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# Explicating Divided Approaches to Gentrification and Growing Income Inequality

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## Abstract

Contemporary sociology offers competing images of the breadth and consequences of gentrification. One subset presents gentrification as a nearly unstoppable force that plays a prominent role in the spatial reorganization of urban life; another presents it as less monolithic and less momentous for marginalized residents, particularly racial minorities. Although neither camp is methodologically homogenous, more qualitative scholars, typically relying on micro-level analyses of individual neighborhoods, tend to present gentrification as increasingly endemic, advanced, and consequential, whereas more quantitative scholars, typically relying on macro analyses, tend to present it in less dire terms. These competing images of gentrification originate in the fact that each subset of research asks different questions, employs distinct methods, and produces particular answers. Exacerbating and partially driving these divergences are different responses to an anxiety within and beyond the academy about broader spatial and economic shifts, such as growing income inequality.



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## INTRODUCTION

When Sharon Zukin penned the last review of gentrification in this journal, in 1987, she highlighted an area of debate then dominating gentrification scholarship: gentrification's causes. Her review details a major split in scholarship between those who conceive of gentrification as produced by markets and politics and those who see it as a consequence of the tastes of the gentry, specifically their desire for residence in the city. Thirty years later, this debate has become less central within US sociology.<sup>1</sup>

However, the gentrification literature remains bifurcated, perhaps even increasingly so. Competing images of gentrification's breadth and of its severity and significance occupy some of the space once held by debates about its causes. Underlying this gap are deeper and more far-reaching questions about what gentrification is and about the degree to which it impacts the contemporary city. One subset of the literature presents gentrification as a nearly unstoppable force bearing down on cities that exacerbates economic and racial inequalities and plays a prominent role in the spatial reorganization of urban life. In contrast, another subset presents gentrification as less monolithic and as having only modest or debatable consequences for poor and working class residents, particularly racial minorities. This subset also underlines the persistence and expansion of concentrated poverty in contemporary cities and implies that the researchers' energy may be better spent elsewhere. Representative of this position, Massey (2002, p. 174) writes, "Compared to the continued large outflow of whites to suburbs and the well-established proclivity by white movers to avoid inner city locations, gentrification is truly a drop in the bucket."

These two positions map loosely onto methodological approaches. Although neither camp is methodologically homogenous, qualitative scholars, typically relying on micro-level analyses of individual neighborhoods, tend to present gentrification as increasingly endemic, advanced, and highly consequential, whereas quantitative scholars, typically relying on macro-level analyses across neighborhoods or cities, tend to present gentrification in less dire terms.<sup>2</sup> Today's gentrification debates may be less vivid than in an earlier period, but they persist nonetheless and have become embedded in distinct research endeavors: Those in each camp tend to ask different questions, employ distinct methods, and, unsurprisingly, produce distinct answers. This limits sociologists' ability to offer clear-sighted policy recommendations: a significant limitation in a moment marked by increasing calls for intervention.<sup>3</sup>

Here, I present an assessment of the state of gentrification that emerges from each camp. First, I summarize accounts from micro research. Next, I review macro approaches. I then identify the origins of the competing portraits of gentrification in the two camps, suggesting that the variation is not rooted in methodological differences. Instead, I suggest that the sources of this divide in

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<sup>1</sup>To be certain, this divide has not entirely dissipated, but it is less dominant than it was two or three decades ago. For a recent review of gentrification's causes see Hwang & Lin (2016). To maintain brevity, this review primarily characterizes US literature on gentrification within the United States. However, the US literature is in conversation with literature by scholars in other nations as well as scholars within and beyond the United States studying other world regions. In this sense, the patterns this review identifies are likely applicable to gentrification scholarship in other locales and other disciplines. I include in the review select scholarship by non-US authors that has been particularly influential.

<sup>2</sup>There are exceptions to these broad patterns. For instance, Wyly et al. (2010) use quantitative data to demonstrate how other quantitative analyses have underestimated the scale of displacement and to highlight the limitations of using survey data to identify displaced residents; indeed, they write that "measuring the displaced is like measuring the invisible" (Wyly et al. 2010, p. 2603; see also Atkinson 2000, p. 163). Likewise, Hwang & Sampson (2014) merge traditional quantitative measures of gentrification with existing qualitative scholarship on gentrifying neighborhoods and with evidence of disorder drawn from Google Street View (see also Immergluck 2009).

<sup>3</sup>An example of this increasing attention to gentrification is a recent *New York Times* article on how gentrification displaces young people from the neighborhoods in which they were raised (Kaysen 2016). Readers are also referred to Brown-Saracino & Rumpf (2011) and McKinnish et al. (2010, p. 180).

scholarship are the empirical heterogeneity or “chaos” (Rose 1984) of gentrification, competing definitions and measurements of gentrification, the uneven empirical attention to different stages of gentrification, and the distinct questions that each camp pursues. Exacerbating and partially driving these differences is an anxiety that fuels (and goes beyond) the gentrification debates: namely, an anxiety about broad economic and spatial shifts that are underway. I conclude by considering ways out of this impasse, which currently limits inclusive and direct conversation across camps.

## GENTRIFICATION AS ASCENDANT AND BROADLY CONSEQUENTIAL

Media accounts indicate an increasingly widespread perception that gentrification continues its forward march and, together with a broader set of causes and consequences, is leaving an indelible mark on many cities (for an analysis of 20 years of newspaper coverage of gentrification, see Brown-Saracino & Rumpf 2011).<sup>4</sup> Indeed, attention to gentrification’s impact is widespread: Politicians debate affordable housing policies and speak out against gentrification (Vigdor 2002, p. 133); protestors take to the streets of San Francisco to highlight the role of technology firms in neighborhood upscaling (Streitfeld 2014); gentrification is the subject of theatrical productions and television punch lines;<sup>5</sup> and Chicago performance artists pose as witches casting spells to halt gentrification (Cromidas 2016).

This image of gentrification’s breadth and inevitability is not limited to popular culture and media. Qualitative sociologists increasingly highlight how urban residents regard gentrification as a social problem; they depict its advance, fueled by powerful actors and institutions, as deeply problematic and consequential for longtime residents.

Qualitative sociological scholarship, especially since the early years of this century, has also devoted increasing attention to resistance to gentrification. Brown-Saracino (2004, 2007, 2009) finds that roughly half of 160 gentrifiers in four gentrifying communities articulated a social preservation ideology: That is, they were highly self-conscious about their role in gentrification and worked to forestall its consequences for longtime residents. Likewise, Lloyd (2006) documents artist-gentrifiers taking to the streets of Chicago’s Wicker Park to protest their own displacement, and Pattillo (2007) writes of longtime African American residents of North Kenwood–Oakland resisting the new gentry’s efforts to change norms about the appropriate use of public space. More recently, Ocejo (2014) depicts nostalgic early gentrifiers on the Lower East Side of Manhattan bemoaning a world of increasingly upscale entertainment, and Martinez (2010) documents longtime residents organizing to protect community gardens from development. Here, ethnographers focus on residents who frame gentrification as troubling, as threatening a way of life and community character.

Echoing the concerns of such actors and the scholars who profile them, Zukin’s (2009) *Naked City* charts the progression of gentrification in New York City and its stultifying effects on city “character” (Molotch et al. 2000, Paulsen 2004). She writes, “In the early years of the twenty-first century, New York City lost its soul” (Zukin 2009, p. 1). How does a city lose its soul? Zukin (2009, pp. 6–7) expounds:

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<sup>4</sup>On the historical longevity of gentrification, readers are referred to Bianchini et al. (1992), Chapin (2004), Fainstein (2011), Glaeser (2003), Hannigan (1998), Noll & Zimbalist (1997), Sanders (2002), and Zukin (1996).

<sup>5</sup>Readers are referred, for instance, to Bruce Norris’s 2011 play *Chylbourne Park*, episodes of the NBC comedy *Will and Grace* (e.g., season 7, episode 6), and the Showtime series *Shameless*.

