match Census published figures for population and race.

The term “gentrification” was first suggested by British sociologist Ruth Glass in her 1964 study of the social transformation happened in Islington, a working-class neighborhood in London (Glass 1964). She defined it as a process in which “older, lower income neighborhoods were receiving an influx of investment and wealthier residents—the “gentry”—after years of disinvestment and physical decline. (Grevstad-Nordbrock 2015:22) The arrival of young, upwardly mobile, and mainly white population associated with gentrification has brought both benefits and disadvantages to the neighborhood for it gave rise to social service and local economy, nevertheless creates tension between new “yuppies” and their poorer neighbors in gentrifying communities. (Michelle, 1991)

Gentrification has long been associated with appeals to diversity and difference, and to social mixing. Because of the arrival of other class and ethnic groups, Harlem has become an oasis of mixed cultures, changing the entire social fabric of Harlem and its original Black identity (Keleher and Lawrence, 2004). As one epitome of cultural diversity, music is beautiful and personal in its most basic form, but also presents social and political influence which grants it a deeper meaning and value to be analyzed. It serves to unify groups of people and help them to express their shared emotions.

Before the gentrification process happened, typical African American music which includes rap, R&B, hip hop, jazz and spiritual, played a dominant role in Harlem. The musical expressions reaffirmed the cultural link that African American lives manifested. “Each musical genre gives a word, expression, or demonstrates a mood and a flavor. For example, Spirituals emphasize the elements of faith, hope, strength to endure discrimination and hardships, whereas Blues gave rise to the shared adversity and unity of African American, and maintain something special that encourage life to continue, to grow. Jazz also retains this spirit. Besides entertainment, Black music is more likely to be a statement that addresses social, economic and political conditions and issues. It is the reflection of the spiritual life of many African
However, gentrification process in recent years has challenged the sense of black identity and African American culture. For example, here is an excerpt from The Observer “For generations, Harlem has been home to jazz, blues, soul food, Africana and all the other trappings of black American life. But now an inflow of outsiders, many of whom are white or foreign, is transforming Harlem from the heart of black America to just another slice of wealthy Manhattan.” Over the weekly drum circle that gathers in Marcus Garvey Park, the newcomers couldn’t appreciate the traditional black music performed by the drummers and complained about the noise.

Within the general context of the trend of cultural diversity, our research paper seeks to explore the effect that gentrification process will bring to the music preference of both groups of people and individuals. By analyzing the extent of gentrification and the genre of popular music played in public “jukebox” in different neighborhoods in Harlem, we can comprehend how gentrification has influenced the music diversity in public. Furthermore, we would like to get a deeper understanding about to what extent the public music preference has affected individuals’ playlists and about the relationship between social interaction and personal attitudes. This discussion brings us to a more macroscopic question: When gentrification leads to diversification, will the result be cultural fusion or cultural conflict? To be more specific in our research, will different groups of people embrace the increasing diversity of music and change their taste in music due to the environment? The reason we choose music variety as the indicator of cultural diversity is that music is a relatively neutral and insensitive topic that people feel comfortable to talk about. At the same time, identifiable traits and accurate emotional expression underlying in music makes it a great epitome and representative of culture. Furthermore, since culture is a factor that identifies who we are, who we used to be and predicts what we will become, studying the influence of gentrification on cultural diversity will contribute to our understanding on Harlem’s characteristic, heritage and future condition.
Quantitative Approach

Our research aims to determine the relationship between gentrification and the diversity of people’s musical preferences. In order to measure the extent of gentrification, we create an indicator variable which is 1 if the neighborhood was in the bottom half of all Manhattan neighborhoods in income in 1999 AND experienced high rates of income growth between 1999 and 2014 and 0 otherwise. The most innovative part of our data is that we use a “musical map” listing the top ten songs which represents public’s musical preference in that area. Because the source is provided by TouchTunes, an e-jukebox vendor which is “the largest in-venue interactive music and entertainment platform, featured in over 65,000 bars and restaurants across North America” (http://touchtunes.com 2016), it can serve as a good indicator of people’s behavior of their musical preference as exhibited in public. Thus each zip code was associated with 10 songs. We collected the genres of those songs and tabulated them. We calculated the entropy of this tabulated distribution, obtaining a score that is higher the more genres present in a given zip code’s 10 song set and the more evenly distributed across genres those 10 songs are. It becomes apparent that, given the structure of the data, there is an upper bound on this entropy score, which is the entropy score that is returned when all 10 songs are of a different genre. We therefore divided each zip codes’ score by this natural upper bound, giving us a normalized entropy score ranging from 0 when all of the songs had the same genre and 1 when they are all of different genres. The result of this calculation is our Music Diversity score. We found through exploration that it is highly correlated with other measures of diversity such as the Index of Qualitative Variation (IQV).

