



GENTRIFICATION, DISPLACEMENT, AND THE POLITICS OF PLACE

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Trends, Contexts, and Concepts

As in other major cities around the nation, Chicago's neighborhoods are changing—with important consequences for the demographic and political future of the city. Administrative and survey data provide a sobering description of these trends: Since the post-recession economy improved after 2012, the share of low-income renter households fell and then stabilized, while the share of high-income renter households in the Chicago area has continually increased.¹¹³ Among low-income renters in the Chicago area, nearly 90% are rent-burdened, meaning that they pay 30% or more of their income on rent.¹¹⁴ Nearly half of African Americans in Chicago have been evicted, foreclosed upon, or lost their housing—or know someone who has faced one of these situations—within the past five years, compared to 38% of Whites and 39% of Latinxs.¹¹⁵ Over 113,000 applicants—

about twice the total number of city households who receive government rental assistance—are on waiting lists for public housing or housing vouchers in Chicago.¹¹⁶ In short, even as more affluent people move to Chicago, a number of others are living in vulnerable situations and in need of greater assistance.

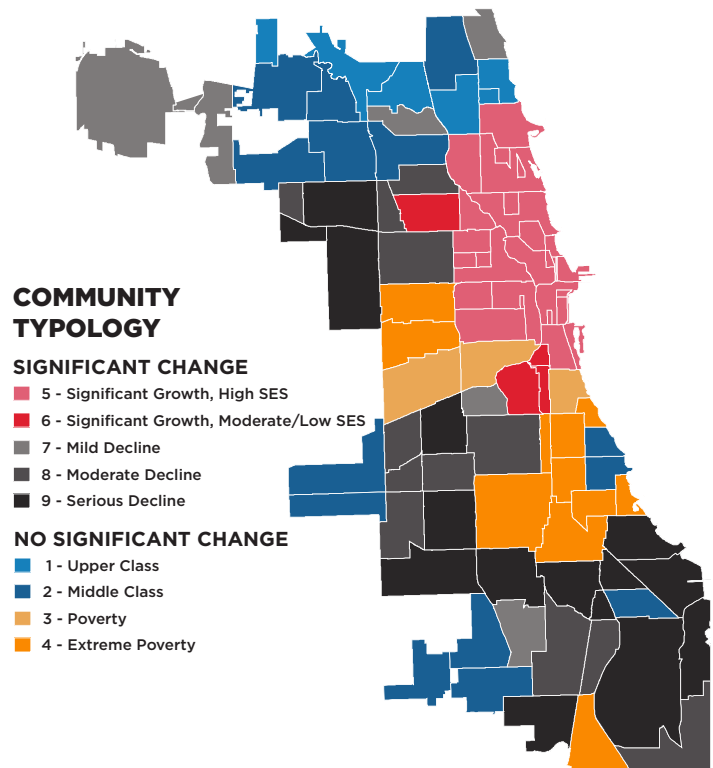
Many of the young adults whom we interviewed regularly used two words to describe these trends. First, dozens specifically talked about gentrification—the influx of affluent or upwardly mobile newcomers into working-class neighborhoods, and the increased property value and cost of living in those neighborhoods. Second, an equal number of young adults discussed displacement—the involuntary movement or relocation of persons and communities by forces beyond their control¹¹⁷—as a counterpart

or outcome of gentrification, if not an independent force all its own. The regular use of these words by young Chicagoans is important to note because these words are fundamentally about power—who has it and who does not—and the ongoing debate over housing as a commodity or right.¹¹⁸ Put more plainly, displacement for young adults in Pilsen, Chinatown-Bridgeport, and Englewood amounts to being “pushed out” from one’s apartment or neighborhood, in addition to witnessing the forced relocation of one’s friends and neighbors.

Young adults in Chicago experience gentrification and displacement in varying ways depending on where they live and on the type of exposure their racial and ethnic communities have to these forces. **Figures 1 and 2**, depicting recent demographic and socioeconomic changes at the community level, show that gentrification and displacement are highly racialized and class-based. While downtown Chicago and neighborhoods on the North Side generally experienced gentrification or remained middle or upper-class between 1970 and 2010, neighborhoods on the South and Southwest sides remained in poverty or experienced further socioeconomic decline during that same period (see **Figure 1**). In particular, neighborhoods that have gentrified on the North and Northwest Sides have largely become whiter, while areas on the South Side that

have experienced positive socioeconomic change were gentrified black (see **Figure 2**). Given these disparities, the young adults we interviewed in Chicago associate gentrification with different types of experiences, including improvements in quality of life and access to community assets on one hand, and forces of exclusion and displacement on the other. These young adults’ divergent attitudes are revealed in their accounts of how gentrification intersects with race; the use and treatment of neighborhood assets, spaces, and culture; and divestment, or the stripping of power, rights, and possessions from those with fewer resources.

