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Gentrification and Fair Housing: Does Gentrification Further Integration?

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ABSTRACT

On the 50th anniversary of the Fair Housing Act, long-time residents of cities across the country feel increasingly anxious that they will be priced out of their homes and communities, as growing numbers of higher-income, college-educated households opt for downtown neighborhoods. These fears are particularly acute among black and Latino residents. Yet when looking through the lens of fair housing, gentrification also offers a potential opportunity, as the moves that higher-income, white households make into predominantly minority, lower-income neighborhoods are moves that help to integrate those neighborhoods, at least in the near term. We explore the long-term trajectory of predominantly minority, low-income neighborhoods that gentrified over the 1980s and 1990s. On average, these neighborhoods experienced little racial change while they gentrified, but a significant minority became racially integrated during the decade of gentrification, and over the longer term, many of these neighborhoods remained racially stable. That said, some gentrifying neighborhoods that were predominantly minority in 1980 appeared to be on the path to becoming predominantly white. Policies, such as investments in place-based, subsidized housing, are needed in many gentrifying neighborhoods to ensure racial and economic diversity over the longer term.

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On the 50th anniversary of the Fair Housing Act, there is growing discussion and concern about gentrification. In almost every American city, long-time residents feel increasingly anxious that they will be priced out of their homes and communities, as growing numbers of higher income, college-educated households opt for downtown neighborhoods. These fears are particularly acute among black and Latino residents who worry that the neighborhoods they regard as home are being taken away from them. As a recent *Atlantic Monthly* article put it, “The way a lot of African American and Latino people experience gentrification is a form of colonization. The gentrifiers are not wanting to share—they’re wanting to take over” (Fayaad, 2017). Yet when looking through the lens of fair housing, gentrification also offers a potential opportunity, as the moves that higher income, white households make into predominantly minority, lower-income neighborhoods are moves that help to integrate those neighborhoods, at least in the near term. The key question is whether this integration will last and help to deliver on the promise of the Fair Housing Act to promote and further integrated living. Inverting the famous words of community organizer Saul Alinsky, this integration may only be the time between when the first white moves in and the last family of color moves out.

Although people have strong assumptions about what happens in gentrifying neighborhoods, there is, in fact, little research examining the long-run trajectory of neighborhoods that have

gentrified. We aim to fill that gap, examining the longer run racial change and composition of low-income, predominantly minority census tracts in U.S. cities that gentrified, or experienced large gains in income relative to their metropolitan area, during the 1980s and 1990s. Specifically, we address three questions. First, are majority black and majority Hispanic central-city neighborhoods more or less likely to gentrify than predominantly white neighborhoods, and how has this changed over time? Second, do predominantly minority neighborhoods that gentrify become more racially integrated during the decade of gentrification, and how has this changed over time? And finally, do the predominantly minority neighborhoods that gentrify appear to resegregate in the decades following gentrification or do they remain stably racially integrated over time?

In brief, we find that a growing number of predominantly minority, low-income neighborhoods gentrified over our time period, becoming just as likely to gentrify as other low-income neighborhoods between 2000 and 2016. On average, these neighborhoods experienced little racial change while they gentrified, but a significant minority became racially integrated during the decade of gentrification, and over the longer term, many of these neighborhoods remained racially stable. Indeed, neighborhoods that became integrated through gentrification appeared to be more racially stable than those that integrated through households of color moving into predominantly white neighborhoods. That said, some gentrifying neighborhoods that were predominantly minority in 1980 appeared to be on the path to becoming predominantly white. Policies, such as investments in place-based subsidized housing, are needed in many gentrifying neighborhoods to ensure racial and economic diversity over the longer term.

Background

Although racial segregation continues to be the norm in American cities, a significant minority of neighborhoods are now racially integrated. This integration has arisen almost exclusively through the entry of households of color into predominantly white neighborhoods. The burden of integration, in other words, has fallen on the shoulders of households of color, who have often encountered resistance and hostility as they have moved into white communities. Table 1 shows the pathway to integration for the set of neighborhoods in metropolitan areas that became newly racially integrated in 1990, 2000, and 2016. As discussed below, we define racially integrated neighborhoods simply as census tracts that are between 25% and 75% non-Hispanic white.¹ Using this definition, 4,990 neighborhoods became newly racially integrated during the 1980s. During the 1990s, the number of newly integrated neighborhoods grew to 6,839. This trend continued between 2000 and 2016, when 8,926 neighborhoods became integrated. The table shows that among all the neighborhoods that became newly integrated during the 1980s and 1990s, 98% started off as more than 75% white at the beginning of the decade. During the 2000s, the overwhelming majority of newly integrated neighborhoods also started off as predominantly white, but nearly 6% of the neighborhoods that became racially integrated between 2000 and 2016

Table 1. Prior racial composition of tracts that became racially integrated in each decade.

Distribution by percentage white in decade prior	All tracts in CBSAs		
	1990 (n = 4,990)	2000 (n = 6,839)	2016 (n = 8,926)
0–25%	0.025	0.017	0.056
75–100%	0.975	0.983	0.944

Note. CBSA = core-based statistical areas. Each column shows the distribution of percentage non-Hispanic white in the decade prior for tracts that became racially integrated (i.e., 25–75% white) in the decade expressed at the top of the column. For example, column 1 shows the distribution of percentage non-Hispanic white in 1980 of all tracts in CBSAs that became 25–75% white in 1990. For tracts observed in 2016, the decade prior is 2000.

were integrated through white households choosing to move into predominantly minority neighborhoods. Although this is still a very small share, the change is notable.