A city loses its soul when its continuity is broken. It begins with little changes you notice in your own neighborhood. The local hardware store or shoe repair shop closes down overnight . . . . Laundromats disappear . . . . It is not only the stores; the people are different too . . . . Little by little the old ethnic neighborhoods [that hipsters and gentrifiers] have moved into are dying, along with the factories where longtime residents plied their trades and the Irish bars, Latino bodegas, and black soul food restaurants where they made their homes away from home. The people who seemed so rooted in these neighborhoods are disappearing.

Sociological scholarship indicates that this is not just a New York story (Tissot 2015); qualitative accounts collectively present gentrification's scope as nearly limitless. On the West Coast, gentrification alters the commercial character of Venice (Deener 2012) and grips Portland (Sullivan & Shaw 2011); in the Midwest, it shapes a small Wisconsin town (Macgregor 2010). Gentrification at first results from partnerships between casinos and city government in New Orleans (Gotham 2007), and after Katrina it is advanced by local, state, and national actors, fundamentally altering the city demographics and dynamics (Gotham & Greenberg 2014; see also Halle & Tiso 2014).

Taken together, qualitative accounts capture what appears to be the inevitable advancement of gentrification in certain neighborhoods: from the early gentrification of the Lower East Side by punks and artists (Abu-Lughod 1995, Mele 2000), to the transformation of the neighborhood into a high-end entertainment destination (Ocejo 2014); from the Harlem of the late 1990s, gradually transformed by the in-movement of African American gentrifiers (Taylor 2002), to the Harlem of the early 2000s, increasingly populated by white gentrifiers (Hyra 2008), to the subsequent explosion of high-end boutiques in the neighborhood (Zukin et al. 2009). On the whole, this literature presents gentrification as a nearly inevitable and almost always ascendant phenomenon<sup>6</sup> that progresses inexorably through typical stages (Kerstein 1990). This sense of gentrification's prowess is also conveyed by scholarship that documents the movement of gentrification from one neighborhood to another: from Manhattan to Brooklyn and Queens (Zukin 2009), from Wicker Park to Humboldt Park in Chicago (Perez 2004), from lower Manhattan to Harlem (Hyra 2008, Taylor 2002), and from the northern lakefront neighborhoods in Chicago to the South and West Side (Boyd 2008, Douglas 2012, Hyra 2008, Lloyd 2006, Pattillo 2007).<sup>7</sup>

Qualitative scholarship also emphasizes the outcomes of gentrification. Scholars document the physical uprooting of long-standing residents (Betancur 2011, Deener 2012, Hyra 2008, Lloyd 2006, Pattillo 2007, Taylor 2002); the conflict between new and old neighbors (Hyra 2014), particularly over changing norms about noise, schools, and the use of public space (Billingham & Kimelberg 2013); the replacement of longstanding commercial institutions with those that appeal to the new gentry (Centner 2008, Deener 2012, Zukin et al. 2009); and the disappearance of longtimers' institutions, such as churches and playing fields (Hyra 2014). Thus, displacement is presented as not only physical, but also political and cultural (Chernoff 1980, Brown-Saracino 2009, Hyra 2014, Martin 2007). Moreover, the literature traces the impact of gentrification not only on individuals but also on institutions. Public schools experience gentrification as middle and

<sup>6</sup>Some use the expression "third-wave gentrification" to refer to gentrification characteristics that relate to what I term ascendant or advanced gentrification. However, scholars generally differentiate the third wave from other waves based on the different causes of gentrification (with the third wave regarded as a state project). Instead, I refer to the breadth and advancement of the process of gentrification (Hackworth 2007, Hackworth & Smith 2001, Wyly & Hammel 1999).

<sup>7</sup>The literature does not present this geographic expansion as random; gentrification follows particularly pathways. These include pioneering populations of first-wave gentrifiers, such as artists, students, and gay men and lesbians (Brown-Saracino 2009, Ghaziani 2014, Kaliner 2014, Lloyd 2004, Patch 2008). Such populations often seek amenities such as train lines (Lloyd 2004), historically significant spaces and properties (Hyra 2008), and access to downtown amenities.

upper-middle class gentrifiers reshape them in their own image (Billingham & Kimelberg 2013, Clark et al. 2002, Cucchiara 2013, DeSena 2006, Hankins 2007, Keels et al. 2013, Kennedy & Leonard 2001; see also Posey-Maddox et al. 2014, Varady & Raffel 1995); nonprofits are priced out of downtown Los Angeles (DeVerteuil 2010); arts organizations recognize that they have to market themselves and their artist-residents delicately, promoting their work and neighborhood without simultaneously opening the floodgates (Wherry 2011). Such accounts of documented or implied threats constitute a core feature of many contemporary qualitative accounts of gentrification.

In addition, a core subset of micro scholarship focuses on the role played by institutional actors in advancing gentrification; in many recent accounts gentrification is, among other things, a project advanced by state actors (Cucchiara 2013, Gotham 2007, Gotham & Greenberg 2014), developers (Martinez 2010), and other private and public interests, from media (Lloyd 2004) to higher education institutions (Logan & Molotch 1987). Embodying this approach, in their study of New York's High Line, Halle & Tiso (2014, p. 17) pursue the "major role of 'public and private entrepreneurs'" in its construction and the subsequent advancement of gentrification along its path (see also Loughran 2014). This approach portrays gentrification as formidable and sometimes even unassailable.

In sum, recent qualitative sociological scholarship on gentrification, which increasingly aligns with popular and media accounts of the process (Barton 2016, Brown-Saracino & Rumpf 2011), presents a dire portrait with four core features. First, over the past decade and a half scholars have increasingly documented how gentrification inspires resistance and how everyday actors frame it as a social problem. Second, in qualitative scholarship gentrification appears as "progressive" in the sense that it is increasingly advanced and moves into previously underinvested and often contiguous locales. Third, this scholarship presents gentrification as deeply consequential for longtime residents and, more broadly, for neighborhood and city character. Finally, qualitative scholars increasingly pursue questions about the role of powerful actors and institutions in advancing gentrification projects.

Taken together, this literature makes public resistance to gentrification seem rather unsurprising. It presents gentrification as an ascendant social problem—capable even of surviving an international economic crisis—with which planners, politicians, and everyday actors must wrestle.<sup>8</sup> However, a contrasting image of gentrification is also evident in the literature.

## **GENTRIFICATION AS OF LIMITED SCOPE AND MODERATE CONSEQUENCE**

Many recent macro-level quantitative sociological analyses, especially those penned in the past decade and a half, offer a more muted assessment of gentrification, cautioning that the qualitative view is distorted. There are three core dimensions to this approach. First, some suggest that gentrification is not as expansive or as monolithic as many qualitative portraits imply. Second, some counter the increasingly common image of gentrification as driven by white gentrifiers establishing residence in minority, particularly African American, neighborhoods; they suggest that the breadth of this trend is at least overstated and make more general claims about the limits of gentrification's breadth. Finally, beginning in the early years of the twenty-first century, some

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<sup>8</sup>On gentrification's resurgence after an earlier recession see Smith & DeFilippis (1999), Wyly & Hammell (1999). To be certain, gentrification sometimes stalls (Williams 1986) or altogether falters (Ding et al. 2016, Hwang & Sampson 2014, Timberlake & Johns-Wolfe 2017), but these scholars present a portrait of its general advancement, albeit at different paces and scales in different times and places.

quantitative scholars have renewed claims that displacement is far from endemic. Below, I explore each dimension in turn.

There are three primary ways in which recent macro analyses contest the notion of rampant gentrification: They demonstrate the durability and expansion of high poverty tracts even in the face of gentrification; underline the uneven distribution of concentrated affluence (of which gentrification is part and parcel) across regions and cities; and, finally, point to the relatively modest geographical scope of gentrification within many contemporary cities.

