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Gentrification-Induced Displacement in Detroit, Michigan: An Analysis of Evictions

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ABSTRACT

A growing number of studies have used evictions data as a way to address the methodological challenges to measuring gentrification-induced displacement. The spatial and temporal dimensions of evictions data enable researchers to potentially trace the movement of tenants over time. This article explores the role of evictions in gentrification-led displacement in Detroit, Michigan, by conducting a spatiotemporal analysis of eviction filings in the city between 2009 and 2015, and by addressing the question Where do displaced households go? This is a question that often goes unanswered in gentrification studies. Using a mixed-methods approach, this article documents the relocation of tenants from a project-based Section 8 building and traces the movement of tenant households out of a gentrifying downtown to the periphery of the city.

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Gentrification-induced displacement has been studied and debated in scholarly and policymaking circles for decades (see Hartman, 1980; Sumka, 1979). Yet there is still much we do not know (Davidson, 2008, 2009; Shaw & Hagemans, 2015; Stabrowski, 2014). For example, the magnitude of the association between displacement and gentrification remains uncertain and subject to polarizing debate (Freeman, 2008). This could be because of methodological challenges to measuring displacement, as well as the undertheorization of displacement processes (Davidson, 2008, 2009; Shaw & Hagemans, 2015). For one, it is difficult to track and locate displaced households because “by definition, displaced residents have disappeared from the very places where researchers or census-takers go to look for them” (Newman & Wyly, 2006, p. 27).

The methodological challenges to quantifying displacement have created fodder for debate regarding the actual magnitude and severity of the issue, with some scholars arguing that very little displacement occurs (e.g., Freeman, 2005; Freeman & Braconi, 2004; Vigdor, 2002) and others holding the opposite view (e.g., Marcuse, 1985; Newman & Wyly, 2006). Additionally, there are different interpretations of mobility and succession patterns within gentrifying and nongentrifying areas. For example, Hamnett (2003) argues that the change in demographics in previously working-class areas in London, United Kingdom, is not displacement but replacement, which is due to a long-term reduction in the working class and its replacement by middle-class households. Freeman and Braconi (2004) found that low-income tenants in gentrifying areas in New York City in the 1990s were less likely than their counterparts in nongentrifying areas to move, thus suggesting that gentrification-induced displacement is not occurring on a large scale and that demographic changes may be caused by normal succession. Thus, how gentrification and displacement are conceptualized is crucial in determining whether—and how accurately—they are measured and documented, and whether they are considered to be a problem (Easton, Lees, Hubbard, & Tate, 2019).

There are also quantification issues with accurately measuring displacement given the data limitations, such as a lack of appropriate longitudinal data (Atkinson, 2000) and problems with availability of data on the migration history of individual households, which are often insufficient or flawed (Easton et al., 2019). This lack of quantitative evidence to conclusively point to gentrification-induced displacement as a policy problem has enabled policymakers to “pursue strategies of gentrification unchallenged by statistical evidence” of its most negative impact—the displacement of existing residents (Easton et al., 2019, p. 2). To address these data limitations, a growing number of scholars have used evictions data as one way to circumvent the difficulties with collecting quantitative data on gentrification-induced displacement (Easton et al., 2019). An emerging body of work has investigated the relationship between evictions and gentrification. For example, in his study of evictions data in Toronto, Canada, Chum (2015) found that there is a significant relationship between gentrification and evictions, and his findings suggest that “excluding evictions in the study of gentrification may lead to the underestimation of displacement effects” (p. 1092). Further, he found that the timing of gentrification was an important factor in this relationship. In fully gentrified areas in which gentrification occurred in earlier periods (e.g., the 1970s and 1980s), there is a negative association with evictions as vulnerable households have already been pushed out, whereas areas undergoing early gentrification pressure have a stronger positive association with evictions (Chum, 2015). In other words, evictions appear to be more prevalent in neighborhoods experiencing early-stage gentrification or pregentrification upgrading. These findings align with what Sims (2016) uncovered in his study of evictions in Los Angeles, California, between 1994 and 1999, which demonstrated the presence of four distinct geographies of displacement that occurred within nongentrifying, pregentrifying, and gentrifying contexts. Thus, evictions can be a good indicator of areas experiencing gentrification, especially in the early stages. However, the role that evictions play as a mechanism of gentrification-led displacement has generally been underappreciated in the literature (Chum, 2015; Sims, 2016). Evictions can be a rich source of data because of their geographic and temporal dimensions, which offer researchers the opportunity to uncover whether any spatial concentrations persist over time (Sims, 2016). Significant rates and concentrations of evictions can be a good indicator of shifting housing markets (Sims, 2016).

This article examines the displacement effects of regeneration initiatives in Detroit, Michigan, by conducting a spatiotemporal analysis of eviction filings in the city between 2009 and 2015, supplemented by qualitative interviews with housing workers and Section 8 tenants. This research explores the role of evictions in gentrification-induced displacement in Detroit and addresses the question Where do displaced households go? This is a question that often goes unanswered in gentrification studies (Helbrecht, 2017). This article contributes to the literature by documenting the relocation of tenants from a project-based Section 8¹ building and by tracing the movement of tenant households outside of the downtown area.