Given the fact that, at least until recently, so few predominantly minority neighborhoods have experienced any gain in white population, it is not surprising that few researchers have examined whether gentrification advances racial integration. Moreover, the conventional view is that long-time, lower income residents are displaced through gentrification, which would undermine any economic integration and likely racial integration too. The scholars who have attempted to measure the extent of displacement of low-income residents have generally found little evidence of heightened mobility rates in gentrifying neighborhoods (Ellen & O'Regan, 2011; Freeman, 2005; McKinnish, Walsh, & White, 2010; Vigdor, 2002). It is possible that researchers would find more evidence of heightened mobility today, as the pace of gentrification has accelerated, but to be clear these studies do not show that there is no direct displacement occurring; their results simply suggest that mobility rates among the poor are no greater in gentrifying neighborhoods (Ellen, 2018). Low-income households tend to live in unstable housing conditions, regardless of the neighborhood where they live. As Matthew Desmond's (2016) book *Evicted* so powerfully shows, low-income renters experience enormous instability in the private market, even in neighborhoods seeing little investment or gentrification. This means that there is ample room for fairly quick racial and economic change, even absent elevated rates of displacement.

We are not the first researchers to examine race and gentrification. Several articles have studied how baseline neighborhood racial composition predicted gentrification during the 1980s and 1990s. They generally find that predominantly black, low-income neighborhoods were less likely to experience income gains than white neighborhoods were (Ellen & O'Regan, 2008; Galster, Quercia, Cortes, & Malega, 2003; Hwang & Sampson, 2014; McKinnish et al., 2010; Rosenthal, 2008). Results for Hispanic neighborhoods are reversed, with studies suggesting that low-income Hispanic neighborhoods were more likely to experience a gain in socioeconomic status than other neighborhoods (Ellen & O'Regan, 2008; Rosenthal, 2008), at least during the 1990s. Hwang and Sampson (2014), by contrast, find the pace of gentrification was negatively correlated with the initial share of both black and Latino residents, but they focus only on Chicago between 2007 and 2009. Using an entropy measure to capture neighborhood racial diversity (across four racial groups), Freeman (2009) finds that neighborhoods that gentrified during the 1980s and 1990s and those that remained persistently low income had similar levels of racial diversity at the start of the decade.

Another set of studies has examined racial change in gentrifying neighborhoods. Qualitative accounts have highlighted the racial change and conflict that can accompany gentrification (Hyra, 2017). But the few quantitative studies that explore racial change in gentrifying neighborhoods typically find very little of it. Bostic and Martin (2003), for example, emphasize that despite the conventional view of gentrification as the entry of white households into black neighborhoods, many gentrifiers are black. They offer evidence that black homeowners were a significant gentrifying force during the 1970s, though not as much during the 1980s. Ellen and O'Regan (2011) look more directly at racial transition and show that neighborhoods that gentrified during the 1990s gained few whites over the course of gentrifying. Freeman (2009) meanwhile finds that trends in racial diversity were the same in low-income neighborhoods that gentrified during the 1980s and 1990s as they were in other low-income neighborhoods.

Researchers examining neighborhoods since 2000 document an uptick in racial transition in predominantly minority neighborhoods. For example, Freeman and Cai (2015) document an increase in the number of whites moving into black neighborhoods, particularly neighborhoods close to the central business district. Even more relevant, perhaps, Owens and Candipan (2018) examine racial change in what they call ascending neighborhoods, or neighborhoods experiencing socioeconomic growth. (These neighborhoods include gentrifying neighborhoods but also neighborhoods that start off as higher income.) They find that although few predominantly black and Hispanic neighborhoods saw much racial/ethnic change between 1990 and 2010, those that experienced gain were more likely to transition to mixed race than those that did not gain. Specifically, 26% of predominantly black and 16% of

predominantly Hispanic ascending neighborhoods transitioned to mixed race during the period compared with just 6% and 1%, respectively, of the nonascending neighborhoods. These disparities hold up after controlling for other neighborhood characteristics. A very small share of both ascending and nonascending predominantly minority neighborhoods transitioned to predominantly white, but a significant minority shifted to racially mixed. Finally, Sutton (2018) examines the racial change accompanying the gentrification of neighborhoods in New York City during the 1980s, 1990s, and 2000s. She finds that during the two earlier decades, the average gentrifying neighborhood in the city saw little racial change, but during the 2000s, the average gentrifying neighborhood experienced an increase in percentage white and a reduction in percentage black and Hispanic. She concludes that blacks and Latinos have become increasingly vulnerable to displacement through gentrification.

Our inquiry differs from these previous analyses in that we examine gentrification through the lens of racial integration. We focus on initially low-income neighborhoods,² distinguish between mixed minority and racially integrated neighborhoods that include a substantial number of whites, and examine demographic similarity between households of different races in integrated neighborhoods. Finally, and perhaps most significantly, we examine what happens to the racial composition of neighborhoods over the longer term, in the decades following the initial gentrification or economic gain.

Data and Definitions

Like most studies of gentrification, we use census tracts to proxy for neighborhoods. We obtain tract-level data from the 2010 Neighborhood Change Database (NCDB) and the 2012–2016 American Community Survey to construct measures of gentrification and racial composition for three cohorts of central-city tracts that started as low income in the years 1980, 1990, and 2000.³ Our sample is restricted to tracts that were part of 412 core-based statistical areas (CBSAs) and were labeled as central city tracts by the census.⁴ We further restrict the sample to tracts that had at least 100 residents in 1980, 1990, 2000, and 2000–2016, which we refer to as 2016.

We define central-city tracts as low income if they fall into the bottom 40% of the neighborhood median household income distribution within their CBSA. Because central-city tracts tend to have lower median incomes than suburban tracts, just over half of all central-city tracts meet our definition of low income in all three of our time periods. Our analytic sample includes 13,255 low-income tracts in the 1980 cohort, 13,525 in the 1990 cohort, and 13,823 in the 2000 cohort.