One way in which quantitative analyses counter the image of gentrification's unambiguous entrenchment is by presenting evidence of the increasing calcification of both poverty and affluence within cities. Solari (2012) finds that whereas some neighborhoods remain affluent or become increasingly affluent (via processes that include but extend beyond gentrification), others remain chronically poor. Likewise, Hwang (2015) reports that pockets of poverty remain entrenched in many cities. Indeed, numerous reports indicate that economic segregation has increased since the 1970s (Fischer et al. 2004, Reardon & Bischoff 2011).<sup>9</sup> Landis (2015, pp. 16–17) finds that economic decline was more prevalent than upscaling between 1990 and 2010 in a broad set of US cities (although this does not take into account upscaling that might have occurred before 1990). Even in New York, which has experienced intensive gentrification, the share of residents with college degrees (a frequent indicator of gentrification) remains strikingly uneven across the city (Capperis et al. 2014, p. 38); this, together with other evidence, contests notions of gentrification's ubiquity across neighborhoods.

Many suggest that this trend reflects increasing economic inequalities in the United States. Zuk and colleagues (2015, p. 5), summarizing the gentrification literature, suggest that between 1980 and 2010, "the share of upper-income households living in majority upper-income tracts doubled," whereas the "segregation of lower-income households living in majority lower-income tracts" saw a more modest increase (see also Fry & Taylor 2012). As inequality increases and the distribution of wealth becomes increasingly bifurcated in the United States, the same happens in many of our cities (see Owens 2012, Pew Res. Cent. 2016, Sharkey 2012, Solari 2012). Characterizing this rising income inequality, Bischoff & Reardon (2013, p. 213) highlight the declining share of middle-income neighborhoods:

In 1970, 65% of families lived in middle-income neighborhoods (neighborhoods in one of the two middle categories); by 2009, only 42% of families lived in such neighborhoods. The proportion of families living in affluent neighborhoods more than doubled from 7% in 1970 to 15% in 2009. Likewise, the proportion of families in poor neighborhoods doubled from 8% to 18% over the same period. Thus, in 1970 only 15% of families lived in one of the two extreme types of neighborhoods; by 2009 that number had more than doubled to 33% of families.

As the middle class declines, some cities experience greater increases in affluence and poverty than others (Pew Res. Cent. 2016); still, this literature presents the attrition of the middle class as increasingly unambiguous.

This attention to the persistence of high poverty tracts and the related bifurcation of wealth counters two alternate ways of thinking about gentrification. First, it challenges any residual notion of gentrification's rarity or of gentrification as constituting what Berry (1982) described in the 1980s as "islands of renewal in seas of decay"—the dominant way of thinking about gentrification

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<sup>9</sup>Some analyses report reductions in racial segregation even as economic segregation increases. See, for instance, Glaeser & Vigdor (2012), Iceland & Sharp (2013), Lichter et al. (2012).



in the 1970s and 1980s. Affluent enclaves, whether constituted by gentrification or not, are increasingly prevalent (Owens 2012). Yet, this scholarship also challenges the increasingly popular notion of gentrification's dominance, or of what Wyly & Hammel (1999), reversing Berry, term "islands of decay in seas of renewal"—an image especially prominent in micro scholarship.<sup>10</sup> According to the above analyses, concentrated poverty and wealth are expanding in urban areas simultaneously (Ding et al. 2016). Gentrified neighborhoods constitute a core facet of many contemporary cities, but macro-level quantitative analyses suggest that beyond individual changing neighborhoods, gentrification is not dominant. Indeed, even as concentrated affluence increases, poverty remains entrenched and is even gaining ground in some cities.

Second, and relatedly, recent quantitative assessments find that gentrification is unevenly distributed across the United States; several prominent analyses present this as yet another manner in which gentrification is limited in scope. Part of this scholarship indicates that the gentrification we associate with New York, San Francisco, and increasingly with cities like Boston, Seattle, and Washington, DC, is not uniform. The pace, scale, and intensity of growth of affluent neighborhoods, a category that includes but also extends beyond gentrifying places, varies by region (Dwyer 2010, Lichter et al. 2012, Maciag 2015, Solari 2012).<sup>11</sup>

Solari (2012) and Owens (2012) find that rates of persistent neighborhood poverty and affluence vary regionally. For instance, persistent poverty rates are highest in neighborhoods in the Midwest (Solari 2012, p. 379).<sup>12</sup> Outside of sociology, a recent report suggests that gentrification remains rare and uneven across US cities: Maciag (2015) concludes that "only 8% of all neighborhoods reviewed experienced gentrification since the 2000 Census," whereas 58% of tracts in Portland, Oregon gentrified during the same period. Thus, these analyses suggest that cities that we tend to turn to for an image of gentrification—New York, San Francisco, and, increasingly, cities such as Portland and Seattle—depart from broader trends (but see Hwang & Sampson 2014 and Timberlake & Johns-Wolfe 2017). These quantitative findings depart starkly from those that emerge from a qualitative focus on a specific subset of (typically highly gentrified) cities and from gentrifying or gentrified neighborhoods within them. In addition, macro quantitative analyses find that central city neighborhoods—as opposed to the broader metropolitan statistical areas (MSAs) that some, such as Solari (2012), examine—experience higher rates of gentrification than outlying areas (Timberlake & Johns-Wolfe 2017).<sup>13</sup> This is in part because gentrification can encourage further gentrification; some analyses suggest that gentrification is, in essence, "contagious" (see, for instance, Vicario & Monje 2003). Landis (2015, p. 23) notes that "a census tract located in a metropolitan area in which upgrading and gentrification are common is itself more likely to be

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<sup>10</sup>This is, of course, a result of qualitative gentrification scholarship's attention to gentrifying tracts or what Sampson (2012, p. 107) refers to as selecting "on change itself." This qualitative portrait might be closer to that which emerges from quantitative scholarship if qualitative scholars studied processes—like economic and racial segregation—that are implicated in gentrification but also extend beyond it.

<sup>11</sup>As an example of this, an analysis of a set of cities associated with upscaling by Capperis et al. (2015, p. 4) found that "in 2013, more than three out of every five low-income renters were severely rent burdened in all 11 cities. In most of the 11 cities, over a quarter of moderate-income renters were severely rent burdened in 2013 as well."

<sup>12</sup>On the different economic fates of cities, and on the movement of the poor to certain cities and the concentration of the affluent in others, readers are referred to Lichter et al. (2012) and Fry & Taylor (2012).

<sup>13</sup>The types of neighborhoods that have gentrified over the last four decades are often neighborhoods people turn to when they need to stay in the city for reasons of consumption or work. However, even if only a minority of neighborhoods gentrify, analyses suggest that the proportion is not altogether modest (Hwang & Sampson 2014, Owens 2012, Solari 2012, Timberlake & Johns-Wolfe 2017); gentrification is not monolithic, but it has an unmistakable presence in many contemporary cities. Moreover, gentrification's effects extend beyond gentrified neighborhoods, influencing the demographic, economic, social, and cultural characteristics of the broader city (Hwang & Sampson 2014, p. 727).

upgraded or to gentrify than an otherwise identical tract in a metropolitan area where upgrading or gentrification are rare.” This, of course, reifies gentrification’s uneven prevalence and influence.

Beyond regional or cross-city variation, recent scholarship indicates metropolitan-level variation in gentrification and, more generally, points to the limited scope of gentrified tracts within cities. Indeed, recent quantitative studies that seek to identify and count gentrified neighborhoods suggest that they remain in the minority (Hwang 2015, Hwang & Sampson 2014, Timberlake & Johns-Wolfe 2017, Zuk et al. 2015); if most do not “ascend,” even fewer gentrify (Owens 2012, Solari 2012). Although scholars debate the precise number of gentrified or gentrifying neighborhoods (Hwang & Sampson 2014, Timberlake & Johns-Wolfe 2017), as well as how best to measure gentrification (Zuk et al. 2015), a growing number of macro analyses suggest that in most cities, most neighborhoods are neither gentrifying nor gentrified (Barton 2016, Hwang & Sampson 2014, Timberlake & Johns-Wolfe 2017).