Data

This paper mainly draws its data from TouchTunes and the US Census. The Wall Street Journal article A Musical Map of New York City (http://graphics.wsj.com/nyc-jukebox-map/) provides a visual map of the 10 most popular songs and artists listened to on Touch Tunes devices in each region of the city. The names of these songs and artists were scraped from the infographic.
Information about neighborhood conditions, educational degree, ethnic diversity is gathered at the zip code level from City-Data, the 2000 US Census, and the 2014 American Community Survey (ACS) 5-year estimates.

**Methodology**

This research aims to examine whether there is a relationship between the extent of gentrification and the diversity of people’s musical preference. The research design includes a linear regression model, which measures the difference in conditional averages of music diversity by zip code in gentrified and non-gentrified neighborhoods and a qualitative approach which includes several interviews with local residents about their opinions towards the change around their neighborhoods and its influence on their musical preferences.

**Linear regression model**

This study employs linear regression to assess the hypothesis that there is a relationship between the extent of gentrification and diversity of musical tastes at the ecological level. This is conceptually similar to just comparing the mean level of music diversity in gentrified and non-gentrified areas. However, a comparison of means would be more prone to bias. For example, we know from sociological research on taste that richer people tend to have more diverse tastes (Khan 2010). We also know that compositionally, gentrified neighborhoods are more ethnically diverse, and so even no one was influenced by the overall tastes in the neighborhood, it is possible that the music tastes could be more diverse, just because the people are. Regression allows us introduce controls, to find the effect of gentrification independent of other compositional effects.

Below is the model we devised. We regressed music diversity on the gentrification indicator, controlling for the level of ethnic diversity and the log of median household income. We ran the regression in R Statistical Software.
\[ MusicDiversity_i = b_0 + \text{gentrified} * X_1 + \text{ethnic}_{\text{diversity}} * X_2 + \log(\text{median}_{\text{household}_{\text{income}}}) * X_3 \]

**Regression Results:**

The results show that the gentrification indicator is a significant positive predictor of music diversity. Controlling for income and proportion not white, gentrified neighborhoods have musical tastes that are on average roughly 10 points more than non-gentrified neighborhoods. We also find that our model explains a large portion of the variance in musical diversity – giving us confidence in it. Overall, these results confirm our hypothesis.

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<tr>
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<th>Dependent variable:</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Music Diversity</td>
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<tr>
<td>Gentrification Indicator</td>
<td>0.113*</td>
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<tr>
<td>Proportion Not White</td>
<td>-0.261</td>
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<td>(R^2)</td>
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<td>Residual Std. Error</td>
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<td>F Statistic</td>
<td>4.533*** (df = 3; 30)</td>
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*Note:* \(^*p<0.1; \ **p<0.05; \ ***p<0.01\)
Qualitative approach

During the course of the semi-structured interviews, we will first ask respondents about the time they have lived in Harlem. The interviewer will then ask open-ended questions about the respondent’s view of gentrification, their musical preference and add other questions when necessary.

Research setting

The research was conducted in Harlem, specifically in Central Harlem where the five study area had different gentrified extent (starting from the region with lowest gentrified rate: 130th Street-135th Street, between Amesterdam Avenue and Saint Nicholas Avenue, 124th Street – 126th Street, between Saint Nicholas Avenue and Frederick Douglass Boulevard Avenue, 124th, 124th Street- 126th Street Malcolm X Blvd and 5th Avenue, 136th street to 138th street between Fredrick Douglass Blvd and Adam Clayton Blvd, ) and East Harlem where the study area was delineated to stretch from 115th street to 118th street between Lexington Av and 2nd Av.