FIGURE 1. CHANGES IN THE SOCIOECONOMIC STATUS OF COMMUNITY AREAS IN CHICAGO, 1970-2010^K



Race and Gentrification

Consistent patterns in attitudes about gentrification emerged among young adults we interviewed on the South, North, and West sides of Chicago. Across Chinatown-Bridgeport, Albany Park, and Pilsen, for instance, young people repeatedly described gentrification and the demographic change often associated with it, not as positive outcomes, but as sources of exclusion. Xiaming, a 26-year-old Asian American man from Chinatown-Bridgeport, said, *“The rising cost of living, the increased rent, the influx of newer, younger money ... is forcing a lot of people to question if they want to stay here [in Chinatown] long-term.”* This feeling of uncertainty about whether to

TABLE 1. POPULATION CHANGE IN MAJOR SECTIONS OF PILSEN (2000-2010)^M

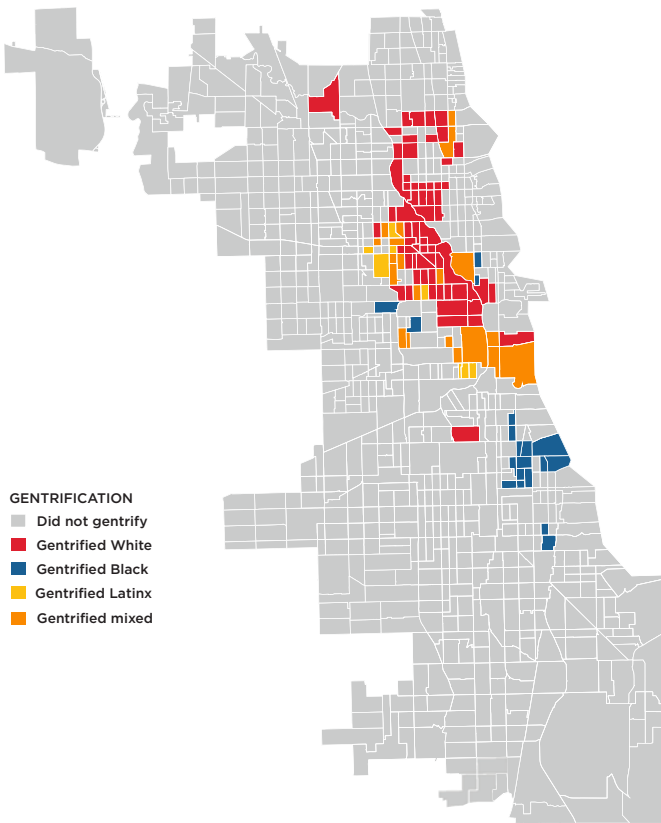
Population Change	Hispanic	White	Total Loss
East Pilsen	-1310	+153	-769
Center Pilsen	-4946	+998	-2522
West Pilsen	-3235	+24	-3176

stay in Chicago was a common emotion experienced by many of the young Asian Americans and Latinxs we interviewed.

The traditionally Latinx neighborhood of Pilsen, for example, has been one of the Chicago areas most heavily affected by gentrification over the past several years. Specifically, gentrification has been occurring in the eastern and central sections of Pilsen, the two areas that now have the highest incomes and the greatest concentrations of white residents in the neighborhood.¹¹⁹ Moreover, the number of building permits for new construction in Pilsen more than doubled from 2015 to 2016, increasing from 18 to 43.¹²⁰ These trends reveal a process of gentrification.¹²¹ These trends are also occurring alongside population decline. Between 2000 and 2010, Pilsen lost 31% and 20% of its foreign-born and family households,¹²² respectively, while the share of non-family households (single individuals and those most likely to be young gentrifiers) nearly doubled.¹²³

In the wake of these patterns, Latinx young adults in Pilsen, as well as in Albany Park,