Moreover, although extreme economic inequality is increasing in the central city and the share of middle class neighborhoods is shrinking (Bischoff & Reardon 2013), recent reports indicate that it would be a mistake to consider all urban neighborhoods as either poor or gentrified; some remain middle or upper class, experiencing little of the combined upward mobility and demographic shifts indicative of gentrification (quantitative scholars refer to some of these neighborhoods as “ungentrifiable,” as the gentry already resides in them; see Hwang 2015, Timberlake & Johns-Wolfe 2017). Indeed, Solari (2012) finds that poor and affluent neighborhoods became increasingly stable through 2000 (see also Owens 2012). Solari (2012, p. 370) writes that “rates of chronic poverty and persistent affluence are high, ranging between 30 and 35% of neighborhoods across [1970–2010].”<sup>14</sup>

Taken together, the persistence of concentrated poverty in urban areas and the limited share of gentrifying or gentrified neighborhoods in certain regions and even in metropolitan areas experiencing intensive gentrification that macro analyses present suggest that gentrification remains a selective process. If not all neighborhoods gentrify, what do we know about why some do? Quantitative analyses emphasize that location and other neighborhood amenities and advantages, and especially the racial demographics of neighborhood populations, determine which neighborhoods gentrify.

Specifically, quantitative analyses indicate that the likelihood of gentrification increases in neighborhoods proximate to cultural amenities, downtown, and public transportation (Hwang & Sampson 2014, Kahn 2007, Lin 2002, Lloyd 2004, Pollack et al. 2010, Timberlake & Johns-Wolfe 2017).<sup>15</sup> Moreover, the quality of a neighborhood’s housing stock, and its ability to be upgraded or preserved, also affects gentrification (Landis 2015, p. 21; see also Galster et al. 2003; Hammel 1999; Hammel & Wyly 1996; Heidkamp & Lucas 2006; Ley 1996; Smith 1979, 1996; Wyly & Hammel 1998); the presence of single-family homes and older buildings is especially appealing (Landis 2015, p. 23). In some instances, proximity to other gentrifying tracts increases the likelihood of gentrification (Hwang & Sampson 2014, Timberlake & Johns-Wolfe 2017). This body of macro analyses largely complements the findings of qualitative studies that consider gentrifiers’ motivations for neighborhood selection.

However, Hwang & Sampson (2014) find that neighborhood amenities are more consequential in some contexts than in others. They find that in Chicago, “the share” of blacks and Latinos in a tract attenuated the degree of gentrification—even in tracts that had showed signs of

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<sup>14</sup>Many quantitative analyses examine MSAs and therefore include some noncentral city tracts in their analysis.

<sup>15</sup>Readers are referred to Clark et al. (2002) on the appeal of urban amenities and how this relates to a broader shift of cities from sites of production to sites of consumption.



gentrifying in 1995 or that were adjacent to gentrifying neighborhoods (Hwang & Sampson 2014; see also Hwang 2015, p. 320).<sup>16</sup> This scholarship is part of a broader research cluster that examines how the racial characteristics of neighborhood populations predict gentrification (Crowder & South 2005, Hwang 2015, Hwang & Sampson 2014, Landis 2015, Solari 2012, Timberlake & Johns-Wolfe 2017). Most results underline the “racialized structure of neighborhood change” (Hwang & Sampson 2014, p. 737). Several studies indicate that neighborhoods in which African Americans constitute a majority are least likely to gentrify (Hwang & Sampson 2014; see also Hwang 2015, Lee & Wood 1991, Timberlake & Johns-Wolfe 2017).<sup>17</sup> Indeed, they find that a neighborhood’s racial characteristics may cancel out the impact of conditions that might otherwise encourage gentrification, such as proximity to downtown. Hwang & Sampson (2014, p. 744) write that “despite various local amenities and increasing hand of the state, racial-ethnic context and perceptions of disorder remain robust in shaping gentrification trajectories.” The racialized nature of gentrification partially accounts for the persistence of high-poverty and minority-dominant neighborhoods in cities that have also experienced substantial gentrification; as Hwang argues, such neighborhoods remain quite durable (Hwang 2016).<sup>18</sup> Cumulatively, this research challenges the increasing redefinition of gentrification as the movement of white populations into African American and other minority neighborhoods (Bates 2013, Bostic & Martin 2003, Landis 2015, Zuk et al. 2015), as well as the argument, present in some qualitative analyses, that “racial tension has been an important subtext of gentrification in many revitalizing neighborhoods” (Vigdor 2002, p. 138).<sup>19</sup> McKinnish and colleagues (2010, p. 181) go so far as to conclude that gentrification is “not consistent with displacement and harm to minority households.”

Despite these accounts of how gentrification avoids predominately African American neighborhoods (Hwang 2015, Hwang & Sampson 2014, Timberlake & Johns-Wolfe 2017), some recent analyses suggest that gentrification does occur in certain racially heterogeneous spaces.<sup>20</sup> Hwang & Sampson (2014, p. 739) find that “racial heterogeneity is indeed positively and significantly correlated with gentrification.” However, they specify that only certain forms of heterogeneity encourage gentrification. Gentrification is especially likely to occur in racially and ethnically

<sup>16</sup>This stands in contrast to increasing qualitative attention to the gentrification of neighborhoods with high proportions of minority residents (Hyra 2008, Lloyd 2004, Pattillo 2007, Perez 2002, Taylor 2002).

<sup>17</sup>However, for research that documents whites’ movement into minority neighborhoods, readers are referred to Crowder & South (2005), Ellen et al. (2011), and McKinnish et al. (2010). In addition, Landis (2015) discusses how the initial percentage of white residents encourages gentrification. Differences in findings likely relate to the cities studied and to the indicators selected to identify gentrifying tracts.

<sup>18</sup>These analyses, which tend to look across cities and over several decades, confirm early qualitative case studies of gentrifying neighborhoods (see two collections of studies: London & Palen 1984, Laska & Spain 1980), which emphasize gentrifiers’ prioritization of white ethnic neighborhoods. They also agree with more recent qualitative scholarship that reveals how gentrifiers’ taste for diversity (Berrey 2005, Butler 2003, Caulfield 1994, Osman 2011, Tissot 2015) or “grit” (Lloyd 2006) is highly selective (Bridge et al. 2012, Brown-Saracino 2007, Zukin 2009). On these grounds, the gentry avoid certain neighborhoods, whereas in other instances African American gentrifiers pioneer the movement toward historically African American neighborhoods (Pattillo 2007, Taylor 2002). In some instances, this leads to the later in-movement of white populations (Hyra 2008).

<sup>19</sup>This frame risks neglecting early forms of gentrification (with mostly white gentrifiers moving into what had been white working class spaces), as well as the participation of racial minorities in gentrification (Boyd 2008, Pattillo 2007, Taylor 2002). It also colors over the results of the above quantitative analyses, namely the fact that black neighborhoods, especially in “highly segregated cities such as Chicago” (Hwang 2015, p. 338), are least likely to experience gentrification. Broadly speaking, this scholarship contributes to a body of claims that cautions that gentrification is not blindly expansive.

<sup>20</sup>This avoidance of predominately African American neighborhoods reflects the relative rarity of minority-led gentrification of the kind found in places like Harlem, Chicago, and Washington, DC. Of course, the rarity of minority-led gentrification stems from the fact that gentrification requires a sizable affluent population. As a result, white gentrification, which prefers white or diverse neighborhoods, drives macro-level findings on race and gentrification.

diverse neighborhoods that are or have recently been immigrant destinations, drawing in particular Asian and Hispanic populations (Hwang 2015; see also Freeman 2009). The presence of Asians in these diverse neighborhoods is highly correlated with gentrification, whereas Hispanics “are positively associated with gentrification in neighborhoods with higher shares of blacks” (Hwang 2016, p. 209). In some instances, then, immigrant populations draw gentrification by limiting the presence of certain other populations. For instance, at least in Seattle, “the degree of gentrification is positively associated with *declines* of foreign-born blacks” (Hwang 2015, p. 337; emphasis added).<sup>21</sup> Cumulatively, this body of research challenges a popular perception of gentrification as threatening spaces where racially and economically marginalized populations live, and it contributes to a broader narrative about the selectivity and modest scope of gentrification.