The choice for the place is motivated by how gentrified the place is. For example, the area in Central Harlem is highly gentrified and may indicate a more diverse musical preference, while the area in East Harlem is not that gentrified and thus may not have a diverse musical preference. Because the source is from jukebox vendor, which correspond people’s behavior in public or places where social interactions occur, we need to know more about people’s attitude by asking their musical preference as individual so that we can gain a better understanding about the difference between people’s behavior in public their attitude. That is to say, we need to find out whether their musical preference in public, (the song they choose in jukeboxes), corresponds with their musical preference in private(the playlist they make in their musical application).

Sampling strategy
We initially use convenience sampling, because it is rather difficult to ensure randomness and local residents are not often too cooperative. However, our approach has its limitation— the people we selected cannot represent the entire neighborhood.

**Qualitative Findings**

We find that most of people who live in Central Harlem and East Harlem tend to reserve their musical preference no matter whether the environment changes or not. The respondents mostly agree that music is a personal choice and they change their musical preference because they feel good.

“Everybody kept the same genre in music.”

“It doesn’t. Music doesn’t affect me at all. If it’s a party music here, I want to dance. If it is one of the gangs’ songs, which might not make me go on kill nobody. It is like... it’s just like stress relieving.”

“Barbershop, grocery, I know they play too much Spanish music. Latino grocery, Latino barbershop, they play too much Latino music from Dominican, and that’s the type of music when I work...music from here I heard it. If I feel like to move, I move my body.”

“Yes. (Personal preference) music style has been changing because the environment is changing. A lot of killing staff has been going on. I don’t want to hear it when I listen to music. I want something that makes me feel good, make me feel good about all the stuff we are going on. That’s the reason why my preference in music has been changing.”

In East Harlem, people say that they prefer not fitting into the local culture because of the linguistic barrier; some shows fully respect for the musical composition but also complain that the recent popular sings, especially hip hop and rap are redundant.

“Unfortunately, I don’t know their (Hispanic, Latino) language, so I don’t listen to.”

“Not typically, I mean, I have respect for all genre in music, you know for someone music is hard work and dedication, although a lot of music nowadays is very repetitive, it’s very boring to me, I am more interested in music from 90s and before
Discussion & Conclusion

Our expectation for this research is to see the positive correlation between music diversity and extent of gentrification—the more gentrified an area is, the more diverse the music genre will be. This hypothesis is verified through our quantitative study. By analyzing the data of music genre in every zip coded area and utilizing the linear regression model to evaluate the correlation number, we can conclude that the extent of diversity in music preference in highly gentrified area is greater than that of gentrifying area, and that the relationship between these two variables is relatively strong. By conducting interview with people who live in different blocks within Central Harlem and East Harlem, we noticed that the personal music style has not been influenced so much by the increasing diversity of songs in the environment. Thus, the diversification exists because of different race, class and age groups gather in the same area, but in a microscopic perspective, most of the individuals belonged to each certain group will still keep their own style and preference. However, this statement is only our hypothesis because the sample we draw is not enough to support a valid result.

The first limitation of our research is the credibility and authority of the data sources. Our data is mainly drawn from the Internet-enabled and app-accessible to vast song libraries of TouchTunes, an e-jukebox vendor that allows people to play their favorite music in different restaurants, bars and other social hot spots in the US and Canada and charge the patrons money from that. However, there are some restaurants that don’t have the jukebox service. What is more, not all of the consumers are willing to spend money to order songs. Thus, the top 10 popular songs within each area collected by TouchTunes are not accurate and representative enough. Another weak point the sample in our qualitative research is relatively small. And we didn’t covered all the age and racial groups while conducting our interview. Thus we cannot use it to generalize all the people’s attitudes towards the increasing diversity of music
in their neighborhood and its influence on their personal favorite music genre.

One point our design will not covered is to examine the diversity of music due to age differences or class differences. We mostly focus on the role gentrification indicated by distinct racial and ethnic groups plays on people’s behavior.

The biggest challenge we faced in executing the project we have designed is that the data sources indicating the extent of gentrification in each zip code is tricky to find and the category of music genre is time consuming and such a grueling. The total time we spent on our data collection was about 918 minutes. Moreover, in the interview section, we find it is hard to let interviewees answer the change of their music preference due to the effect of gentrification without saying the word “gentrification”. People tend to describe the personal reason why they change their music style, but not under the context of gentrification.
References


Department of Music in Education, University of Toronto, Toronto.