Further, this article challenges the assumption that gentrification impacts in a highly abandoned city are minimal considering the large numbers of vacant housing units. There is a popular assumption that shrinking cities have an abundant supply of affordable housing (Glaeser & Gyourko, 2005), which stems from the observation that low-demand housing markets will tend to generate lower housing prices because of the fact that supply greatly exceeds demand. However, a weak housing market with high vacancy rates does not necessarily mean increased housing affordability for residents, especially low-income residents. To the contrary, it can mean a precarious housing situation given the decreasing supply of decent housing (Tighe & Ganning, 2016) that is affordable to low-income households. Revitalization efforts to improve the housing stock can create even more housing precarity, as these efforts typically attract wealthier in-movers and result in increased competition for a scarce supply of decent housing.

Documenting the extent of direct displacement in a highly abandoned city undergoing regeneration reveals that displacement effects are severe regardless of the substantial number of vacant housing units. This study draws upon a case study approach to deepen our understanding of how displacement occurs within the context of a shrinking city, which enables a better understanding of

how gentrification might be different in Detroit. The article unfolds in five main sections. The theoretical underpinnings of my argument are grounded in the work of Neil Smith, and his rent gap theory is outlined in the first section. The second section provides context on the historical factors and racial division that have helped shape the current sociospatial landscape in Detroit. The third discusses the resurgence in the downtown area and gentrification patterns in the city. This is followed by a methods section which outlines the eviction filings data and how the spatiotemporal analysis was conducted. The findings from the evictions mapping are presented in the final section, along with the story of the Griswold conversion from a project-based Section 8 building to market-rate housing.

Rent Gap Theory

Considered the most influential production-side explanation of gentrification (Lees, Slater, & Wyly, 2008), Neil Smith's rent gap theory (see Smith, 1979, 1996) challenged the dominant consumer sovereignty theories at the time and was at the heart of the production-side versus consumption-side debates that dominated the gentrification literature. Also known as supply-side theories, production explanations understand gentrification as the product of uneven capitalist development, whereas consumption-side theories (also known as demand-side explanations) understand gentrification "as a consequence of changes in the industrial and occupational structure of advanced capitalist cities" (Lees et al., 2008, p. 90). Whereas Smith (1979) acknowledged that consumption is important and saw the relationship between production and consumption as a symbiotic one, he noted that "it is a symbiosis in which production dominates" (p. 540). In other words, he viewed production as holding primary importance in initiating the process and consumer preference and demand as being paramount in shaping the final spatial forms of gentrification (Smith, 1979).

Smith (1982) argued that gentrification is the "leading edge of a larger process of uneven development which is a specific process, rooted in the structure of the capitalist mode of production," (p. 139) in which disinvestment creates the opportunity for future investment and redevelopment through the emergence of a rent gap (Smith, 2011). Smith's theory showed how suburban growth and expansion in the post-Second World War period (i.e., spatial fix, as termed by David Harvey) is related to long-term inner-city disinvestment. Harvey's (1989) idea of a spatial fix posits that the overaccumulation problem in capitalist economies could be absorbed through geographical expansion. Thus, the "massive postwar suburbanization in the U.S. was part of an overall strategy to create and maintain a long-term cycle of growth" (Hackworth, 2007, p. 77)—which was supported by allied commercial interests such as the automobile and consumer durables industries, and by the state in the form of subsidies for homeownership in addition to other federal policies. This spatial fix allowed capital to move to new markets in the suburbs. However, this seesaw movement of capital also helped create devalorization and property abandonment in older central cities, thus producing rent gaps in these areas (Smith, 1979). This is a paradox of urban development, in that capitalism is always creating new environments and investments in the pursuit of profit and accumulation, although in the process accelerating the devalorization of previous investments (Lees et al., 2008). This "valorization and devalorization of capital invested in the built environment" is an aspect of uneven development, which generally refers to the obvious fact that development does not occur everywhere at the same rate or in a similar positive trajectory (Smith, 1996, p. 80).

The rent gap is the difference between the "actual economic return from a land parcel given its present land use (capitalized ground rent) and the potential return if it were put to its optimal, highest, and best use (potential ground rent)" (Lees et al., 2008, p. 52). The rent gap is produced by capital depreciation, which causes the capitalized ground rent to decrease, and by urban development and expansion, which "has historically raised the potential ground rent level in the inner city" (Smith, 1979, p. 545). This process works to widen the gap between potential and capitalized ground rent:

Gentrification occurs when the gap is wide enough that developers can purchase shells cheaply, can pay the builders' costs and profit for rehabilitation, can pay interest on mortgage and construction loans, and can then sell the end product for a sale price that leaves a satisfactory return to the developer. The entire ground rent, or a large portion of it, is now capitalized; the neighborhood has been "recycled" and begins a new cycle of use. (Smith, 1979, p. 545)