FIGURE 2. GENTRIFICATION OUTCOMES BY RACE IN CHICAGO, 1980 TO 2010^L

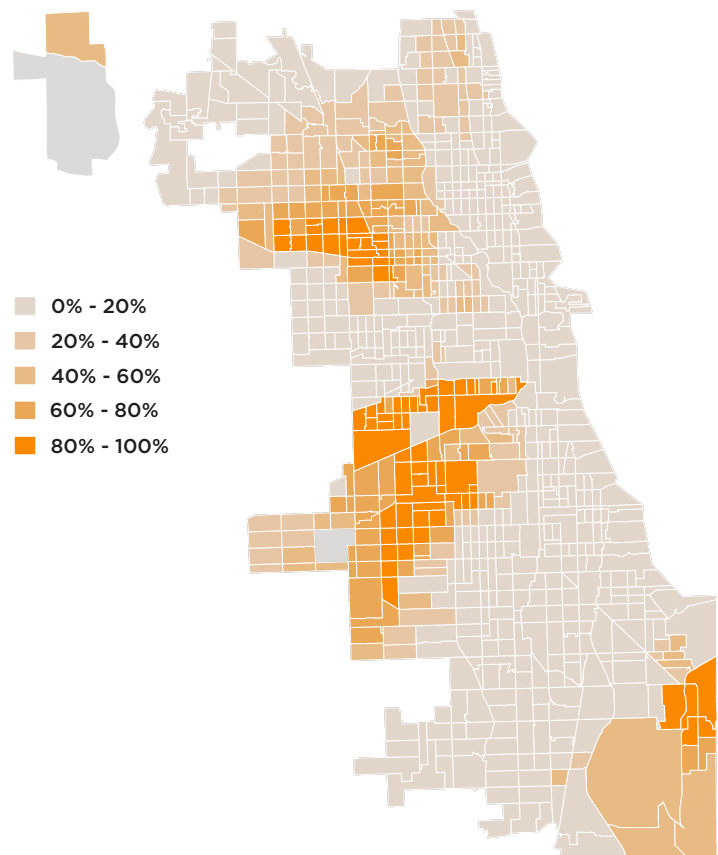


spoke often and with deep understanding of gentrification and displacement. Their experiences directly aligned with the statistics. As the cost of living increased in Pilsen, two flows in population change occurred: A wealthier and whiter group is moving in, while established members of the Latinx community are priced out of homes and businesses in the neighborhood (see Table 1). These trends in population change are important to note because gentrification has especially affected some historically Latinx communities, and the Latinx population is highly concentrated on the West sides of Chicago (see Figure 3). Gentrification and displacement in these areas, then, likely alter the feel and meaning of local community.

Young Latinx adults noted that equal treatment and respect do not follow the influx of diverse, well-resourced groups. Over and over, they shared their fears about losing housing and having to move away from their community. Several recounted incidents of class or cultural exclusion in Pilsen, an important shift in a historic community known as a safe space for Latinxs and immigrants—a neighborhood they once called home. María, age 23, recounted, *“I feel like Pilsen has been a safe space for undocumented people. Just people of color in general. But now I feel like there are little instances or occurrences that happen where you get knocked down to earth and realize ‘Oh, I’m not white.’ Because these people*

make you feel that way.” The combination of these experiences caused many in the community to feel what 22-year-old

FIGURE 3. THE CONCENTRATION OF LATINXS IN CHICAGO ^N



Manuela called the “de-civilization of people’s sense of home.” For example, Juanita, also 22 years old and a barista in Pilsen, described how big celebrations in places like Harrison Park no longer feel safe and comfortable because of the influx of unfamiliar faces. Juanita also described witnessing an incident of tension between a regular patron of hers and a retail worker in another shop in the community. According to her account, the retail workers in this new shop only spoke English, which made it

difficult to communicate and assist the patron, and the prices in the store were also unaffordable. Juanita recounted the incident and the man's response: *"I happen to be there, and he was just asking questions, asking the prices, and [then] he just told me, 'I want to get something for my girlfriend.' And everything was too expensive for him. He was like, 'Well, why is this store here? I can't afford anything.'"* In short, demographic and economic changes in areas like Pilsen can have an impact on how long-term residents feel about their own standing and familiarity with their neighborhoods.

White young adults, however, tended to have a different understanding of the effects of gentrification and neighborhood change. This perspective may in part be due to the racial wealth divide between white households and households in other racial and ethnic communities in the city.¹²⁴ Because those with more income and wealth (including a number of young Whites on the North Side) have more access to the affluent shops, restaurants, and real estate that tend to accompany gentrification, this population often talked about the access to affluent amenities that came with gentrification. Leah, a 28-year-old white woman in Wicker Park, offers one such description of gentrification in her neighborhood: *"A lot of new buildings [are] being reconstructed and demolished and built [in Wicker Park]. ... Just the building down the street ... which was empty for*

the last three years [and they] just converted it into a hotel. It's a really high-end hotel. The rooms are like \$400 a night and they have a beautiful rooftop bar and restaurant. I think seeing that that's what was put into that space also shows you that the neighborhood is becoming more gentrified. There's more people over here willing to spend \$25 on brunch and that type of thing."

Few white young adults discussed facing personal consequences of gentrification, such as rent hikes or other increasing costs of living. Instead, when discussing gentrification, white young adults often talked about neighborhood improvements

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and changing demographics. Hunter, a 26-year-old white man in Wicker Park, drives home this point: When asked if his neighborhood has changed since moving to Wicker Park, Hunter notes, *"Not since I moved in, but having gone to school here, having gone to [a] Near North [school], I've seen this neighborhood come from a neighborhood that wasn't a great place to live. I mean in terms of the racial and the ethnic background breakdown,*

it's definitely moved away from being very heavily Hispanic to definitely more gentrified and Caucasian now."

Hunter's story of neighborhood change in Wicker Park reflects the perspective a number of young Whites have toward gentrification. There is a level of awareness of the exclusionary effects of gentrification, but these issues are typically not a priority among white young adults. Rather, these issues play out as a backdrop of daily life for them.

When asked if race or racism play a role in recent neighborhood changes, nearly every white young adult we interviewed referred to racial and class diversity, and most underlined that racial and class diversity was lacking in their neighborhoods. For instance, 21-year-old Chase, a white man in Lincoln Park, echoed the sentiments of other young white adults by bemoaning the neighborhood's lack of diversity: wishing for any type of lasting diversity, he admits his perception that *"even if you take out race and ethnicity from the equation, you can't even get a diverse economic population in Lincoln Park. And at least from my perspective, I think that can kill an urban neighborhood. If you don't have some diversity. I don't care what kind of diversity it is, but if there's none, it can kill a neighborhood really quickly."*

This approach differs greatly from that of young Latinxs and Asian Americans,

who talked repeatedly about the cultural and racial conflict they witnessed or experienced as their communities became more diverse. To these young adults, greater diversity can result in the loss of safe cultural spaces. For example, 27-year-