We label a tract as gentrifying if it experiences an increase in the ratio of its median income to the median income of the CBSA of at least 0.1 over a decade.⁵ This definition of gentrification is informed by prior work that also used relative changes in a tract's median income (Brueckner and Rosenthal, 2009; Ellen & O'Regan, 2011). By estimating CBSA- and year-specific distributions of the tract-to-CBSA median income ratio, we ensure that the change in a tract's median income is not driven by a metropolitan area-wide rise in median household income. We examine the sensitivity of our findings to defining gentrification as an upward move in the distribution of median household income of at least 10 percentile points. Of the 1,180 tracts that gentrified in the 1980s under the income ratio change definition, 1,039 (88%) also gentrified under the percentile change distribution. Similar patterns hold in the 1990s and the 2000s. We obtain qualitatively similar results across all analyses when we use this alternative measure.⁶

One of our primary outcomes is change in neighborhood racial composition. To measure it, we classify each tract into one of the following three categories at the start and end of each decade: (1) predominantly white tracts, defined as tracts with a non-Hispanic white share larger than 75%; (2) racially integrated tracts, with a non-Hispanic white share between 25 and 75%; and (3) predominantly minority tracts, with a non-Hispanic white share below 25%. We further divide the predominantly minority tracts into (a) majority black tracts, in which the share of black residents is at least 50%; (b) majority Hispanic tracts, in which the share of Hispanic residents is at least 50%; and (c) mixed minority tracts, in which neither blacks nor Hispanics constitute a majority. Our definition of racially integrated is broader than that used in many earlier studies (see, e.g., Ellen, 2000). Specifically, we anchor our definition around neighborhoods that are

Table 2. Baseline characteristics of central-city low-income tracts.

	Low-income and gentrified			Low-income and did not gentrify		
	1980–1990	1990–2000	2000–2016	1980–1990	1990–2000	2000–2016
	(n = 1,180)	(n = 1,907)	(n = 2,225)	(n = 12,075)	(n = 11,618)	(n = 11,598)
<i>Income and education</i>						
Mean tract to metro area income ratio	0.58	0.58	0.61	0.70	0.65	0.64
Mean income percentile	15.75	14.11	17.65	18.03	18.14	17.79
Mean % college	18.24	13.16	22.21	10.95	13.41	14.14
Mean % poverty	19.08	30.53	25.15	21.31	23.69	24.24
<i>Racial composition</i>						
Mean % white	68.89	42.16	43.81	56.18	50.64	40.26
Mean % black	18.31	33.36	27.72	27.36	28.48	31.93
Mean % Hispanic	10.06	20.36	21.74	13.62	16.42	22.26
<i>Distribution by percentage white</i>						
75–100% white	0.57	0.25	0.22	0.43	0.35	0.21
25–75% white	0.29	0.35	0.44	0.28	0.33	0.37
0–25% white, majority black	0.10	0.26	0.19	0.21	0.20	0.23
0–25% white, majority Hispanic	0.02	0.13	0.12	0.06	0.09	0.15
0–25% white, mixed minority	0.01	0.02	0.04	0.01	0.03	0.04
<i>Distribution by census region</i>						
Northeast	0.21	0.15	0.27	0.22	0.23	0.20
Midwest	0.18	0.26	0.16	0.25	0.24	0.26
South	0.39	0.36	0.32	0.30	0.31	0.32
West	0.22	0.23	0.25	0.23	0.23	0.22

Note. Each column reports baseline characteristics at the start of the period expressed at the top of the column. For example, column 1 shows baseline characteristics in 1980 of tracts that were low income in 1980 and gentrified between 1980 and 1990. Low-income tracts are defined as those that were at or below the 40th percentile of the core-based statistical area (CBSA) income distribution. Gentrifying tracts are those that experience a gain in the ratio of their income to the CBSA income of at least 0.1 over a decade. White refers to non-Hispanic white population. Black refers to non-Hispanic black population. Our sample of CBSAs includes 327 metropolitan areas and 85 micropolitan areas, based on the 2013 delineations by the U.S. Office of Management and Budget. The metropolitan and micropolitan areas excluded from the analyses are those that include tracts that were not sampled in the 1980 census.

50% non-Hispanic white and label neighborhoods with a non-Hispanic white share as low as 25% as integrated, even though non-Hispanic whites constitute a majority of the U.S. population. But non-Hispanic whites comprise a smaller share of the population today than they did in earlier decades; consider that in 2016, non-Hispanic whites comprised 61% of the U.S. population, down from 75.6% in 1990 (U.S. Census Bureau, 2001; Vespa, Armstrong, & Medina, 2018). Moreover, the non-Hispanic white population share in central cities is even lower.⁷

Results

Which Low-Income City Neighborhoods Gentrify?

In the 1980s, very few predominantly minority low-income central-city neighborhoods experienced gentrification. Figure 1 shows that just 8 percent of mixed-minority, low-income city neighborhoods experienced gentrification. Predominantly black and predominantly Hispanic low-income neighborhoods were even less likely to experience gentrification, with just 4.6% and 3.8%, respectively, gentrifying during the decade. During the 1990s and 2000s, predominantly minority neighborhoods were far more likely to gentrify. Indeed, during the 1990s, predominantly black and predominantly Hispanic neighborhoods were actually more likely to gentrify than were predominantly white neighborhoods.⁸ Between 2000 and 2016, predominantly white neighborhoods were again more likely to gentrify, but gaps had closed.

Table 2 shows baseline characteristics of the low-income, central-city neighborhoods that gentrified and those that did not, by decade. Consistent with Figure 1, the neighborhoods that gentrified during the 1990s and 2000s started out as more racially diverse than those that