Smith's work falls within the Marxist political economy perspective, which rests on the theoretical proposition that economic disinvestment is central to understanding decline and that "neighbourhood change is rooted in the circulation of capital in the built environment" (Smith, Caris, & Wyly, 2001, p. 500). Further, the deterioration and economic devalorization of the inner city is "a strictly logical, 'rational' outcome of the operation of the land and housing markets" (Smith, 1996, p. 60). Smith sees urban decline not as an unfortunate side effect but as a necessary part of the "spatial unevenness under capitalism" (Swyngedouw, Castree, & Smith, 2000, p. 267) in that "capitalist development is necessarily, rather than just contingently, uneven" (Swyngedouw, Castree, & Smith, 2000, p. 269). So, growth and decline are not different processes.

Smith's rent gap theory has been critiqued for not playing out empirically in that gentrification has not started in the most depressed areas where the rent gap is the greatest and the potential for profit is at its highest (Lees et al., 2008). However, Smith holds that disinvestment creates the conditions for reinvestment to occur, but, in and of itself, is not sufficient to bring about gentrification (Smith, Duncan, & Reid, 1989). In places that are well located and that have architecturally appealing housing (Chapple & Zuk, 2016; Ley & Dobson, 2008), gentrification is more likely to occur. The role of the state is also important in this process, as localities assemble properties and convey these properties at lower assessed values or provide attractive property tax abatements (Defilippis, 2004)—essentially bearing the "costs of the last stages of capital devaluation, thereby ensuring that developers could reap the high returns without which redevelopment would not occur" (Smith, 1979, p. 546).

Growth proponents often bring up the false choice of gentrification or more abandonment and disinvestment (Slater, 2009). Although, if gentrification and disinvestment are not different processes, but are simply two different articulations of the same flows of capital into the built environment (Defilippis, 2004), then the false choice is exposed. And the problem is not that neighborhoods suffer from a lack of capital or investment; rather, the problem is that they lack control over the most basic of needs—shelter (Defilippis, 2004).

Context: Historical Housing Development and Racial Division in Detroit

The story of Detroit is very much a story of race and racial division, and housing has been and continues to be a key site of racial conflict. The Detroit region, historically, has been a highly segregated area and remains one of the most racially segregated metropolitan areas in the United States (Galster, 2012). Sugrue (1996) illustrates how structural forces (e.g., economic transformation and institutionalized discriminatory mortgage lending practices) helped shape the city and region; however, he stresses that these structural explanations should not obscure the role of individual and group agency in reproducing racially segregated neighborhoods. The actions of certain homeowner groups to protect their interests and violently "defend" their neighborhoods from becoming racially integrated greatly influenced and polarized city politics on the issues of race and housing (Sugrue, 1996, p. 263). This racial bias and conflict greatly contributed to regional fragmentation and stunted redevelopment efforts in the city (Thomas, 1997).

Today, Detroit remains a highly fragmented region based on class and race. Generally speaking, the sociospatial landscape in the region features a city containing high rates of racialized poverty (with islands of affluence) surrounded by a ring of white affluent suburbs. This is largely the product of economic transformations (e.g., corporate decentralization and capital mobility, impact of automation, union animus), federal policies, and the racial disunity and politics that emerged from housing and workplace discrimination (Sugrue, 1996; Thomas, 1997). Specifically, the postwar white exodus to the

suburbs was fueled by large-scale affordable suburban housing development and racial prejudice, which was facilitated by federal urban and housing policies. The Federal Housing Administration (FHA) preferred to support new construction in the suburbs, and low-interest loans for returning veterans helped make suburban homes affordable (Accordino & Johnson, 2000; Hirsch, 1993). These federal housing policies, combined with the building of major highway networks, helped subsidize white flight and would greatly contribute to the depopulation of central cities (Downs, 1997; Hirsch, 1993). In the case of Detroit, white flight was occurring even before the 1967 Detroit Rebellion, although the numbers grew substantially in the years that followed (Akers & Seymour, 2018; Safransky, 2014).

Sugrue (1996, p. 266) makes an important observation when he writes about “grassroots racial politics” taking root in the suburbs as white Detroiters replicated the communities they had fled in the East Side and West Side of Detroit, with exclusionary zoning and hostility being the manifestation of their continued “defensive” tactics against racial integration. The result of this racial division, in addition to the increased political power of these white suburbs, has meant the diffusion of the political power of the City of Detroit:

The most enduring legacy of the postwar racial struggles in Detroit has been the growing marginalization of the city in local, state, and national politics. Elected officials in Lansing and Washington, beholden to a vocal, well-organized, and defensive white suburban constituency, have reduced funding for urban education, antipoverty, and development programs. (Sugrue, 1996, p. 268)