Some recent macro-level scholarship suggests that avoidance of African American neighborhoods may be changing. Examining white entry into black neighborhoods between 1980 and 2010, Freeman & Cai (2015) find an increase between 2000 and 2010 (see also Crowder & South 2005, Ellen et al. 2001, McKinnish et al. 2010).<sup>22</sup> This supports recent qualitative accounts of the gentrification of traditionally African American neighborhoods (Hyra 2008, 2014). However, macro quantitative accounts generally propose that this remains relatively uncommon and is more likely to occur in neighborhoods that are 50% black than in neighborhoods that are 90% black (Freeman & Cai 2015). Moreover, amenities matter; neighborhoods rich in amenities and proximate to white neighborhoods are most likely to gentrify. Freeman & Cai (2015, p. 314) also find that the likelihood of whites moving into African American neighborhoods varies by metro area, with less segregated cities more likely to experience white invasion. This bolsters Hwang’s (2015, 2016) argument that gentrifiers valorize racially heterogeneous spaces. Still, a small body of literature indicates that, at least until recently, white gentrifiers have, on the whole, avoided residence in predominately African American neighborhoods.

Finally, the third way in which recent quantitative scholarship increasingly dispels notions of gentrification’s unambiguous harm pertains to displacement. A spate of publications in the early years of the twenty-first century suggest that low-income renters in tracts that scholars identify as gentrifying exit the neighborhood at rates comparable to those of low-income renters in

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<sup>21</sup>The relationship between race and gentrification may vary by city. Hwang (2015) demonstrates how city context—specifically, a city’s history, degree of racial segregation, and immigration trends—affects broader gentrification patterns. For instance, the presence of Hispanics is negatively associated with gentrification in cities with a growing Hispanic population (Hwang 2015). For these reasons, it would be a mistake to assume that race and gentrification share a uniform relationship. Generally speaking, why is the gentrification of African American–dominant neighborhoods less likely than the gentrification of other places? Although this remains relatively untested in large-scale studies that consider multiple cities across decades, analyses of residential choices reveal white urbanites’ enduring avoidance of African American neighborhoods. It is plausible that gentrifiers’ avoidance of neighborhoods with high proportions of black residents corresponds with the more general residential preferences of white urbanites (see Hwang 2015, Krysan et al. 2009). As Bader & Krysan (2015, p. 279) write, “whites seek to live among whites and avoid living among minorities” (see also Ellen 2000). They add that our “perceptions of place” remain “racialized” (Bader & Krysan 2015, p. 279). Thus, racial attitudes likely help to explain where gentrification takes root and where it does not, therefore providing a crucial clue about why cities are increasingly home to (racialized) concentrated affluence and poverty. However, as Bader & Krysan (2015) also assert, racial inequality and the uneven spatial distribution of economic resources are likely to also drive whites’ attitudes about residence in predominately African American neighborhoods. Attitudes about race and class are bound up with one another (Krysan et al. 2014), and the distribution of urban resources is racialized (Hwang & Sampson 2014). Gentrifiers’ avoidance of some predominately African American neighborhoods may also be read as an avoidance of neighborhoods that have endured long histories of redlining and that have historically been cut off from public transportation, major cultural and civic institutions, and other urban amenities (Massey & Denton 1987). Indeed, Landis (2015, p. 28) finds that income levels greatly influence a tract’s likelihood to gentrify: “More populous tracts or those with greater proportions of residents below the poverty line were less likely to have gentrified.”

<sup>22</sup>Broad analyses of segregation in US metropolitan areas suggest that segregation is declining in many places, although there is limited agreement on the degree of such decline (see Glaeser & Vigdor 2012, Iceland & Sharp 2013, Lee et al. 2014, Logan 2013).

nongentrifying neighborhoods (Freeman 2011, Freeman & Braconi 2004; but see Ding et al. 2016, Newman & Wyly 2006). At its core, this research suggests that low-income residents of urban neighborhoods tend to move frequently regardless of gentrification; their housing situation is generally tenuous (Desmond 2015). Thus, low-income renters would be “replaced” when nonpoor residents move in behind them rather than “displaced” (Hamnett 2003; see also Vigdor 2002 on involuntary displacement). This, of course, counters a key claim about gentrification’s risks and consequences for the contemporary city. Although some subsequent analyses contend that Freeman & Braconi (2004), for instance, underestimate direct displacement, their own reports nonetheless present displacement as much more modest than that apparent in many qualitative accounts (Ding et al. 2016, Newman & Wyly 2006).<sup>23</sup>

In summary, many recent quantitative analyses portray gentrification as less encompassing, more tenuous, more selective, and overall less dire than the cumulative image that emerges from much contemporary qualitative sociological scholarship. Macro quantitative analyses caution that it is a mistake to regard the American city as uniformly gentrified and insist that gentrification is not universal within or across cities (Hwang 2015, Owens 2012, Short & Mussman 2014, Solari 2012). Cities grappling with deindustrialization and increasing income inequality have followed different pathways and met different fates. Even those cities experiencing ascendant gentrification diverge in the precise scale, pace, and character of their gentrification processes (Hwang 2015, Maciag 2015, Short & Mussman 2014).<sup>24</sup> In addition, even as gentrification advances in many places, cities and their broader metro areas contain enduring pockets of concentrated poverty. Finally, this literature suggests that gentrification remains a selective process, that it typically avoids African American neighborhoods, and that the threat of displacement has been greatly overstated. While some qualitative scholars offer evidence in support of these individual claims, the cumulative body of evidence that contemporary quantitative scholarship offers on the scale and severity of gentrification is strikingly disparate from that found in the qualitative literature.

## ACCOUNTING FOR DISPARATE IMAGES OF GENTRIFICATION

In this section I outline three interrelated sources for these disparate images of gentrification.<sup>25</sup> First, these differences emerge from the empirical heterogeneity of what contemporary sociologists treat as gentrification: One could study one Los Angeles neighborhood and find that gentrification’s consequences are muted, whereas someone else could study another neighborhood in the same city and find that gentrification is ascendant and transformational.<sup>26</sup> This gap is exacerbated across cities and regions (Maciag 2015, Owens 2012, Short & Mussman 2014, Solari 2012): Gentrification may appear one way in the Bay Area and another in St. Louis (Maciag 2015). A second source of those divergences are measurement differences. Within and especially across methods, ways of conceptualizing gentrification vary; as a result, the indicators used to identify gentrification vary, too. Finally, competing images of gentrification originate in the varying types of questions micro and macro analyses tend to pose. On the one hand, macro scholars tend to

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<sup>23</sup> Only infrequently do such analyses answer questions about where longtime residents move to when exiting gentrifying neighborhoods. This, of course, limits our ability to assess, quantitatively, the degree of harm experienced by those who exit (see Ding et al. 2016).

<sup>24</sup> Brown-Saracino (2009) and Hyra (2008) provide qualitative accounts of variation in the scale and intensity of gentrification by place.

<sup>25</sup> On “images” in sociology, the reader is referred to Becker (2008).

<sup>26</sup> For instance, Chicago’s Rogers Park (Berrey 2005) offers a different portrait of gentrification—in terms of its progress and immediate term consequences—than do Boystown (Greene 2014) and Wicker Park (Lloyd 2006, Parker 2014).

favor questions about gentrification's origins (e.g., the conditions that produce it) and numerically demonstrable outcomes (e.g., displacement rates); on the other, micro scholars increasingly enter new territory, investigating the role of culture in gentrification, the relationship between gentrification and commerce, the dynamics of very advanced gentrification, and the experience of gentrification for various actors involved. Below I consider each source of difference in turn.