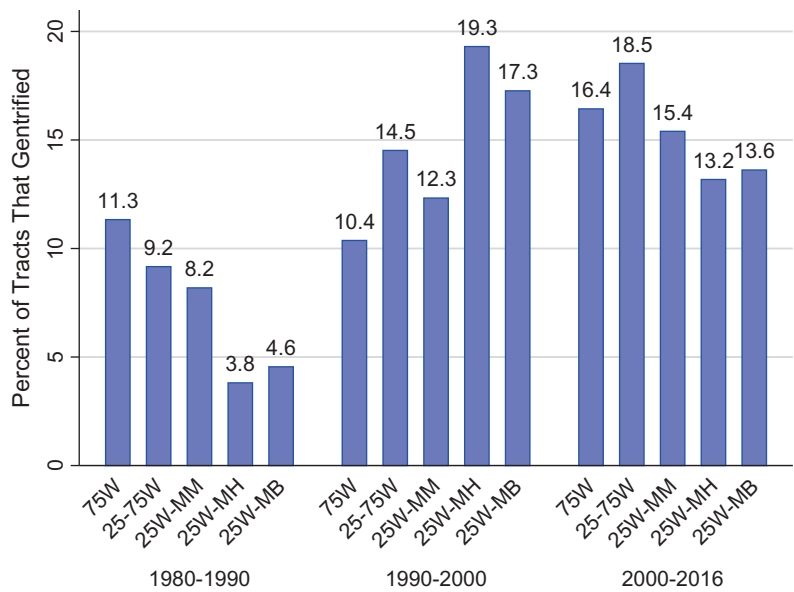


Figure 1. Percent of tracts that gentrified, by initial racial composition.
Note: 75W are tracts that were more than 75% white at the start of the decade, 25-75W are tracts that were 25-75% white at the start of the decade, 25W-MM are tracts that were less than 25% white and more than 50% Asian or mixed minority at the start of the decade, 25W-MH are tracts that were less than 25% white and more than 50% Hispanic at the start of the decade, and 25W-MB are tracts that were less than 25% white and more than 50% black at the start of the decade.

gentrified during the 1980s. The average neighborhood that gentrified during the 1980s was 69% white, 18% black, and 10% Hispanic in 1980. The average neighborhood that gentrified during the 1990s started out as 42% white, 33% black, and 20% Hispanic. Similarly, the average neighborhood that gentrified between 2000 and 2016 started out as 44% white, 28% black, and 22% Hispanic. [Table 2](#) shows that this same general pattern was evident for nongentrifying neighborhoods too, which is not surprising given the diversification of the U.S. population during this time period. As for initial income, in all three decades, gentrifying neighborhoods started off as slightly lower income relative to tracts that did not gentrify in their same metropolitan areas. That said, the share of residents with college degrees was generally higher at baseline in gentrifying neighborhoods than in other low-income neighborhoods. Finally, low-income neighborhoods that gentrified during the 1980s and 1990s were disproportionately located in the South, whereas those that gentrified after 2000 were disproportionately located in the Northeast, as compared with other low-income neighborhoods.

Table 3. Short-term change in percentage white for low-income, predominantly minority tracts, by gentrification status.

	Gentrified			Did not gentrify		
	1980s	1990s	2000s	1980s	1990s	2000s
25th percentile	– 2.8	– 2.2	0.3	– 4.3	– 4.1	– 3.6
50th percentile	0.3	– 0.1	7.2	– 1.4	– 1.0	– 0.4
75th percentile	7.2	1.5	18.3	0.0	0.4	1.9
90th percentile	17.7	6.5	28.7	1.7	1.8	6.0

Note. In each decade, the sample is restricted to central-city tracts that started as low income (i.e., tracts below the 40th percentile of the core-based statistical area income distribution) and were less than 25% non-Hispanic white.

Table 4. Short-term transition probabilities of racial distribution for central-city, low-income, predominantly minority tracts.

	Gentrified					Did not gentrify				
	+ 75%	25–75%	< 25%MB	< 25%MH	< 25%MM	Total	+ 75%	25–75%	< 25%MB	< 25%MH
	1990 white					1990 white				
1980 white										
< 25%–MB	0.00	18.49	80.67	0.84	0.00	100.00	0.00	1.68	93.31	2.72
< 25%–MH	0.00	27.59	6.90	62.07	3.45	100.00	0.00	2.05	0.27	95.77
< 25%–MM	0.00	28.57	21.43	0.00	50.00	100.00	0.00	0.64	8.92	45.22
< 25%, pooled	0.00	20.99	62.35	11.73	4.94	100.00	0.00	1.71	69.28	24.82
				2000 white					2000 white	
1990 white										
< 25%–MB	0.00	4.08	89.39	3.47	3.06	100.00	0.00	0.89	93.57	3.02
< 25%–MH	0.00	8.20	0.41	90.98	0.41	100.00	0.00	1.47	0.20	97.06
< 25%–MM	0.00	25.00	6.82	27.27	40.91	100.00	0.00	1.60	6.07	38.34
< 25%, pooled	0.00	6.56	56.81	32.26	4.37	100.00	0.00	1.11	60.26	32.08
				2016 white					2016 white	
2000 white										
< 25%–MB	0.24	32.00	60.47	2.35	4.94	100.00	0.00	4.04	88.61	2.74
< 25%–MH	0.39	25.68	0.00	68.48	5.45	100.00	0.06	3.25	0.35	93.38
< 25%–MM	0.00	34.12	1.18	15.29	49.41	100.00	0.00	4.50	3.64	31.05
< 25%, pooled	0.26	30.12	33.64	25.95	10.04	100.00	0.02	3.81	49.67	37.07

Note. In each decade, the sample is restricted to central-city tracts that started as low income (i.e., tracts below the 40th percentile of the core-based statistical area [CBSA] income distribution) and were less than 25% non-Hispanic white. Gentrifying tracts are those that experience a gain in the ratio of their income to the CBSA income of at least 0.1 over a decade. White refers to non-Hispanic white population; + 75% indicates tracts that were more than 75% white; 25–75% indicates tracts that were 25–75% white; < 25%MB tracts are tracts that were majority black and less than 25% white; < 25%MH tracts are tracts that were majority Hispanic and less than 25% white; < 25%MM tracts are tracts that were mixed majority and less than 25% white.

These patterns hold up in a multivariate analysis in which we predict the likelihood of gentrification separately in each period (1980 to 1990, 1990 to 2000, and 2000 to 2016) for central-city neighborhoods that started as low-income at the beginning of the corresponding period.⁹ The dependent variable is a binary indicator of gentrification that takes a value of 1 if a tract experiences an increase in the ratio of its median income to the median income of the CBSA of at least 0.1 over the period, and 0 otherwise. We regress this indicator on tract characteristics measured at the beginning of the period: the ratio of tract median income to the median income of the CBSA, the percentage of residents in the tract with college degrees, the percentage non-Hispanic black, the percentage Hispanic, and dummies for census region. The coefficients on the race variables (presented in [Table A1](#) in the appendix) suggest a notable shift over time. During the 1980s, low-income neighborhoods with larger black and Hispanic population shares were significantly less likely to gentrify than other low-income neighborhoods were. In the later time periods, by contrast, neighborhoods with larger Hispanic population shares were more likely to gentrify, whereas the likelihood of gentrification was unrelated to the initial black population share. Gentrifiers, in other words, have become more open to moving into predominantly minority neighborhoods over time.