A Resurgent Downtown Detroit

Considering its iconic status as an American declining city, Detroit has long been associated with images of ruin, property abandonment, and disinvestment—fueled by the popular depiction of the city as an empty space filled with decaying commercial and residential infrastructure (Kinney, 2016). The highly abandoned housing landscape that dominates some city neighborhoods is the result of years of ad hoc demolitions (Hackworth, 2016), severe depopulation, suburbanization of employment, and lax development rules (Galster, 2014). From 1960 to 2000, the city demolished 178,000 dwelling units—which represented 32% of its 1960 housing stock—but the number of vacant houses, demolitions, and vacant lots continued to rise (Mallach, 2012). As of 2010, Detroit had 80,000 vacant housing units (Mallach, 2012). The large number of vacancies is unsurprising given the fact that the city lost over 1.1 million residents between 1950 and 2010 (Hackworth, 2014), whereas the suburban areas surrounding Detroit gained over 1.9 million people (Galster, 2014). Thus, the population in the region has remained relatively steady since 1970 while the central city has shed a large share of its resident base. This hollowing out of Detroit, argues Galster (2014), is not the primary result of deindustrialization—an explanation that is often offered as the main cause of Detroit’s decline. Instead, according to Galster, the main forces driving abandonment have been the combined relocation of jobs to the suburbs and unplanned housing development at the fringes aided by racial sentiments. Given the “region’s easily-buildable topography” and lax development rules, developers in the region have built an excess supply of over 600,000 dwellings as of 2010 because “they could make a profit and their new suburban subdivisions could win the competition for occupants against the older housing stock located in more dangerous, more deteriorated, lower-status neighborhoods” (Galster, 2014, p. 211). Galster calls this process the city disassembly line, which stretches from the urban core to the suburban fringes, and acts like a giant conveyor belt in that each time a new house is added, all other houses drop in value and the least valuable house falls off the line and is abandoned.

In the last few years, however, this narrative of decline has become one of renaissance and resurgence, as Downtown and Midtown Detroit have been undergoing intense redevelopment (Doucet & Smit, 2016; Moskowitz, 2017), which can be seen in the positive development activity map in Figure 1. The map illustrates that development has been concentrated in the greater downtown area from 2010 to 2015, with intense development occurring along Woodward Avenue

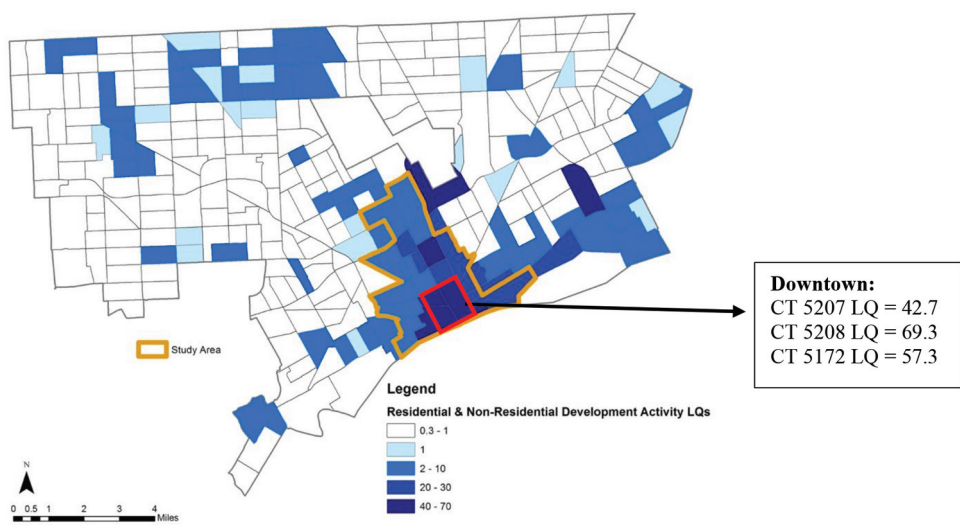


Figure 1. Map of positive development activity^a location quotients (LQs), 2010–2015. ^aMinus demolitions. Source: Buildings, Safety Engineering, and Environmental Department (BSEED), City of Detroit.

Table 1. Building permit data—downtown, 2010–2015.

Downtown	Estimated cost (number of permits)					
	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015
Additions, alterations, and repairs	\$20,980,169 (54)	\$94,601,219 (138)	\$186,292,451 (132)	\$73,059,022 (140)	\$81,167,664 (187)	\$148,569,667 (242)
New construction	\$148,600 (8)	\$7,531,011 (42)	\$21,538,364 (38)	\$54,575,863 (38)	\$2,513,500 (22)	\$8,307,500 (21)
Total	\$21,128,769 (62)	\$102,132,230 (180)	\$207,830,815 (170)	\$127,634,885 (178)	\$83,681,164 (209)	\$156,877,167 (263)

Source: Buildings, Safety Engineering, and Environmental Department (BSEED), City of Detroit.

in the downtown and Brush Park areas. The positive development location quotient (LQ) for the downtown census tract (CT) 5207 is 42.7, which means that positive development is nearly 43 times more concentrated in that CT than in the city generally. The other downtown CTs also show heightened concentrations of development. Table 1 breaks down the development activity by the number of building permits and estimated project costs, which demonstrates the steady rise in the number of construction and rehabilitation projects in the downtown area from 2010 to 2015.