A first source for these different portraits of gentrification is the empirical heterogeneity of gentrification, or what Rose (1984) termed gentrification's "chaos." Cumulatively, analyses present evidence of wildly varied gentrification processes, from the early-stage gentrification of Chicago's West Side (Douglas 2012) and the stalled gentrification of Washington, DC (Williams 1988; see also Hosman 2016), to the very advanced gentrification of parts of Manhattan and Brooklyn (Butler & Lees 2006, Gotham 2005, Lees 2002, Zukin 2009). Sociological scholarship also reveals substantial variation in the breadth of gentrification within cities and especially across cities (Hwang & Sampson 2014, Maciag 2015, Owens 2012, Timberlake & Johns-Wolfe 2017). Gentrification has surpassed all expectations in Manhattan's Greenwich Village and London's Notting Hill, but it has taken different forms in parts of Pittsburgh and Providence. Thus, part of the disjuncture between qualitative and quantitative assessments results from the fact that what scholars term gentrification varies across times and places, with quantitative scholarship more frequently capturing ungentrified spaces and qualitative scholarship more frequently documenting highly gentrified spaces.<sup>27</sup>

However, this is not the whole story. If gentrification is fractious, the literature is all the more divided because of differences in scholars' objects of analysis. Qualitative scholars, by preselecting neighborhoods that are gentrifying or gentrified, may by default study neighborhoods that are at more advanced stages of gentrification than the mean census tract included in quantitative analyses. Qualitative accounts tend to focus more on New York than Buffalo, more on San Francisco than Sacramento. In contrast, by examining the mean within or across cities and, more generally, by providing a bird's eye view, quantitative analyses rarely highlight extreme cases and typically turn attention away from both New York and Buffalo. Also, by default, quantitative analyses are better positioned to capture ungentrified spaces because they often begin by reviewing all tracts in the city or MSA. In summary, sociologists following different methodological approaches will often study different places.<sup>28</sup>

This closely relates to the second source of this disjuncture: measurement difference. Some differences originate in variable definitions of what gentrification is; however, they also relate to the temporal and spatial limits of census data, the temporal scale considered (typically, in quantitative analyses, 10-year increments), and disagreement about how best to measure the presence of the gentry and other markers of neighborhood change.

The most fundamental difference between the camps relates to how they define gentrification. Quantitative scholars, especially those who emphasize gentrifying or potentially gentrifying rather than gentrified neighborhoods, are not always capturing the neighborhoods that many contemporary actors would imagine when thinking of gentrification—or, at least, their bird's eye view renders these poster children of gentrification (e.g., Greenwich Village or Park Slope) anomalous.

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<sup>27</sup>This is not to say that qualitative scholars study advanced gentrification in great numbers; rather, by preselecting gentrified spaces and by (in some instances) not explicitly excluding tracts already inhabited by wealthier residents, on the whole they are better positioned to capture advanced gentrification than macro-level studies.

<sup>28</sup>It would be a mistake to overstate the amount of attention devoted to neighborhoods at advanced stages of gentrification. Rather, the inclusion of more gentrified neighborhoods in collective qualitative samples is exacerbated by the fact that findings from those spaces tend to be sticky, in the academy and beyond. Readers may be more concerned about lessons from Brooklyn and Los Angeles than about lessons from Buffalo or Pittsburgh.

Indeed, many recent macro quantitative assessments would not define certain neighborhoods that are the object of qualitative attention as gentrifying—despite their upscaling. They might not even include them in their count of gentrified neighborhoods, as they may appear too affluent to belong to this category. At this late stage, New York’s Lower East Side (Ocejo 2014) and Chicago’s Wicker Park (Parker 2014, Timberlake & Johns-Wolfe 2017) might not be labeled as gentrified in quantitative analyses, despite their prominence in qualitative accounts and in the popular imagination.

Maciag (2015) provides a case in point, finding that “if all city neighborhoods are considered—including wealthier areas not eligible to gentrify—less than one of every ten tracts gentrified.” However, in the same paragraph he notes that “cities like Detroit, El Paso and Las Vegas experienced practically no gentrification at all” between 2000 and 2010. As a result, Detroit and El Paso are disproportionately featured in such reports, as Maciag acknowledges that San Francisco, for instance, had very few tracts left to gentrify in 2000. Therefore, upgrading that qualitative researchers may consider gentrification is sometimes excluded from such accounts. In turn, this informs sensibilities about the scope or scale of gentrification—leading, for example, to Maciag’s conclusion that less than one in ten tracts have gentrified.

Why is this? Quantitative analyses tend to consider only tracts that were below county, MSA, or city median household income at the time of the previous census and that have since moved up; alternatively, they look at tracts at the bottom of a broader range as tracts that could potentially gentrify. Maciag (2015), for example, examines only tracts that were “in the bottom 40th percentile of all tracts within a metro area at the beginning of the decade.” In contrast, some of the neighborhoods that qualitative scholars study may have already exceeded this bar; or they may be located in census tracts that, as a whole, exceed income standards that would permit their inclusion in most quantitative analyses but that may nonetheless contain small pockets transitioning from working to middle or upper-middle class. In short, for these reasons qualitative scholars, especially in recent years, have devoted greater attention to advanced gentrification than their quantitative counterparts. To provide a specific example, Timberlake & Johns-Wolfe (2017) suggest that by 1980 many of Chicago’s North Side neighborhoods were not available to gentrify because their median income was too high. As a result, they do not measure subsequent changes in neighborhoods that many qualitative scholars have relied on for case studies of gentrification, such as Uptown, Edgewater, and Andersonville (Berrey 2005; Betancur 2011; Brown-Saracino 2004, 2009; Johansson & Cornebise 2010; Levy et al. 2007; Maly 2005). Likewise, Hwang & Sampson (2014) excluded neighborhoods such as Lincoln Square, which has, in recent years, been popularly recognized as gentrifying (e.g., Behrens 2009).

These differences should not be read as an unambiguous error on the part of either camp. Rather, they gesture to collective uncertainty about how to define and operationalize gentrification and, more generally, to the difference between on-the-ground and bird’s eye views of gentrification. More than 50 years after Ruth Glass coined the term gentrification, scholars continue to debate—both implicitly and explicitly—how to define the process (see Wacquant 2008). Some uncertainty likely emerges from a desire to keep pace with gentrification’s advancement; that is, to include what Lees (2002) terms “supergentrification”—the movement of financiers and others into already gentrified neighborhoods—and to trace gentrification’s increasing geographic breadth by studying rural villages (Bell 1994, Brown-Saracino 2009, Macgregor 2010, Stiman 2016) and looking beyond the US and European capitals that most researchers initially studied (Centner 2012, Maloutas 2015). At the same time, other scholars, particularly those deploying quantitative approaches, more frequently restrict gentrification to parameters aligned with Glass’s (1964) original definition, which emphasizes the movement of the middle and upper-middle class into traditional working class spaces in the central city. In fact, these approaches are so distinct

that scholars increasingly study different places undergoing different stages of gentrification, while nonetheless using the same language (see Goetz 2011).

There are other measurement differences. For one, scholars continue to debate what should be considered an indicator of gentrification. Some quantitative analyses consider neighborhoods that have, among other things, experienced racial turnover, whereas others do not [Freeman & Braconi (2004), for instance, consider educational attainment]. Many consider changes in education levels, whereas others limit their attention to changes in median household income.<sup>29</sup> Some examine changes in home values (Immergluck 2009) or mortgage lending patterns (Kreager et al. 2011); others do not. Some evaluate commercial and other nonresidential changes (Hwang & Sampson 2014, Papachristos et al. 2011). Likewise, some qualitative scholars study slow-moving or intermittent gentrification (Hosman 2016), whereas others attend to ascendant gentrification (Lees 2002).

In addition, there are substantial differences between the spatial scales that quantitative and qualitative scholars examine. Most quantitative analyses turn to census tracts that sometimes do not align with recognized neighborhoods or do not coincide with the areas studied by qualitative scholars because they are either too broad or too narrow (Barton 2016; Landis 2015, p. 2). This may turn their attention away from smaller pockets of intensive or muted gentrification. There is also variation in how quantitative researchers select neighborhoods for inclusion in their studies; some determine which tracts they will examine by considering the economic and demographic conditions of a tract relative to other tracts within a central city, MSA, or county (see Owens 2012). Likewise, some qualitative scholars rely on how residents or media present a neighborhood as gentrified or not, whereas others rely on census indicators.