Racial Change During a Decade of Gentrification

As noted in the introduction, many believe that predominantly minority neighborhoods that gentrify experience large gains in white population and large losses in black and Hispanic populations. To examine the extent to which this is true empirically, we use two approaches to measure racial change in the decade of gentrification: net changes in the share of residents who are non-Hispanic white from one decade to the next, and transition probabilities across the five categories of racial composition defined earlier. We compute net changes in the share of non-Hispanic white and transition probabilities for the three cohorts of low-income tracts, distinguishing between those that gentrified and those that did not.

[Table 3](#) shows the distribution of short-term change in the share of non-Hispanic white for low-income tracts that started off as predominantly minority (i.e., the share of non-Hispanic white was below 25%). We find that the typical predominantly minority neighborhood that gentrified during the 1980s and 1990s saw little change in white population share during the decade when they gentrified. The median predominantly minority neighborhood that gentrified between 2000 and 2016 saw a much larger decline on average in white population share, of 7 percentage points. Meanwhile, the median tract that did not gentrify saw a slight decline in percentage white in each decade.

[Table 3](#) also shows wide variation in the extent of racial change. Some neighborhoods experienced very large increases in percentage white during the decade of gentrification, especially since 2000. A quarter of the initially predominantly minority, low-income city neighborhoods experienced a gain in percentage white of at least 7 percentage points during the 1980s and at least 18

Table 5. Long-term change in percentage white for tracts that started at <25% white in 1980, by gentrification status.

	Gentrified		Did not gentrify	
	1980s	1990s	1980s	1990s
25th percentile	– 3.8	– 2.0	– 4.8	– 4.5
50th percentile	1.8	0.7	– 0.5	– 0.3
75th percentile	22.6	7.8	3.5	2.9
90th percentile	42.1	24.2	14.5	11.2

Note. Long-term changes are measured from 1980 to 2016 and from 1990 to 2016. Low-income tracts below the 40th percentile of the core-based statistical area income distribution). White refers to non-Hispanic white population; black refers to non-Hispanic black population.

Table 6. Long-term transition probabilities of racial distribution for central-city, low-income, predominantly minority tracts.

	Gentrified						Didn't Gentrify					
	2016 White						2016 White					
	+75%	25-75%	<25%MB	<25%MH	<25%MM	Total	+75%	25-75%	<25%MB	<25%MH	<25%MM	Total
1980 White												
<25%-MB	3.36	28.57	57.98	5.88	4.20	100.00	0.12	9.17	75.48	10.14	5.09	100.00
<25%-MH	6.90	27.59	6.90	58.62	0.00	100.00	0.27	10.38	1.23	85.38	2.73	100.00
<25%-MM	0.00	57.14	0.00	14.29	28.57	100.00	0.00	8.92	4.46	56.69	29.94	100.00
<25%, Pooled	3.70	30.86	43.83	16.05	5.56	100.00	0.15	9.42	56.13	28.57	5.73	100.00
	Gentrified						Didn't Gentrify					
	2016 White						2016 White					
	+75%	25-75%	<25%MB	<25%MH	<25%MM	Total	+75%	25-75%	<25%MB	<25%MH	<25%MM	Total
1990 White												
<25%-MB	0.41	15.10	74.29	6.12	4.08	100.00	0.04	6.90	81.09	6.73	5.24	100.00
<25%-MH	0.00	17.62	0.41	79.51	2.46	100.00	0.20	5.29	0.88	91.18	2.45	100.00
<25%-MM	0.00	31.82	4.55	38.64	25.00	100.00	0.00	7.99	4.15	40.89	46.96	100.00
<25%, Pooled	0.26	16.84	47.17	30.98	4.76	100.00	0.08	6.55	52.32	33.03	8.01	100.00

Notes: Low-income tracts are defined as those that were at or below the 40th percentile of the CBSA income distribution. Gentrifying tracts are those that experience a gain in the ratio of their income to the CBSA income of at least 0.1 over a decade. White refers to non-Hispanic white population. +75% are tracts that were more than 75% white. 25-75% are tracts that were 25-75% white. <25%MB tracts are tracts that were less than 25% white and majority black. <25%MH tracts are tracts that were less than 25% white and majority Hispanic. <25%MM tracts are tracts that were less than 25% white and mixed majority.

percentage points during the 2000s. Indeed, between 2000 and 2016, 10% of predominantly minority, low-income neighborhoods saw a gain in percentage white of at least 28 percentage points. We see many fewer tracts experiencing large white population gains during the 1990s. Not surprisingly, nongentrifying, predominantly low-income tracts experienced more modest racial change.

A key question here is how many of these predominantly minority, low-income neighborhoods experiencing racial change transitioned to become racially integrated, and how many transitioned to become predominantly white. Table 4 shows a transition matrix for low-income, predominantly minority city neighborhoods that gentrified and those that did not, during each of our three time periods. In addition to reporting transition probabilities for all predominantly minority, low-income neighborhoods, we disaggregate these transition probabilities for majority black, majority Hispanic, and mixed-minority tracts. The table shows that during the 1980s, four of five predominantly minority neighborhoods (and more during the 1990s) that gentrified remained predominantly minority during the decade of gentrification. There was a slight shift after 2000, but even then, 68% of the neighborhoods that started off as majority black remained predominantly minority, and 74% of those that started off as majority Hispanic remained predominantly minority. No neighborhoods that started off as predominantly minority transitioned to being more than 75% white during the 1980s and 1990s, and less than 0.5% made such a transition during the 2000s.

A significant minority of the predominantly minority neighborhoods that gentrified transitioned to become racially integrated at the end of the decade, with 21% ending up in a racially integrated category during the 1980s, 6.6% during the 1990s, and 30% during the 2000s. Note that the pace of racial change once again appears to be far more modest during the 1990s. Although not shown in the table, virtually all of these racially integrated neighborhoods fell in the 25–50% white range rather than the 50–75% range. The contrast with nongentrifying tracts is striking. A full 98% of nongentrifying, predominantly minority neighborhoods remained predominantly minority during the 1980s and 1990s, and 96% remained predominantly minority between 2000 and 2016.