"Do we welcome integration and gentrification potentially? And potentially displacing some families? Or, are we okay with this enclave of culture and tradition that you can't really find anywhere else?"

old Allison, an Asian American woman in Chinatown-Bridgeport, emphasized that Chinatown in particular faces tough decisions as a community: *"Do we welcome integration and gentrification potentially? And potentially displacing some families? Or, are we okay with this enclave of culture and tradition that you can't really find anywhere else? ... And then how do we really make it a port of entry for new immigrants, [while also] really making it thriving for the second and the third generation that have lived here?"* Ramón, a Latinx man, age 22, made similar statements about Pilsen. While acknowledging that Pilsen has *"a lot more diversity,"* he maintained that *"there needs to be a balance, and people can't afford to be displaced. That's—Pilsen needs to be a harbor for Latino immigrants."* To

TABLE 2. ETHNIC/RACIAL AND SOCIOECONOMIC CHANGE IN WICKER PARK, CHICAGO, CENSUS TRACT 2403 (1980-2010) ^o

	1980	1990	2000	2010
% White	48.4%	59.1%	83.5%	88.2%
% Black	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%
% Latino	48.5%	36.8%	9.9%	5.7%
Average Family Income (in Constant \$2010)	\$40,416	\$63,537	\$173,070	\$257,700
% with College Degree or More	2.7%	27.2%	61.1%	81.0%
% with Professional or Technical Occupation	6.2%	24.1%	35.3%	66.2%

many young Asian American and Latinx adults, Chinatown and Pilsen signify cultural richness and safety for immigrant communities. They believe these assets are invaluable and should not be compromised by economic and demographic changes associated with gentrification.

Of course, young white Chicagoans are not a monolithic group. While only a minority of white young adults we interviewed discussed race/ethnicity and racism as factors shaping displacement white young adults who are originally from Chicago made up that minority. As with white young adults who had studied urban issues in school, these young white Chicagoans felt conflicted about gentrification and their potential role in it. Emma, a 27-year-old resident of West Town, expressed these mixed feelings succinctly: *“I feel uncomfortable sometimes with the prospect of moving to a neighborhood, like Logan Square, where there’s a potential*

that you, as a white person, are displacing people of color... I may very well just stay here [her current neighborhood] because...I am very mindful of the fact that my relocation to another place by virtue of wanting to have cheaper rent is going to make it so that other people wouldn’t be able to live there.” Emma’s concerns have arguably been borne out in other neighborhoods.

One case that exemplifies these dynamics is the dramatic ethnic/racial and socioeconomic change in Wicker Park, a neighborhood northwest of downtown that has experienced substantial increases in family income and socioeconomic status (see Table 2) in addition to demographic change, and is now known for its “hipster” scene. As shown in Table 2, between 1980 and 2010 Wicker Park transitioned from being a neighborhood that was nearly half Latinx and half white to a neighborhood that was 6% Latinx and nearly 90% white.

During that same time period, the average family income and the percentage of college graduates increased from about \$40,000 to over \$260,000, and from about 3% to 66%, respectively.

Somewhat unlike those originally from Chicago, young, affluent, White transplants (a substantial share of Chicago's population, and a group that Chicago policymakers especially want to grow in the city¹²⁵) discussed gentrification as related to broad problems of diversity and class without explicitly naming racism. For example, 28-year-old Tara, like many other white transplants, stated that her North Side neighborhood *"lacks a lot of diversity income-wise, ethnic-wise, spiritual[ly]. I think it's lacking a lot of diversity."* This important difference is likely due to the different levels of local knowledge possessed by those originally from Chicago and by transplants to the city. Indeed, young adults who are

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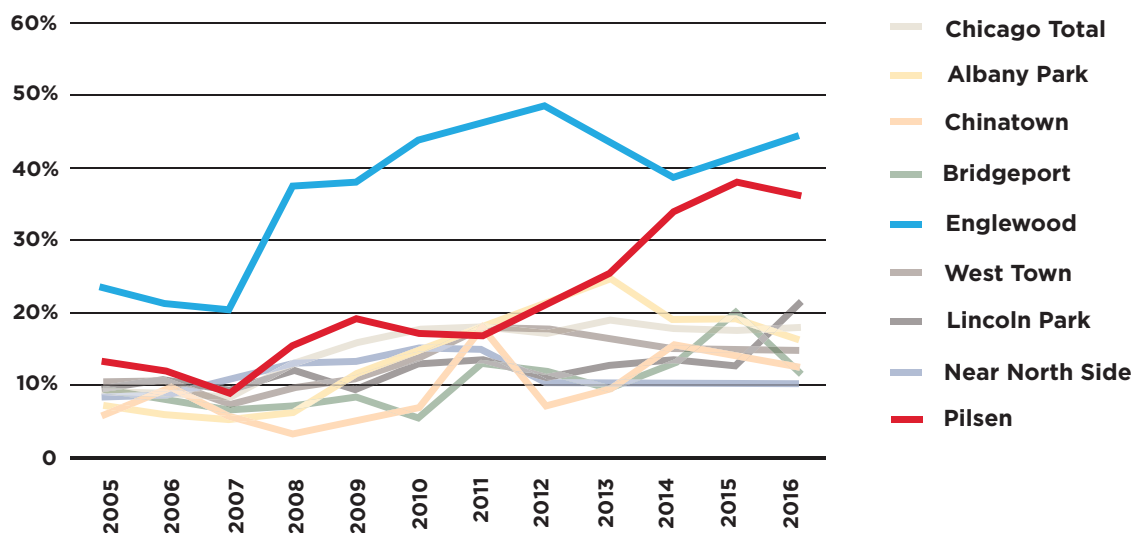
lifelong Chicagoans may also enjoy more opportunities to learn over time about different populations, areas, and issues in