Finally, approaches to measuring gentrification's consequences also vary—as do conceptualizations of its consequences. Although not himself a sociologist, Stabrowski (2014) embodies an approach to capturing gentrification outcomes that is apparent in some recent qualitative research. His ethnography of Polish immigrants in gentrifying Brooklyn traces not only physical displacement, but also “a protracted displacement process that is experienced in and through the transformation of lived space” (Stabrowski 2014, p. 813; see also Martin 2007). This emphasis on documenting broader forms of displacement rather than physical uprooting is a common trend in qualitative studies.<sup>30</sup> Cumulatively, such work suggests that the cost of gentrification for longtime residents extends beyond loss of housing to include loss of “enclave” (Stabrowski 2014).<sup>31</sup> Of course, these are dimensions of displacement that quantitative analyses rarely touch on.<sup>32</sup>

Another point of divergence is that qualitative scholars may document gentrification—either directly, via census and other data, or indirectly, via residents' accounts—across flexible and expansive units of time, that is, through changes both rapid and slow. Quantitative scholars, by often limiting their attention to change that occurs between decennial censuses, may miss

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<sup>29</sup>There are even debates about how best to measure rent. What residents currently pay in rent may not take into account the rent prices on the open market. Writing of New York City, Capperis et al. (2014, p. 36) note that “The median asking rent of apartments advertised for rent on StreetEasy in 2013 was \$2,900—more than double the median rent paid by all renters in the city.”

<sup>30</sup>Readers are referred, for instance, to Small (2004) on the impacts of gentrification on daily life for public housing residents, but also Ellen & O'Regan (2011) on housing satisfaction.

<sup>31</sup>Some quantitative scholars, such as Vigdor (2002, p. 135), discuss possible costs of gentrification beyond displacement, such as a rising housing burden.

<sup>32</sup>Posey-Maddox et al. (2014) call for bridging the quantitative/qualitative divide in education studies of gentrification and cities.



neighborhoods that have been slower to transform or have changed too rapidly. This also means that macro analyses typically best capture changes within particular neighborhoods from one census to the next. Together, these different approaches to defining, measuring, and therefore studying gentrification help to produce discrepancies between accounts of gentrification's breadth and consequences (Barton 2016).

A third source of difference are the starting questions qualitative and quantitative scholars pose. Quantitative scholars tend to ask, Are places gentrifying, and if so, at what rate, which places, and with what consequences? These lines of inquiry closely relate to enduring questions and debates in the gentrification literature (Atkinson 2003, Laska & Spain 1980, London & Palen 1984, Smith & Williams 1986, Zukin 1987) and provide opportunities to refine measures of gentrification and strategies for mapping its breadth. In contrast, contemporary qualitative scholars tend to ask questions about the dynamics on the ground in gentrifying places. Increasingly, they chart new directions by inquiring into the meaning making and the choices of actors in gentrifying places; they question the role of institutions in gentrification and gentrification's impact thereon, from disaster relief efforts (Gotham & Greenberg 2014) to the consequences of gentrification for the corner store or local school (Billingham & Kimelberg 2013, Deener 2012).

These different questions reinforce divergences in case selection. If researchers are studying not whether gentrification occurs, but how, they may tend to select sites that seem to be gentrifying and even, depending on the question, to be fairly gentrified (e.g., questions about the effects of gentrification on commerce or schools often assume the presence of a population of gentrifiers substantial enough to support commercial and educational changes). In brief, these different questions call each camp to attend to different ends or versions of the process, and therefore to reach different conclusions about it.

Exacerbating this is the degree to which micro scholarship has veered into new territory. Whereas macro scholars currently revisit and refine areas of inquiry that have cyclically occupied urban scholars for the last 40 or 50 years—e.g., refining methods for measuring displacement and establishing metrics for identifying gentrification, sometimes in quite innovative ways (e.g., Hwang & Sampson 2014)—qualitative scholarship, especially over the last 10 to 20 years, has moved away from questions still at the heart of much quantitative work. That is, with some exceptions, qualitative scholars devote relatively little attention to displacement rates and to questions about gentrification's breadth and scale.

Specifically, ethnographic accounts increasingly highlight commercial gentrification, the role of urban institutions—such as schools, city government, and marketing firms—and other mechanisms, especially in intensive and advanced gentrification projects. Another increasingly dominant line of inquiry pertains to the experience of gentrification and the motivations (or ideologies) that propel residential choices and a broader engagement with urban change. As part of this, qualitative scholarship increasingly complicates existing notions of the gentrifier (Brown-Saracino 2004, Moore 2009, Ocejo 2014, Patillo 2007, Schlichtman & Patch 2013, Taylor 2002). Sometimes these strands unite. For instance, scholarship on gentrification and education broadens our understanding of the gentrifier—long presented as a childless single or married person (Vigdor 2002)—by exploring the motivations of those with children who choose to remain in the central city (Billingham & Kimelberg 2013, Clark et al. 2002, DeSena 2006, Kennedy & Leonard 2001). In turn, they call attention to the implications of these actors for neighborhood populations and institutions (see Keels et al. 2013, Posey-Maddox et al. 2014, Varady & Raffel 1995).<sup>33</sup>

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<sup>33</sup>This is perhaps in part because many of us sociologists—whether we rely on qualitative or quantitative methods—are or have been gentrifiers, as Schlichtman & Patch (2013) propose.

Most centrally, questions pertaining to culture have become central to micro inquiries. Reflecting a broader cultural turn in sociology (Friedland & Mohr 2004), ethnographers and other social scientists have taken up questions about cultural markets (Zukin 1996); neighborhood branding and identity (Greenberg 2008, Keatinge & Martin 2016, Lloyd 2006, Wherry 2011); the symbolic power of neighborhood actors, new and old (Deener 2012, Kasinitz 1988, Lloyd 2006, Ocejo 2014); and perceptions of neighborhood change (Bell 1994, Spain 1992). As one example of this approach, Martin (2007) traces interactional dynamics in gentrifying places. In the process, she engages work in cultural sociology on symbolic boundaries (e.g., Lamont & Molnár 2002). These trends in qualitative research speak to certain enduring debates in gentrification scholarship, such as the one about the role of tastes (Zukin 1987), but these are distinct from the questions and related debates that principally occupy macro analysts.

This divergence in the type of question pursued contributes to the sense that we are studying different processes and further circumscribes the degree to which micro and macro scholarship are positioned to be in direct conversation on matters like displacement. With the other two mechanisms—inconsistent definitions of and strategies for measuring gentrification and the “chaos” of gentrification on the ground—this confounds direct conversations across camps and the formation of a coherent image of the state of gentrification. This leads to unnecessary impasses in the literature, such as McKinnish and colleagues’ (2010, p. 180) claim that “there is a shortage of empirical evidence describing how gentrification occurs and its consequences for low-income and minority individuals”—when, in actuality, the qualitative literature has frequently documented this (often without making direct displacement a focal point).

## CONCLUSION

In a 2010 article, Wyly and colleagues refer to the “politics of measurement” of displacement (Wyly et al. 2010, p. 2603; see also Slater 2006, Wacquant 2008), by which they refer to the ongoing debates about the best way to calculate and quantify gentrification’s harm. The divisions that color the sociological literature on gentrification reveal a broader politics of inquiry because they are rooted in more far-reaching debates than those pertaining to measurement. As this review details, a politics of inquiry underlies the starting questions of the researchers, the source and character of data they collect, and, ultimately, the portraits they present.