Racial Change Over the Longer Run

The results that we have presented so far suggest that, in some instances, gentrification leads to racial integration in the short term. A key contribution of this article is that we also examine what happens to these neighborhoods over time. Specifically, we can examine the 2016 racial composition of predominantly minority neighborhoods that gentrified during the 1980s—some 36 years after gentrification started. Similarly, we can examine the 2016 racial composition of predominantly minority neighborhoods that gentrified during the 1990s, some 26 years after gentrification started.

Table 5 shows that the typical predominantly minority neighborhood that gentrified during the 1980s and 1990s had experienced only a very modest gain in white population share by 2016. The median tract that did not gentrify during 1980s and 1990s meanwhile saw a slight decline in percentage white over this longer time period. Once again, however, we see enormous variation in the extent of racial change. A quarter of the initially predominantly minority, low-income city neighborhoods that gentrified during the 1980s experienced a gain in percentage white of at least 22.6 percentage points in the 36 years between 1980 and 2016, and 10% saw a gain of at least 42 percentage points. We again see less dramatic racial change among the predominantly minority tracts that gentrified during the 1990s, but 10% saw a gain in white of at least 24 percentage points.

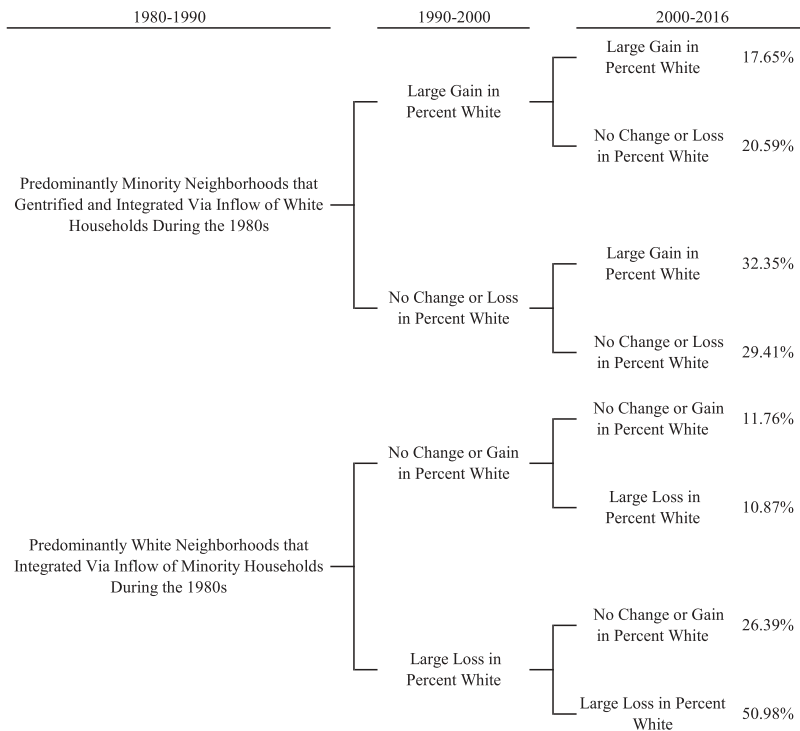
Table 6 shows the proportion of gentrifying, predominantly minority neighborhoods that had transitioned to racially integrated over this longer time period. Approximately 28% of the majority Hispanic and majority black tracts and over half of the mixed-minority tracts that gentrified during the 1980s had transitioned to racially integrated by 2016. We again see less dramatic racial change during the 1990s, but 15%, 18%, and 32% of majority black, majority Hispanic, and mixed minority neighborhoods that gentrified during the 1990s were racially integrated in 2016. Meanwhile, just a handful of the predominantly minority tracts that gentrified during the 1980s and 1990s had

Table 7. Family structure of predominantly minority, low-income tracts that gentrified and racially integrated.

	1990 (%)	2000 (%)
<i>Black households</i>		
With children	34.47	32.89
Without children	25.27	22.85
Nonfamily	40.26	44.25
<i>Hispanic households</i>		
With children	38.82	42.71
Without children	27.51	24.61
Nonfamily	33.67	32.68
<i>White households</i>		
With children	20.80	18.14
Without children	27.79	26.25
Nonfamily	51.41	55.61

resegregated to become predominantly white by 2016. In absolute numbers, of the 930 predominantly minority neighborhoods that gentrified during the 1980s and 1990s, 746 were still predominantly minority in 2016, 176 had become racially integrated in 2016, and only eight transitioned to predominantly white in 2016.

Although this long-term picture suggests that gentrification has spawned some stable racially integrated neighborhoods, it is possible that some of these integrated neighborhoods are seeing continued gains in white population, even as they remain integrated. To explore this, we examine subsequent racial change in the predominantly minority neighborhoods that became integrated

**Figure 2.** Subsequent racial change in census tracts that became integrated during the 1980s.

and gentrified during the 1980s. Specifically, we calculate the share of these neighborhoods that experienced white population gain or stability during the 1990s and 2000s. Figure 2 shows that 29% of the predominantly minority neighborhoods that integrated through gentrification during the 1980s saw no change or a loss in percentage white during both the 1990s and 2000s, and 21% experienced a gain in white population during the 1990s but not during the 2000s. Thus, roughly half appeared to be fairly racially stable in 2016. The other half showed signs of continued racial transition. In particular, 32% of these racially integrated neighborhoods experienced a gain in white population during the 2000s but not the 1990s, and 18% experienced a significant gain in their white population during both the 1990s and 2000s. This last set of neighborhoods are the most at risk of resegregating.¹⁰ It is worth emphasizing, however, that only six census tracts followed this pattern, representing only about 4% of all the predominantly minority neighborhoods that gentrified during the 1980s.