the city compared to newcomers, many of whom develop tighter networks of similarly positioned peers.

Exploitation & the Ownership of Space and Culture

Another important concern among young Chicagoans involved the exploitation and use of community space and culture as commodities in the city. Across race, ethnicity, and place, these young people identified real estate developers, corporate businesses, city policymakers, and well-off homebuyers as active agents in gentrification, divestment, and displacement. Many argued that a fallout occurs when these stakeholders purchase and renovate property, or enable the purchase and renovation of such property. By doing so, developers and other new property owners not only enrich themselves, but they do so at the expense of others in the neighborhood with less capital and who are generally unable to buy property. But, according to a minority of the young adults with whom we spoke, this is how things work in the United States: Poor communities require investment, and the poor simply need to acquire the resources to buy property and gain a feeling of investment in their communities. For example, 22-year-old Jared, a white man on the North Side, said gentrification made Wicker Park better and has benefited many people: *"Overall it's gotten a lot better ... I have a strong*

FIGURE 4. SHARE OF RESIDENTIAL PROPERTIES PURCHASED BY BUSINESSES ^P



opinion that the only way [development] is going to happen is, rather than giving out housing vouchers, to incentivize people to buy homes, so that when their neighborhood does get better, they reap the benefits. I can't think of another situation that is sustainable. Other than that, I think if you own a home, you're going to invest in your community."

Accordingly, one of the things Jared wants to do is buy, renovate, and "flip" properties in areas on the far West and South Sides.

A far larger share of young Chicagoans had a more complicated view of gentrification, stating that the value of community ownership is undercut when outsiders seek to capitalize on local property. African American young adults, largely from Englewood, brought up the history of unfair racial advantage in Chicago, which they said can now be observed in who is buying and losing property in their community (see Figures 4 and 5).

These African American young adults stated that outsiders and speculators are "taking advantage of the low prices" for property in Englewood. Faith, a 28-year-old black woman and Englewood resident, made the point more directly. *"Now I see a lot of white people coming into the neighborhood. They're starting businesses, and it's easier for them to obtain grants and loans as opposed to people that have been in the neighborhood 20, 30, 50, 60 years that are being pushed out for new businesses where they can't afford to shop."* Although these businesses may bring job opportunities, Faith's point is that there is a racial bias in who has the opportunity to open businesses in the neighborhood. These reflections on newcomers to Englewood stand in contrast to young, African American Englewood residents' reports of attending community meetings, where developers stated that they need more tax incentives and cheaper mortgage interest rates to offset

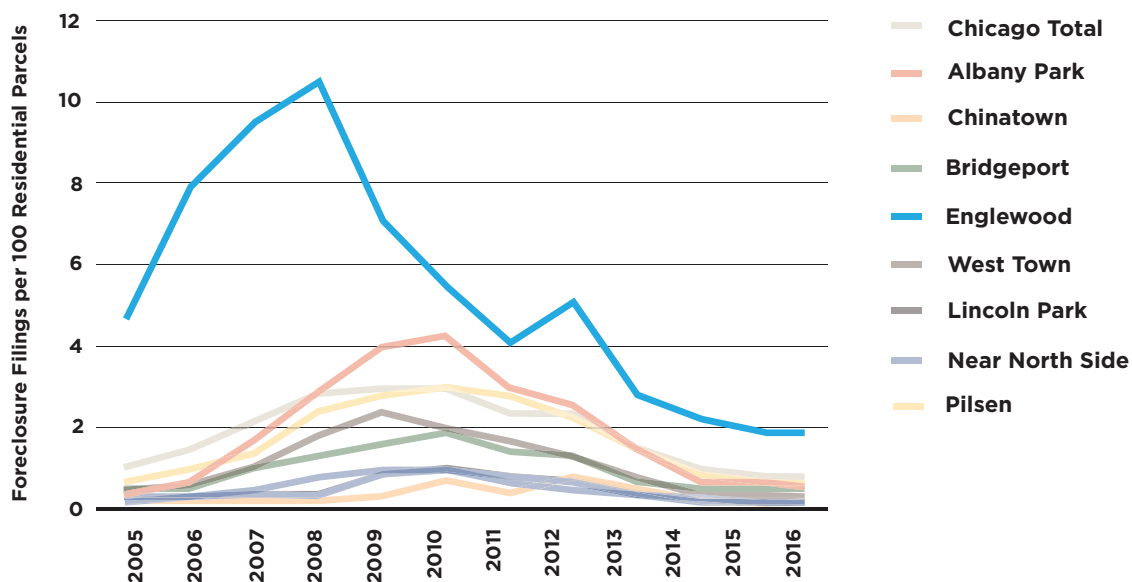
concerns over vandalism and negative neighborhood stereotypes.