Positive development activity (i.e., minus demolitions) is a strong indicator of reinvestment and can be a useful gauge of whether an area is gentrifying. However, this begs the question of whether redevelopment always leads to gentrification. Exploring the nebulous conceptual boundaries between regeneration and gentrification requires understanding when the lines blur and when regeneration becomes gentrification. Scholarly literature on the urban regeneration agenda in the United Kingdom has tended, for the most part, to be critical of regeneration in terms of its impacts on disadvantaged populations, as these initiatives are viewed as disassembling a strategy of social cleansing and gentrification (see Atkinson, 2000, 2004; Lees, 2008). Some scholars view the use of terms such as urban regeneration as a way to deflect criticism by subsuming gentrification within the more anodyne language of regeneration, which is seen as an attempt by policymakers to obscure or sugarcoat the class dimensions of the process to forestall public resistance (Lees, 2008; Smith, 2002). These scholars do not see or make a distinction between gentrification and regeneration, and in their work “regeneration is often seen as a euphemism for gentrification” (Porter & Shaw, 2009, p. 2).

However, Porter and Shaw (2009) contend that there is a difference, although they also acknowledge that regeneration initiatives are often implicated in processes of gentrification. They define regeneration simply as “reinvestment in a place after a period of disinvestment” (Porter & Shaw, 2009, p. 2). For them, the tipping point (i.e., when regeneration becomes gentrification) occurs when there is displacement (both direct and indirect).

A review of the literature of successful regeneration cases show a range of outcomes but, in general, suggests that most cases result in negative consequences for disadvantaged populations. For example, the imputed social benefits of housing-led regeneration have been shown to be overstated and instead can serve to displace residents of lower status (Lees, 2008; Legates & Hartman, 1986; Marcuse, 1985; Slater, 2006). Other negative impacts include increased housing costs and displacement of the poor (Atkinson, 2004), increased sociospatial inequalities (Fol, 2012), anchor-driven displacement (Silverman, Lewis, & Patterson, 2014), and the loss of a sense of place through indirect displacement (Davidson, 2008, 2009; Shaw & Hagemans, 2015). Success stories of revitalization tend to focus on a return to previous levels of economic and population growth (e.g., Zeuli, 2014), and omit a critical examination of whether increases in household incomes are due to the in-migration of more affluent households and the replacement/displacement of lower-income residents. The literature tends to suggest that, left to market-driven approaches and private sector-led regeneration where the role of government is to provide tax abatements or other financial incentives to remove the risk of capital reinvestment, the line between regeneration and gentrification will tend to be blurred and revitalization efforts will be synonymous with gentrification.

There is an ongoing debate on how gentrification is defined and how it occurs given the evolving nature of the process (see Lees et al., 2008). Ruth Glass offered the first definition of gentrification in 1964, which has held considerable sway with scholars in that early conceptualizations closely aligned with her classical definition (Davidson & Lees, 2005). Glass conceptualized gentrification as residential rehabilitation, the main processes of which included upgrading by the urban gentry, housing tenure changes from rental to ownership, rising housing costs, and the displacement of working-class and low-income residents (Lees et al., 2008). However, the evolving nature of gentrification prompted some scholars, like Neil Smith, to recognize that the meaning of the term was bound to change as the process itself evolved. By the early 1980s, it became “increasingly apparent that residential rehabilitation is one facet (if a highly publicized and highly visible one) of a more profound economic, social, and spatial restructuring” (Smith & Williams, 1986/2010, p. 10). Smith & Williams (1986/2010, p. 10) argue that the process is highly dynamic and resistant to “overly restrictive definitions,” and they cautioned researchers to approach the definition with fluidity and not impose a definitional order.

As the process of gentrification has matured and its scale and manifestations have changed as the role of the state in the process has evolved (Hackworth & Smith, 2001), new forms have emerged, giving rise to the debate over whether new construction should be conceptualized as gentrification (Walks & Maaranen, 2008). The debate hinges on the issue of displacement, as some researchers contend that new-build development does not constitute gentrification since no direct displacement of an existing population (low-income or otherwise) occurs, given that development is built on vacant land (see Boddy, 2007). Other scholars (Davidson, 2008; Davidson & Lees, 2010) argue that displacement does occur indirectly, in the following ways: (a) gentrification limits the housing opportunities for a low-income household to live in a formerly working-class neighborhood, thus preventing them from moving into a neighborhood they would otherwise have lived in; (b) there is a loss of a sense of place as a neighborhood’s sociopolitical structures and identity are changed; and (c) the retail and service composition in the neighborhood changes to cater to more affluent in-movers.