As a benchmark, Figure 2 also shows the proportion of the much larger number of predominantly white neighborhoods that became integrated through the in-movement of minority households during the 1980s. Over half of these neighborhoods experienced successive loss in white population share during the 1990s and 2000s, and only 12% saw no change or a gain in white population share in both decades. In other words, although integration is fragile in both cases, the integrated neighborhoods created through gentrification appear to be somewhat more racially stable.

Interaction in Integrated Neighborhoods

To be sure, we know very little about the extent to which different groups actually interact with one another in these neighborhoods. Census data only reveal the location of people's homes and not their social networks. The demographic distance between households of different races in these integrated neighborhoods, however, sheds some light on the likely level of interaction. For example, if the new white residents moving to predominantly minority, low-income neighborhoods are young, childless renters and the long-time residents are families with children, there may be limited interaction across racial groups in the neighborhood, and some might not even consider the community a meaningfully integrated neighborhood. In Table 7, we examine such demographic distance. The first column shows the 1990 composition of households in predominantly minority, low-income neighborhoods that gentrified and became racially integrated during the 1980s, whereas the second column shows the 2000 composition of households in predominantly minority, low-income neighborhoods that gentrified and became racially integrated during the 1990s. We find that in both sets of neighborhoods, black and Hispanic households were more likely to have children and less likely to be nonfamily households, compared with white households. More work is needed to explore the social dynamics in these racially integrated neighborhoods, but these differences raise some question about the level of social integration.¹¹

A Tale of Two Neighborhoods

Our analysis finds that whereas most predominantly minority neighborhoods that become racially integrated through gentrification appear to be fairly racially stable, there is significant variation. To highlight this variation, we present the story of two predominantly minority census tracts in New York City that became racially integrated through gentrification during the 1990s but followed very different trajectories after that initial decade. We chose New York because of the city's size and the extensive gentrification its neighborhoods have experienced in the past few decades.

The first tract is located in Williamsburg, Brooklyn, a neighborhood that has become almost synonymous with gentrification. Consistent with this common view, the tract has seen dramatic racial and economic change. The tract started with a poverty rate of 49% and a median household income that was 47% of the median household income in the metropolitan area in 1990 (which put it in the bottom 40% of census tracts in the metropolitan area). By 2000, the poverty rate had declined to 31% and the median household income in the tract had risen to 87% of the median household income in the metropolitan area.

Over the next 16 years, the tract's poverty rate fell further to 24% and the median household income rose to 130% of the median household income in the metropolitan area. As for racial change, the neighborhood transitioned from 14% white, 7% black, and 74% Hispanic in 1990 to 38% white, 4% black, and 52% Hispanic in 2000. By 2016, the neighborhood had become 67% white, 2% black, and 19% Hispanic. Over a 26-year period, in other words, the white population share rose by 53 percentage points. To be clear, such dramatic racial change is unusual in gentrifying tracts. Across the country, only seven of the census tracts that gentrified in the 1990s (or 0.4%) saw a white population gain this large between 1990 and 2016.

The trajectory of this Williamsburg tract contrasts with that of a census tract in New York's West Midtown that also became racially integrated through gentrification in the 1990s but that remained racially integrated in 2016. In 1990, the tract's poverty rate was 26% and the median household income was 64% of the median household income in the metropolitan area (again putting it in the bottom 40% of tracts in the metropolitan area). By 2000, the poverty rate had fallen to 17% and the median household income had increased to 122% of the median household income in the metropolitan area. The poverty rate remained fairly constant between 2000 and 2016, and the median household income had increased slightly to 127% of the median household income in the metropolitan area. As for racial change, the tract went from 17% white, 38% black, and 41% Hispanic in 1990 to 38% white, 23% black, and 27% Hispanic in 2000. But the neighborhood saw no additional gain in percentage white between 2000 and 2016. In 2016, the neighborhood remained racially integrated, with a population composition that was 37% white, 11% black, and 34% Hispanic.

One key difference between the two neighborhoods is the presence of public housing. The tract in West Midtown includes a large public housing development with 14 high-rise buildings. The continued affordability of that public housing has assured some level of economic and racial diversity in the neighborhood. The degree to which public housing residents interact with higher income residents in the neighborhood is unclear, but at the very least, residents of all races and incomes have access to the same schools, transportation networks, and neighborhood streets.

Summary and Discussion

We aim in this article to consider how fair housing advocates should view the growth of gentrification in American cities. Walter Mondale, a cosponsor of the Fair Housing Act, said that a key aim of the act was to replace ghettos with "truly integrated and balanced living patterns" (114 Cong. Rec. 3422, 1968). Yet 50 years after the passage of the act, such integrated spaces are rarely found in U.S. cities and suburbs.

Is gentrification helping to deliver the integrated neighborhoods that the authors of the Fair Housing Act had in mind? Our answer is that gentrification offers a potential opportunity to further integration, but policies may be needed to solidify that integration. First, although most predominantly minority, low-income neighborhoods have remained low income, a growing number have gentrified in recent decades. And gentrification, at least in the short term, has brought with it racial integration for a significant number of these neighborhoods. In the context of a country where the burden of integration has almost exclusively fallen on minority households, there is some good news here. Between 2000 and 2016, we saw an uptick in the number of higher income white households choosing to move into racially and economically diverse, central city neighborhoods rather than only considering the higher income, white enclaves that they have traditionally selected.

Second, the neighborhoods that have integrated through gentrification have remained racially integrated for longer periods of time than the conventional wisdom suggests. Many are seeing little change in their white population share in the decades following gentrification. Indeed, neighborhoods that became integrated through gentrification appeared to be more racially stable than those that integrated through households of color moving into predominantly white neighborhoods. Further work should explore these newly integrated neighborhoods more deeply and, most importantly, study how these neighborhoods shape the racial attitudes, cultural competence, and life chances of the children growing up in them.

We say all this with a large caveat, as some predominantly minority neighborhoods that gentrified during the 1980s were potentially on a path to becoming predominantly white and experiencing the resegregation that many fear. More importantly, the predominantly minority neighborhoods that have gentrified since the year 2000 have experienced a more significant rise in white population in the short run, and thus they may not see the same racial stability in the longer run. So although gentrification may offer an opportunity to diversify communities, the racial integration it creates is still fragile.