Data from the city of Chicago show that the share of business-owned residential properties in Englewood has doubled since the 2007 housing crash (see Figure 4). Today, between 40% and 50% of residential properties in Englewood are owned by private businesses. This rate is far greater than in most of the other neighborhoods we studied and has important implications for the community's decision-making power. The higher rate of business ownership of residential property in Englewood suggests that fewer residents are homeowners or are building this important dimension of equity, which in turn leaves many in the community vulnerable to rent increase and eviction. These trends also occurred as part of a broader wave of displacement: the housing foreclosure crisis, which

disproportionately exposed Englewood to a foreclosure rate 3.5 times the average in Chicago at the height of the 2008 recession (see Figure 5). Though it has been reduced, this disparity remains today and further spurs displacement.

Asian American and Latinx young adults made similar observations, although they also underscored the “trendification” of their neighborhoods. This involves not only the arrival of “hip” restaurants and storefronts, but also others’ perception that their neighborhoods and ethnic cultures are themselves hip and fashionable. In Chinatown-Bridgeport, young Asian Americans repeatedly mentioned the diverse influx of young, well-resourced people to their neighborhoods. New coffee houses, pop-up shops, and restaurants come and go, and franchises such as Starbucks have recently opened their doors in the area.

FIGURE 5. FORECLOSURE FILING ACTIVITY BY NEIGHBORHOOD ^P



Young Asian Americans felt conflicted about these developments. On one hand, many were excited about the prospect of more businesses in the neighborhood that cater to young adults. On the other, they noted that this young demographic is coming to capitalize on particular advantages—the relatively affordable rent, Asian culture, and proximity to universities and high performing public schools. As a result, young adults in Chinatown-Bridgeport explained that established Asian American families are becoming displaced or pushed to buy property further west.¹²⁶ Alex, a 20-year-old Filipino from Chinatown-Bridgeport, put these issues in perspective: *“A lot of Asian things are the new, hip, trendy thing, so a lot of people want to come here and live in this neighborhood. And because of that, all the prices for the housing rise. And because of that, older Asian families, especially if they can’t get a job here or don’t speak English, have to move.”* Yet, as some young residents have recounted, the young newcomers to Chinatown-Bridgeport are causing the rising costs they seek to avoid. Some have mentioned attending local community meetings composed of mostly new residents, where these newcomers ask how to keep the rent and cost of living down. *“It was really weird to hear [these young, affluent, mostly white] people talk about that,”* said one young Chinese-American woman *“...because they are the ones who are making the cost of living high.”* This kind of account illustrates

how new, more affluent residents may be unaware of their role in gentrification, while revealing how socioeconomic diversity also imposes some costs on established neighborhood residents.

According to many young Latinx adults in Pilsen, white newcomers have a fundamentally different relationship to the area, treating Latinx space and culture as commodities. Most point out the

“I feel like they come here not really knowing how they’re affecting the community. They just come here, and they feel like it’s a cool place to be.”

exclusionary actions of young newcomers and developers alike. These newcomers, said 25-year-old Lucía, arrive in Pilsen unaware of or unconcerned by their effect on the community. *“I feel like they come here not really knowing how they’re affecting the community. They just come here, and they feel like it’s a cool place to be. I’ve heard them say [Pilsen] is hip and up-and-coming and has cool bars and cool restaurants. ... But do you talk to the people? Do you respect the people and the residents and the families? ... They don’t contribute to the community. If anything, they’re opening their own little boutiques and shops, which the family across the street can never afford.”* These observations

were echoed across Pilsen and, to a lesser extent, Chinatown-Bridgeport.

Young Latinx adults identified frequent occurrences of developers and businesses “asking” or “harassing” people to move from their apartments, thereafter buying property and selling it to more affluent, non-Latinx newcomers. This activity, said some young Latinx adults, is a form of capitalism in which outsiders take advantage of the vulnerabilities in the community and the lack of financial capital among its residents. Twenty-year-old Alec, a Latino from Pilsen, argued, *“Everyone is looking out for themselves. The developer who realized that this is cheap property for him to develop—he’s going to get it ... just like the artist who is coming from a different state and sees that he can afford rent at this place where it’s so close to downtown, easy commute—he’s watching out for himself.”* But these activities crowd out the historic Latinx community that has been in Pilsen for years. As a result, the face and future of the community are changed.

In short, while exploitation emerges as an important concern among young adults in different neighborhoods, it takes a different form depending on the history and culture of the given area. African Americans in Englewood note the role of unfair racial advantage, while Asian Americans and Latinxs connect exploitation with how cultural space

is made into a commodity. But across these neighborhoods, a number of young people regularly named developers and affluent newcomers as critical actors in gentrification and displacement. In doing so, these young adults revealed important class and race differences in people’s sense of ownership and experience of space in Chicago. Less affluent groups feel constrained by their position. In contrast, those with more resources, in the words of 21-year-old Angela, a black woman in Albany Park, are perceived to have *“this mentality that [the city] is theirs, that they’d walked into this place, and it’s theirs, and it’s free-reign.”* These kinds of behaviors may matter, since research indicates that patterns of gentrification are tied to and may well perpetuate racial stereotypes and racial inequality, which can lead to greater mental health risks for the displaced.¹²⁷ What is more, diverse young adults’ compelling and frequent observations of gentrification and displacement in Chicago suggest that policymakers need to rethink the scale at which gentrification and displacement operate. A new generation in the city is being defined by these events. City government and policymakers would therefore do well to develop policies that protect vulnerable populations from displacement and other exclusionary effects of gentrification.