Although Glass’s definition is a useful starting point, the term requires sufficient elasticity to reflect 21st-century mutations of the process (Davidson & Lees, 2005). My understanding of the process is based on Jason Hackworth’s (2002) definition of gentrification as the “production of urban space for progressively more affluent users” (p. 815). This conceptualization is broad enough to

encompass the evolving forms of gentrification as well as the indirect forms of displacement that are implicit in the production of a middle-class space. It also goes beyond the residential rehabilitation that Glass' original conception contained, although it still captures the class-based tensions that she intended when she coined the term. This process typically involves middle-class transformation (Shaw, 2008), capital reinvestment, and the direct or indirect displacement of lower income residents (Davidson & Lees, 2005). As gentrification has continued to mutate since the 1990s, urban areas that were once thought ungentrifiable are now under tremendous redevelopment pressure as the frontiers of gentrification have moved from traditional central-city locations to unlikely neighborhoods (Davidson & Lees, 2005; Hackworth, 2002). This phenomenon appears to be occurring in Detroit, as there are surprising signs of gentrification spreading outward from the greater downtown area.

To investigate the role of evictions in gentrification processes, I first determined neighborhood change patterns in Detroit over a 25-year period, from 1990 to 2015. The housing and social class upgrading patterns can be seen in the neighborhood change map in Figure 2. To identify the CTs in Detroit that showed signs of gentrifying from 1990 to 2015, I used GeoLytics Neighborhood Change Database tract data and 2011–2015 American Community Survey data to determine which CTs experienced above-citywide increases in (a) median gross rent, (b) median household income, (c) median owner-occupied housing value, (d) share of college-educated residents, and (e) share of professionals. These indicators are based on the measurement approach of Walks and Maaranen (2008), who examined the presence and timing of gentrification in Canada's three largest cities. They selected six indicators that are related to three processes of gentrification identified by Ruth Glass: "tenure de-conversion, shifts in housing values and rents, and social class upgrading" (Walks & Maaranen, 2008, p. 9). The methodological approach employed in this study detects increases in housing values and rents, which reflect changes in the level of investment in the area (Ding, Hwang, & Divringi, 2015), and the presence of social class upgrading. By including income and the share of

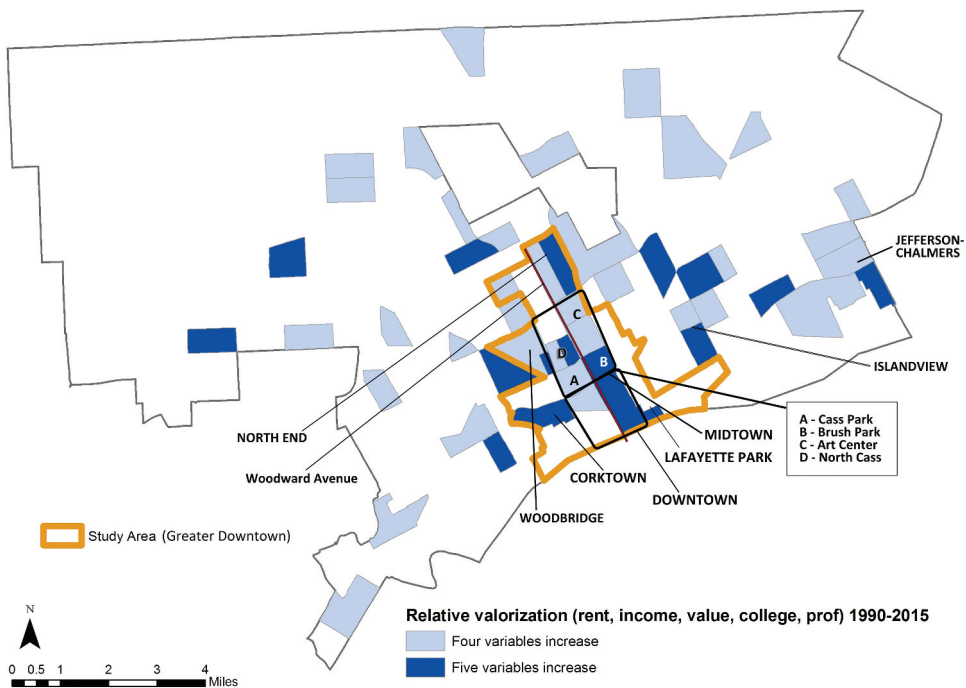


Figure 2. Neighborhood change patterns in Detroit, Michigan, 1990–2015. Source: Geolytics Neighborhood Change Database (NCDB) tract data; 2011–2015 American Community Survey (ACS) data, U.S. Census Bureau.

college-educated and professionals, it captures the presence of young graduates who are commencing their professional careers and may have relatively low incomes (following Ding et al., 2015). However, this approach does not consider the process of tenure de-conversion—from rental to ownership—because the opposite trend has been occurring in Detroit. As a result of the mortgage and tax foreclosure crises, which removed large numbers of low-income homeowners from their homes (Seymour & Akers, 2019), a significant tenurial change has taken place in the city. For the first time in decades, there are more renters than owners in Detroit. In 2010, 45% of housing units were renter occupied; in 2015, that percentage rose to 51%. This increase in renters means increased demand for rental accommodations, which contributes to a tightening of the rental market, thus exacerbating housing precarity. Moreover, the housing supply in some areas of greater downtown is dominated by rental options rather than ownership. In this case, the absence of a change in tenure from rental to ownership may not be a reliable indicator that gentrification is not occurring, and thus has not been included.