Thus, fair housing advocates should not discourage the entry of higher income, white households into lower income, predominantly minority neighborhoods. But advocates should call for policy interventions to secure and stabilize the integration these moves create, at least in the neighborhoods where gentrification pressures are particularly strong. Governments should be sure to have policies in place to protect existing tenants from harassment and evictions. Such protections include just-cause eviction laws, which circumscribe the acceptable causes for eviction; longer leases; and legal and organizing services for tenants (Herrine, Yager, & Mian, 2016).

Such tenant protections are necessary but not sufficient for maintaining integration over time, since the key to racial stability is a diversity of neighborhood in-movers (Ellen, 2000). Preserving the subsidized housing that already exists in gentrifying areas can help to lock in diversity over the long term and help to affirmatively further fair housing. Whereas New York City may be an outlier, a full 12% of housing units in gentrifying areas of the city are public housing units and another 25% are privately owned subsidized housing (Ellen, 2018). If preserved over time, these units can assure some level of economic mixing, and potentially racial mixing too. Local governments can also try to incentivize owners of low-rent but unsubsidized rental housing to keep their rents affordable through offering property tax incentives or lower-interest renovation loans. Such incentives may be costly in strong markets where market rents are high and rising quickly.

In addition to preserving existing affordable units, governments can add to the existing stock of place-based subsidized housing in gentrifying areas through acquisition and new construction. Policies to harness the market through either mandating or incentivizing owners to include low-rent units in their buildings can also be effective in hot markets.

Building the truly integrated communities that Walter Mondale had in mind may require more than just housing investments, however. Additional efforts to knit a community together and ensure that all residents are able to enjoy a neighborhood's amenities and resources may also be needed (Chaskin & Joseph, 2015; Dastrup & Ellen, 2016). As Chaskin and Joseph (2015) find in their study of Chicago's Plan for Transformation, lower income residents can sometimes feel disadvantaged or excluded in mixed-income communities. They argue for intentional efforts to build the social fabric, including developing more inclusive forms of governance and welcoming public spaces. Local community organizations are perhaps best equipped to help break down the barriers that often separate different groups of residents within a neighborhood and ensure that all residents feel part of the community and are able to take full advantage of any emerging opportunities.

Notes

1. Throughout the article, the term white signifies non-Hispanic white.
2. Sutton (2018) focuses on initially low-income neighborhoods in New York City.
3. Both 2010 NCDB and 2012–2016 American Community Survey data use 2010 census tract boundaries.
4. The sample of 412 CBSAs includes 327 metropolitan areas and 85 micropolitan areas, based on the 2013 delineations by the U.S. Office of Management and Budget. This represents 90% of the 363 metropolitan areas in the 49 contiguous states and 15% of the 570 micropolitan areas in the 49 contiguous states. The metropolitan and micropolitan areas excluded from our sample are those that include tracts that were not mapped into census tracts in the 1980 census.
5. Changes in tract-to-CBSA median income ratio are measured between 1980 and 1990 for the 1980 cohort, between 1990 and 2000 for the 1990 cohort, and between 2000 and 2016 for the 2000 cohort.

6. In addition to using income-based measures of gentrification, we also experimented with defining gentrification as experiencing an increase of at least 0.1 points in the tract-to-CBSA ratio in the percentage of college-educated residents. Although the relative increase in percentage of residents with college degrees is less correlated with our income-based measure of gentrification, we still obtain very similar results when defining gentrification as a large relative gain in the share of college educated residents.
7. Frey (2011) reports that the population of the primary cities of the top 100 metropolitan areas was just 41% non-Hispanic white in 2010.
8. When we measure gentrification as a large relative increase in the share of college educated residents, we do not see as large a jump in the share of predominantly minority neighborhoods gentrifying during the 1990s. Using the college-based definition of gentrification, we find that in the 1980s, 19.9% and 18.0% of majority Hispanic and majority black neighborhoods gentrified, respectively. In the 1990s, 23.2% and 21.0% of majority Hispanic and majority black neighborhoods gentrified.
9. As before, low-income means that the tract had a median household income that was below the 40th percentile of the CBSA income distribution.
10. Six tracts were predominantly minority in 1980, gentrified and integrated during the 1980s, and experienced a significant gain in their white population during both the 1990s and 2000s. These tracts are located in the metropolitan areas of Chicago, Illinois (1); Dallas, Texas (1); Milwaukee, Wisconsin (1); New York City (2); and Washington, DC (1).
11. To be clear, some of these differences are due to population-level differences—white households are less likely to have children in general. But the white households living in racially integrated neighborhoods are significantly less likely to have children and significantly more likely to be nonfamily households.

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Appendix

Table A1. Short-term regressions of likelihood of gentrification.

	1(Δ Income ratio > 0.1)		
	(1)	(2)	(3)
	1980s	1990s	2000s
Baseline means			
Income ratio	– 0.4841*** (0.0205)	– 0.3870*** (0.0248)	– 0.3646*** (0.0280)
% College	0.0052*** (0.0003)	0.0017*** (0.0003)	0.0083*** (0.0003)
% Black	– 0.0014*** (0.0001)	– 0.0001 (0.0001)	– 0.0002 (0.0001)
% Hispanic	– 0.0013*** (0.0001)	0.0007*** (0.0002)	0.0003** (0.0002)
Census region			
Midwest	– 0.0109 (0.0066)	0.0773*** (0.0084)	– 0.0628*** (0.0092)
South	0.0462*** (0.0072)	0.0836*** (0.0080)	– 0.0090 (0.0092)
West	– 0.0054 (0.0074)	0.0552*** (0.0086)	– 0.0197* (0.0102)
Observations	13,255	13,525	13,823
Adjusted R^2	0.12	0.03	0.08

Note. In each decade, the sample is restricted central-city tracts that started as low income (i.e., tracts below the 40th percentile of the core-based statistical area income distribution). White refers to non-Hispanic white population. Black refers to non-Hispanic black population.

*, **, and *** refer to statistically significant at the 10, 5, and 1% levels respectively.