Gentrification in DC

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Blog: Sociology in My Neighborhood: DC Ward 6

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DC Data

- Population
  - Today: 646,449; African American = 50.1%; White = 42.9%
  - 1980: 638,333; African American = 70.3%, White = 26.9%
- Income
  - Today: Median household income in DC = $64,267
    - Today: Median household income in US = $53,046
    - Today: Median household income in Washington Metro Area = $107,500
      This is Area Median Income (AMI), the number used by the DC government to calculate income limits for affordable housing. The artificially high number means that those making up to $32K are considered very low income and thus more people are competing than would if the DC median was used ($19K as very low income).
  - 1979: Median household income in DC = $16,211
    - 1979: Median household income in US = $16,841
- Poverty
  - Today: Poverty rate = 18.5% (US = 14.9%)
  - 1979: Poverty rate = 18.6% (US = 12.4%)

Census Quick Facts, District of Columbia 2013: http://quickfacts.census.gov/qfd/states/11000.html; 1980 Census: http://www.census.gov/population/www/documentation/twps0056/tab23.pdf

Definition of Gentrification

- Originally, the replacement of an existing population by a "gentry" (affluent middle-class households).
- The replacement of lower-income residents and businesses with higher-income residents and businesses.
  - Part of a much larger economic, social, and spatial restructuring of the city for a new class, affluent middle-class households.
  - This restructuring continues racial segregation.

DC Racial Segregation today:
A Divided City
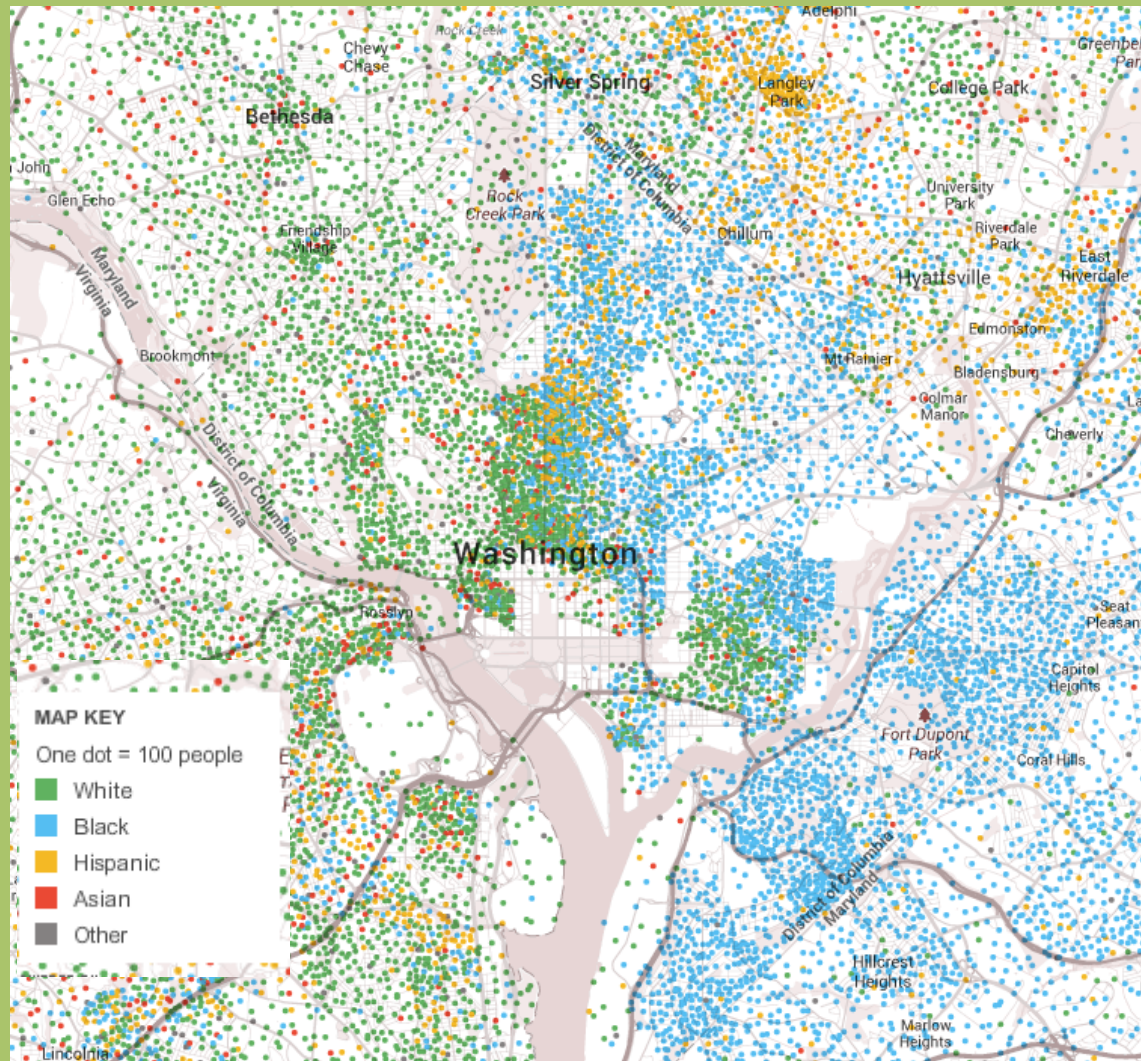
Common Gentrification Narratives