TABLE 3: POPULATION CHANGE IN CHICAGO (2000-2016) ^Q

	2000 Population	2010 Population	2016 Population	Estimated change in Population	Estimated Percent loss/gain
White	1,215,315	1,212,835	1,321,324	106,009	9%
Black/African American	1,065,009	887,608	839,917	-225,092	-21%
American Indian and Alaska Native	10,290	13,337	7,818	-2,472	-24%
Asian	125,974	147,164	165,229	39,255	31%
Native American and other Pacific Islander	1,788	1,013	906	-882	-49%
Hispanic or Latino*	753,644	778,862	790,548	36,904	5%
Total	2,896,016	2,695,598	2,714,017	-181,999	-6%

Divestment & Future Expectations

A wide array of the young adults we interviewed connected displacement with the uneven power people have to control their own lives in Chicago. To these young adults, the current displacement of lower-income people in the city is part of a broader history of inequity in Chicago. This history of inequity in the city is one of unequal investments. While some areas have received a disproportionate amount of local government support, other communities that in fact need more investments have instead been abandoned and suffered from disinvestment.¹²⁸ This history shapes the present—a present that young adults say does not bode well for low-income people and communities of color in the city. Many young Latinx and Asian American adults who saw themselves on the receiving end of gentrification and displacement feared that their families and neighbors will be

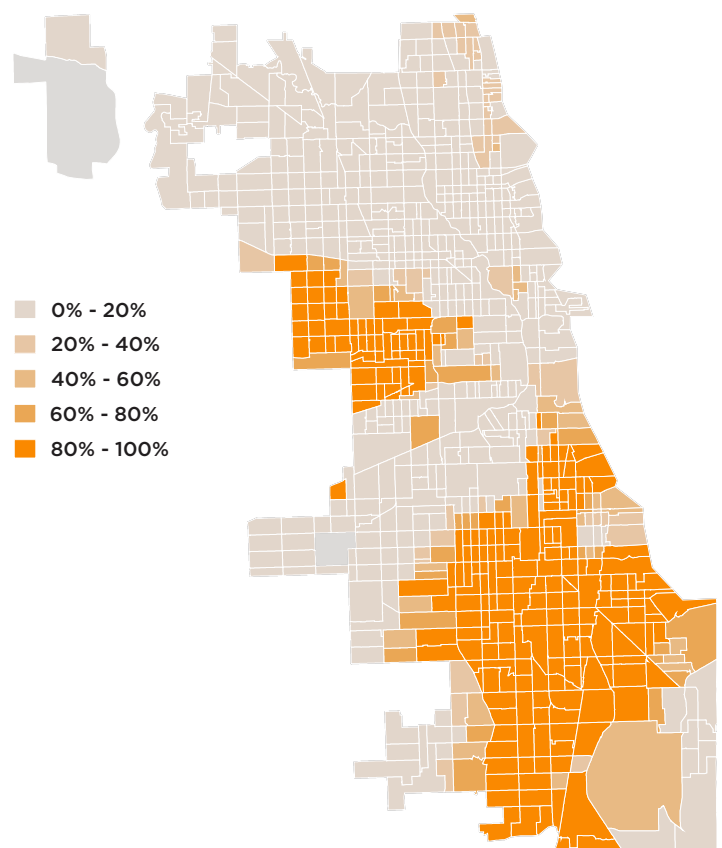
forced to relocate. They feared that their communities will become less represented in the city. In comparison, numerous young whites we interviewed believed that they profit more from gentrification, and thus held more ambivalent views on the costs and benefits of gentrification and their role in that process.

In Englewood, Chinatown-Bridgeport, and Pilsen, young people of color worried that their neighborhoods will change to such an extent over the coming years that community may be lost. For many young African Americans and Latinxs, the changes that Englewood and Pilsen are experiencing are part of a strategy in the city to remake their neighborhoods for other people. For example, for many young African Americans, the opening of the Whole Foods shopping center in Englewood, alongside the planned construction of an \$85 million public high school, signals future gentrification and displacement.