Following Wyly and Hammel (1999)—whose method included a review of scholarly and gray literature, a field survey, and a quantitative measure of gentrification—this simple measurement approach is also supplemented by (a) a review of gray literature, such as city planning reports and local news media; (b) an analysis and mapping of building permit data (see Table 1 and Figure 1); and (c) fieldwork. Fieldwork consisted of qualitative interviews (see the Data and Methods section below), site visits, and walking and cycling surveys of the study area to detect and document spatial signs of gentrification (e.g., evidence of reinvestment in housing and the built environment, presence of high-end restaurants and retail, etc.).

Gentrification occurs in different ways from city to city—even from neighborhood to neighborhood. This observation has been noted by scholars for years and prompted Lees (2000) to call for more research into the “geography of gentrification,” considering that different local, state and national political and planning contexts contribute to varying gentrification forms, trajectories, and consequences. Gentrification in Detroit appears to have been episodic, as development stalled during the 2007–2009 financial crisis; although the process of gentrification in areas adjacent to the downtown appears to date back to at least the late 1990s. Wyly and Hammel (1999) noted the uniqueness of gentrification in Detroit in that expensive houses could be found across the street from “boarded-up houses and deteriorated streetcar retail strips and apartment buildings” (p. 738). The spread of gentrification in Detroit continues to be uneven as gentrifying neighborhoods exhibit signs of upgrading and abandonment. As Wyly and Hammel (1999) observed, gentrification was moderate in the 1990s and neighborhoods adjacent to the downtown showed signs of resurgence, as reinvestment was clearly evident with \$5.74 billion worth of public and private investment planned or underway at the time (e.g., new major sports stadia planned for the Tigers and Lions, and renovations at the Renaissance Center).

The neighborhood change map in Figure 2 shows which tracts have experienced relative (i.e., above citywide) increases in four of the variables (indicated in light blue) and which tracts have seen increases in all five variables (indicated in darker blue). As Figure 2 illustrates, many of the tracts in the greater downtown show signs of gentrification over the 25-year period. These results are not surprising as they fit within popular media (e.g., Christie, 2014; Reindl, 2014) and scholarly accounts (e.g., Doucet & Smit, 2016; Elliott, 2018) of gentrification occurring in the downtown, Corktown, and midtown areas. What is unexpected is the diffusion of gentrification and potential gentrification beyond the greater downtown area. This finding is contrary to the view presented in some popular books (e.g., Moskowitz, 2017) and scholarly articles (e.g., Doucet & Smit, 2016), which generally paint a picture of gentrification and reinvestment only occurring within the 7.2 square miles of the greater downtown area. As the map (see Figure 2) clearly shows, gentrification is occurring in the greater downtown, but it is also spreading to adjacent areas, with pockets of gentrification located in the southwest and east along the Jefferson Corridor in Islandview and the Jefferson-Chalmers area.

During this period of significant redevelopment in the downtown area (2010–2015), there has been substantial racial and social change. Newcomers tend to be young, white professionals. The 20-

to 34-year-old age group grew substantially in the downtown, by 41%, and the number of professionals also increased (U.S. Census Bureau, 2010, 2015). In 2010, the percentage of residents employed as professionals and management was 30%, whereas in 2015, that percentage had grown to 43%. The white population in the downtown area grew by almost 70% from 2010 to 2015, whereas the black population grew by only 4.6% (U.S. Census Bureau, 2010, 2015). However, the story of racial change in the downtown area can be seen more clearly if we look at the change in racial composition. In 2010, the black population in the downtown CT 5207 made up 69% of the population. In 2015, this proportion decreased to 59%. This racial change is even more pronounced in the other downtown tracts. For example, in CT 5172, black residents comprised 74% of the total population in 2010, but only 57% in 2015 (U.S. Census Bureau, 2010, 2015). Unlike many Rust Belt cities, Detroit is an overwhelmingly black city, with 79.7% black residents (Hackworth, 2019). So, the influx of white residents to the greater downtown in recent years has been noticeable and has raised concerns of racial displacement.

Data and Methods

Research began with the following questions: What are the displacement impacts of regeneration initiatives in downtown Detroit? Where do displaced households go? To address these questions, I completed a spatiotemporal analysis of eviction filings in the City of Detroit from 2009 to 2015. The spatial analysis involves the calculation of LQs as a method to detect clustering patterns over time. I then conducted a fine-grained analysis of eviction cases in the downtown area by examining data at the building level. This research is part of a larger study, which included analysis of socioeconomic and housing market changes in greater downtown Detroit. Specifically, this article drew from the following data: site visits and walking and cycling surveys in the downtown area; participant observation at regular meetings of a seniors' housing preservation coalition ($n = 4$), and weekly meetings of a grassroots group involved in antieviction efforts ($n = 12$); and 15 semistructured interviews conducted in 2016 with downtown Section 8 tenants and with housing and community workers. Key informants were invited to participate in the study based on their professional housing knowledge and work with subsidized tenants in the city. Section 8 tenants were recruited with the help of a community partner.