1. **Gentrification is a new trend.**
2. Gentrification is a DC trend.
3. Gentrification is a costless, positive trend.
4. Gentrification is inevitable.

1. Gentrification isn't new

- First wave: 1950s to 1970s
  - Broad displacement: Urban renewal in Southwest DC
  - Individual owner-occupiers and real estate agents in Capitol Hill and Georgetown
- Second wave: late 1970s to late 1980s
  - More corporate, more developers, public-private partnerships
  - Wealthier professional gentrifiers
- Third Wave: mid-1990s-now
  - Large-scale corporate developers of new buildings.
  - Wealthier business gentrifiers, including private equity firms buying local businesses.

Gentrification Narratives

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2. **Gentrification is a DC trend.**
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2. Gentrification is global.

- In the 1970s and 1980s, cities experience severe fiscal crisis.
  - In 1975, NYC almost defaulted.
  - Federal government reduced funding to cities.
- Global urban strategy
  - Inter-urban competition: Cities compete with each other for the new class and for corporate investments.
  - Global hierarchy of cities.

Gentrification Narratives

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3. Gentrification is costly

- Individual costs
  - homelessness
  - loss of community, mental and physical illness
- City-wide costs: a Divided City
  - Reorganization of city for the wealthy.
  - Displacement and destruction of communities.
  - Increased inequality.
  - Revanchism: vengeful attitude by professional middle class against those who have "taken our city from us": African Americans, the working class, the poor, recent immigrants, and so on.

Gentrification Narratives

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2. Gentrification is a DC trend.
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4. **Gentrification is inevitable.**

4. Gentrification isn't inevitable

- Government has always been involved with gentrification.
  - Cities as growth machines: elites as boosters for growth, within which city governments seek higher revenues and disregard low-income needs.
  - Logan and Molotch's *Urban Fortunes*: exchange values and speculation privileged over residents' use values.
- Governments, businesses, social movements, and residents have successfully minimized displacement at some times and not others.
  - Positive examples from the past: Shaw's MICCO
  - Today: Empower DC, ONE DC, Displacement Free Zones

Suggested Readings

- Fullilove, Mindy. 2004. *Root Shock: How Tearing Up City Neighborhoods Hurts America, and What We Can Do About it*. One World Books.

- Gillette, Howard. 1995. *Between Justice & Beauty: Race, Planning, and the Failure of Urban Policy in Washington, D.C.* U of Pennsylvania Press.

- Logan, John R. and Harvey L. Molotch. 1987. *Urban Fortunes: The Political Economy of Place*. UC Press.

- Marcuse, Peter. 1985. "*Gentrification, abandonment and displacement: connections, causes and policy responses*," *Journal of Urban and Contemporary Law* 28: 195-240.

- Sassen, Saskia. 2005. "*The Global City: Introducing a New Concept*," *Brown Journal of World Affairs* 11(2): 27-43.

- Shaw, Kate and Libby Porter, eds. 2009. *Whose Urban Renaissance? An International Comparison of Urban Regeneration Policies*. Routledge.

- Slater, Tom. 2011. "*Gentrification of the City*" or "*Gentrification and the Displacement Question*."

- Steinberg, Stephen. 2009. "The Myth of Concentrated Poverty,"