According to Joshua, a 23-year-old black man, the Whole Foods shopping center in Englewood “just shows you the future of the South Side. ... I honestly think that the South Side is going to be a lot different in the next 20 years just based on the buildings and what is going on in the projects. I feel like most of the blacks are getting pushed out of the city.” Many young black people we interviewed were similarly pessimistic about black people’s prospects in Chicago. Democratic gubernatorial candidate Chris Kennedy also drew connections between the displacement of black Chicagoans and policy decisions like inadequate school funding and the closure of hospitals and mental health facilities.¹²⁹ “What choice do people have but to move, to leave?” Kennedy stated. “I think that’s part of a strategic gentrification plan being implemented by the city of Chicago to push people of color out of the city. The city is becoming smaller, and as it becomes smaller, it’s become whiter.” This critique is not unwarranted, given official data. As mentioned earlier in the report, Chicago’s black population has fallen an estimated 21% since 2000, as has the Native American population in the city, according to the U.S. Census (see Table 3). This change reflects racialized and concentrated levels of population loss in African American neighborhoods in Chicago, since the city is so heavily segregated and black residents overwhelmingly live in the South and West Sides (see Figure 6).

At the same time, a large number of African American young adults also identified powerful actors, like city government and business developers, as critical agents in the acquisition and control of space in their neighborhoods. According to these young adults, while buying property and opening more

FIGURE 6. CONCENTRATION OF AFRICAN AMERICANS IN CHICAGO ^N



businesses may seem to invest in the black community, many of these actions in fact divest from the community and lead to its displacement. Twenty-eight-year-old Malik, a young African American man from Englewood, expressed such a view about displacement, stating the common political view that the renovation and construction

in the area *“is all going into one big power play, a strategic move that’s been in play the past few years.”* Malik continued, *“I feel like eventually all the poorer black residents will have to find somewhere to move to as these new people come in and they get the better schools ... the better streets, the buildings being remodeled.”*

Taken together, these and other reflections from young African American adults reveal their anxieties and fears for African American people in Chicago. For these young adults, the future of Chicago is one in which the size and scope of the black South Side is imperiled. This situation is not an inevitability but, in their view, a political maneuver by the city government. Their response, then, is to fight to stay in their communities and in the city. However, fighting to remain in the city is difficult, they said, because of the lack of support and opportunities for decent work and safe housing in their neighborhoods. From their perspective, the political and economic landscape of Chicago supports the spread of disinvestment in black communities and displacement of black people. Many young Asian Americans in Chinatown-Bridgeport, and Latinxs in Pilsen, were also worried about disinvestment and displacement, and they offered a political analysis of change in their neighborhoods. For instance, young Latinxs noted that the increased presence of businesses and police in Pilsen is not for their direct benefit, which further deprives

them of support and ownership of the community space. According to these young adults, Latinxs are not only “exiled” from the community by developers who are acquiring local property, but police officers are also patrolling more in Pilsen to protect those properties.¹³⁰ All the while, community landmarks and murals have been destroyed by these private property owners, and new businesses are opening in the area that neither employ nor cater to established residents. María, a 21-year-old Latina from Pilsen, asked the question: *“Who are you bringing these jobs for, if the majority of the people in this community won’t be able to apply for them?”*

The power to control their lives was an important issue among many young adults. This is particularly the case for young people of color whose communities are on the receiving end of gentrification and displacement. Divestment—the stripping of power, rights, or possessions from those less resourced—is a key concept among the young adults we interviewed. It involves not only established, lower-income residents, but also developers, incoming businesses, and city policymakers. Still, the interplay between these groups is not natural, but built on racial and class differences in wealth and power. As a result, many young adults of color worry about potential displacement and they fear for the future of their cultural and ethnic communities.

Conclusion: Inequitable Policy Practices and Young Adults as Critical Stakeholders

Neighborhood change looms large in the lives and minds of young adults in Chicago. Although many used the terms gentrification and displacement to describe these changes, important differences arose in young people's observations of these neighborhood changes. For example, young Latinxs, Asian Americans, and African Americans often discussed gentrification and the influx of affluent newcomers and speculators to their neighborhoods as sources of exclusion, including displacement. White young adults, however, held more constrained and conflicted understandings about the impact of gentrification. Few young whites discussed race as a factor in gentrification, choosing instead to talk about race and racism in their neighborhoods in terms of diversity. The small number of young whites who did talk about race and gentrification were themselves originally from Chicago. These differences may have powerful implications for public opinion on gentrification and public support for urban policy alternatives (e.g. renter protection policies like rent control, right to purchase programs, community benefit agreements, and inclusionary zoning ordinances).¹³¹

A large number of young adults also took issue with the economic behavior of real estate developers, corporate businesses, city policymakers, and well-

off homebuyers, who they identified as powerful contributors to gentrification and displacement. In the eyes of many we interviewed, these actors capitalize on local property and cultural space, which undermines their community's capacity to influence decisions. The acquisition of space, opening of high-priced retailers, and influx of more affluent residents not only causes divestment from local residents (for example, by raising the costs of living and by making homes, jobs, and vendors inaccessible to long-term community members), but also leads to the displacement of communities of color, thereby imperiling their future status in the city. But even amid these challenges, a range of young adults also emphasized that their concerns and observations are connected to broader histories of political struggle in their communities. These histories of political struggle are a resource that young people of color use to make sense of present circumstances and point a way forward for future policymaking. In short, given young adults' deep connections to and knowledge of their communities, more effort should be made to prioritize their voices in urban policy debate.

RECOMMENDED CITATION

Knight, David J. "Gentrification, Displacement, and the Politics of Place" in *Race & Place: Young Adults and the Future of Chicago* (Genforward at the University of Chicago, 2019), p58-73.