This politics does not relate to distinct normative positions on gentrification per se, but rather to different sensibilities about change and distinct responses to a panic about urban change that partially penetrates the academy. Some suggest that anxiety about gentrification surges during boom times (Wyly et al. 2010), but sociological literature reveals a more longstanding preoccupation: one that has straddled economic recession, mortgage crisis, and recovery (for example, see Hackworth & Smith 2001 on gentrification following the 1990s recession). At the root of this anxiety (and the rejection thereof) is concern about a broader set of economic transformations and attendant inequalities (see Smith 1996).<sup>34</sup>

The broad range of places that scholars collectively approach as gentrifying indicates the degree to which those who decry gentrification and highlight its consequences are, at least implicitly, sounding alarms about a broader set of economic and spatial shifts of which gentrification is

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<sup>34</sup>However, the literature is not univocal on this. According to Vigdor (2002, p. 134), for instance, the major debate concerns whether it is gentrification that causes specific harm or whether it is “broad economic trends” that harm the poor; and he is correct in indicating the latter as the core underlying debate. However, in part because of Vigdor’s impactful work demonstrating the minimal harm associated with gentrification in the Boston context (pre-2000), this debate has shifted to a question of whether gentrification causes any harm at all.

part and parcel.<sup>35</sup> Three elements of the gentrification literature make these broader concerns evident. First, qualitative scholars increasingly attend to gentrification outside of the central city neighborhoods where Glass (1964) originally located it; this signals an acknowledgment that processes broader than those that are narrowly urban facilitate gentrification. Second, they attend to a variety of gentrification stages, some of which defy the traditional model of the middle and upper-middle class moving into working class spaces (Lees 2002, Ocejo 2014, Zukin 2009). Third, they increasingly attend to widespread conditions, such as city-level branding efforts or federal response to disaster, that help to produce upscaling (Greenberg 2008, Halle & Tiso 2014). These approaches gesture to the degree to which qualitative scholars increasingly wrestle with far-reaching changes tied up with gentrification, beyond those typically associated with it (e.g., mortgage lending practices, historic preservation policies, the rise of the dual income household, and delayed childbirth) (Glass 1964, Laska & Spain 1980).

What, precisely, are the broader social and economic changes that some sociologists gesture to when they discuss gentrification? Foremost among these is the contraction of the middle class and its diminished presence in the city (Bischoff & Reardon 2013, Pew Res. Cent. 2016). Second, and bound up with the first, is the transformation of the industrial working class; by emphasizing its displacement from gentrifying tracts, scholars evoke the more general disappearance or transformation of manual labor in productive industries (Brown-Saracino 2009)—from farmers to fishermen to factory workers. Third, there is anxiety about the “Disneyfication” of the city (see Zukin 1996): that is, the shift from the city as a site of production to the city as a site of consumption and the parallel homogenization of city spaces. Finally, scholars increasingly voice concern that the city is undergoing a largely unmanaged set of transformations under the pressures of neoliberalism. This work implies that we have not sufficiently wrestled with the question of how to manage the impact of the above changes on our cities (see Smith 1996, Wacquant 2008), and that, as a result, the “right to the city” is waning, with the urban poor living increasingly precarious lives (e.g., Brenner et al. 2012, Harvey 2012).

Scholars’ desire to articulate these anxieties at least implicitly encourages some of the latitude with which they apply the term “gentrification.” The characteristics of the cases they take up—the highly advanced gentrification in Brooklyn Heights (Lees 2002) and on the Lower East Side (Ocejo 2014) or the transformation of rural enclaves (Bell 1994)—relate as much if not more to these broad changes (in the class structure, the character of the middle class, the management of urban change processes) than to a classical view of gentrification (Glass 1964).<sup>36,37</sup>

Paradoxically, in the face of this anxiety, macro scholarship that suggests that some are overstating the problem may refuel the sense of urgent advocacy that others bring to their work (Zukin 2009). This reignites the gentrification debates (Brown-Saracino 2010, Smith & Williams 1986) and perhaps also fuels the polarization of the two approaches to the topic.

<sup>35</sup> On similar transformations of the city, readers are referred to Bianchini et al. (1992), Boyer (1992), Chapin (2004), Fainstein (2011), Hannigan (1998), Noll & Zimbalist (1997), and Sanders (2002).

<sup>36</sup> Vigdor (2002, p. 148) provides a review of definitions of and approaches to measuring gentrification, and Massey (2002) discusses the challenges of defining gentrification.

<sup>37</sup> Others have raised concerns about the accuracy of the term and questioned whether the term “gentrification” is sufficiently similar across studies to be applied to different contexts. For example, Maloutas (2011, p. 34) suggests that “looking for gentrification in increasingly varied contexts displaces emphasis from causal mechanisms and processes to similarities in outcomes across contexts.” He notes that Clark (2005, p. 263) calls for a very simple definition of gentrification that would apply across contexts: “a change in the population of land-users such that the new users are of a higher socio-economic status than the previous users, together with an associated investment of fixed capital.” However, like Maloutas, I worry about the loss of analytical specificity when the term becomes this general.

In their book on New York's High Line, Halle & Tiso (2014, p. 16) write that gentrification is often used "very loosely, conflating several issues that should be considered separately." Indeed, they suggest that different versions of gentrification have occurred along different sections of Manhattan's High Line (including what they term classic, commercial, and supercommercial gentrification). However, they do not discourage use of the term; indeed, they use it themselves. Instead, they recommend differentiating between forms of gentrification—in part to shape policy and planning responses. They write that scholars should "evaluate them differently, believing for example that working class residents should have some protection from 'classic gentrification,' while 'commercial gentrification' should generally be allowed to run its course" (Halle & Tiso 2014, p. 17).

In summary, if upscaling is increasingly varied and scholars increasingly use "gentrification" to refer to varied instances of this upscaling, and, crucially, if this exacerbates the incoherence of our collective arguments about and images of gentrification, what is the best path forward? On the one hand, we might cast aside "gentrification" (as a blanket term) (see Maloutas 2011; see also Ley & Dobson 2008). Alternately, as Halle & Tiso (2014) recommend, we might instead deploy it with great specificity (e.g., referring to stage and context and specifying whether the change is primarily residential or commercial).

Yet, this review underlines the limitations of both solutions. Each stops short of providing a language to express the broader changes (what Halle and Tiso refer to as the "several issues" that relate to gentrification) and anxieties pertaining to gentrification. Insofar as use of gentrification (as an umbrella term) prevents us from engaging explicitly with questions of economic restructuring and neoliberal approaches to planning, the continued usage of this term is problematic; its communicative power is limited.

At the same time, gentrification—in its various forms—makes some of these broader transformations concrete; it allows us to think about what these changes, along with globalization and the shift to consumption-based economies, mean practically and materially for everyday actors. This has long been true. Even if the precise conditions generating gentrification have shifted since the term was first coined, "gentrification" has always been used to gesture to one instantiation of a broader set of shifts. In this sense, continued attention to gentrification is an entry point for investigating some of the consequences and dynamics of broader change and, more generally, for rendering visible what sometimes seem to be ephemeral transformations.<sup>38</sup>

In addition, insofar as sociologists are concerned with speaking to broader publics and developing policy recommendations, there is an additional reason to consider retaining a language of gentrification (see Chaban 2016). Marking change as gentrification may call everyday actors to action. And a broad conceptualization of gentrification—for instance, applying the term to very early stages of reinvestment—may serve as a warning of the possibility of impending change.

Still, this leaves unaddressed the greatest risk of calling this broader set of transformations gentrification: This term calls our attention to one dimension of a broader set of changes (to ascending neighborhoods, however varied their forms may be) and not to the other forms and implications of the increasing inequalities unfolding in our cities. Our attention to gentrification and our willingness to deploy the term across a set of contexts may reduce our ability to develop a lexicon that captures the simultaneity of the reconstitution of concentrated affluence and poverty in our cities and beyond. Indeed, we might work to more actively unite scholarship, within and across

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<sup>38</sup>This might mean, for instance, that we move away from questions that narrowly engage gentrification and, instead, capture gentrification as we examine broader urban processes and dynamics. We could then work to develop accounts of and theories explaining processes that encompass but also extend beyond gentrification per se.

the camps this review identifies, on concentrated wealth and poverty. Those of us on either side of the contemporary divide might aim to study the city more holistically, capturing neighborhood change and stasis, poverty, affluence, and everything in between.

As part and parcel of grappling with the question of language, this review suggests that we must directly engage how and why gentrification appears differently from afar and up close; that we ought to constitute a more unified sociology of gentrification that integrates the dominant qualitative and quantitative perspectives highlighted here. This will, by default, require an explication of the relation between gentrification and broader economic and political trends, and of the inequalities that they generate.

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