The evictions data for the City of Detroit is from the 36th District Court, which involves over 240,000 eviction cases from 2009 to March 2016. For the purposes of this study, I have focused on 2009 to 2015 because the data for 2016 are incomplete, and the neighborhood change analysis does not include 2016. These data include over 232,000 eviction filings from this period and feature the following fields: the plaintiff's name and address; the defendant's name and address; the case number; and the dates when cases were opened and closed (i.e., file date and close date). The raw data were received in plain text format, which was converted to Microsoft Excel format and manipulated so that each eviction filing (represented as a case number) could be mapped based on the defendant's address (i.e., the place where the tenant is being evicted from). A very few defendant address entries contained PO boxes; these cases were not mapped but were included in the calculation of the LQs for each CT. It is important to note that many of these eviction proceedings may not result in physical evictions (Akers & Seymour, 2018). Using the eviction case number, further details can be obtained on the case through the Register of Action online database available through the 36th District Court. The limitation of these data is that, whereas they may indicate whether a Writ of Restitution² has been issued, they may not indicate whether the writ has been executed by a bailiff, so it is difficult to determine what "ultimately happened" (Interview with a housing legal professional in Detroit, Sept. 2, 2016). However, considering that formal evictions represent a severe undercount of involuntary displacement (Desmond, 2016; Desmond, Gershenson, & Kiviat, 2015; Hartman & Robinson, 2003; Seymour & Akers, 2019), these data may still be a good indicator of dislocation, as "these records

offer an understanding of the prevalence of these actions but not their full volume” (Akers & Seymour, 2018, p. 138) and can be a good indicator of landlord behavior and intent (Sims, 2016). Some tenants move before cases make it to court, and some may be forced to move through informal evictions (Hartman & Robinson, 2003). For example, a landlord may just tell a household to leave, and offer a sum of money or change the locks (Desmond et al., 2018; Desmond & Shollenberger, 2015). Executing these informal evictions “can be less expensive and more efficient than formal evictions,” and they are not reported in evictions data (Desmond & Shollenberger, 2015, p. 1754).

In total, 210,197 eviction cases were mapped, leaving 24,221 cases unmapped. LQs³ were then calculated as a method to identify and compare spatial concentrations of eviction cases in the city (following Chum, 2015). The equation for calculating the LQs for each CT is as follows:

$$\text{Eviction LQ} = \frac{e^{CT} / d^{CT}}{E^{city} / D^{city}}$$

where e^{CT} is the number of eviction cases in a census tract; d^{CT} is the number of renter-occupied units in a census tract; E^{city} is the total number of eviction cases in Detroit; and D^{city} is the total number of renter-occupied units in the city.

An LQ that is greater than 1 means that there is a higher than average spatial concentration of eviction cases in that CT in comparison with the city as a whole. If the LQ is less than 1, this indicates that a CT has a smaller share of eviction filings than have generally occurred in Detroit. If the LQ is equal to 1, then the CT has the same share of eviction cases as the city.

Where Do They Go?

The Story of the Griswold Conversion

The conversion of the Griswold (see Figure 3) from a subsidized building into a market-rate apartment building is a well-known example of gentrification-induced displacement in Detroit. The historic 1929 building was designed by renowned architect Albert Kahn and is located downtown, in close proximity to the luxury Westin Book Cadillac hotel in the Capitol Park Historic District, which received its historic designation in 1999 (City of Detroit, 2013). Since the 1980 conversion from its previous use as an office building, the Griswold has been a project-based Section 8 building with 127 units targeted to low-income seniors. In 2013, the Griswold was sold to Broder & Sachse, a retail, office, and multifamily development and property management company that operates in Michigan and the Southeastern United States. At that time, according to the U.S. Department of Housing and



Figure 3. The Griswold conversion. A, Before market conversion. Source: Google Street View, Oct. 2011. B, After market conversion. Source: Author, 2017.

Urban Development’s 2013 Picture of Subsidized Households, 95% of households in the Griswold were black, 61% were female-headed, and 54% were age 62 and older. A year before the Section 8 contract was due to expire (on March 31, 2014), the new owners gave tenants a 1-year notice that they would have to move. The 12-story building was converted into a luxury apartment building in 2014, and all the tenants were displaced. The building is now called The Albert, and 1-bedroom rents there range from \$1,500 to \$1,800 a month as of the time of writing. The developers—Broder & Sachse—received public assistance to rehabilitate the building, in the form of a 10-year property tax abatement (City of Detroit, 2013). The estimated savings to the developer over the 10-year period is more than \$1.4 million, and the overall benefit to the city in the 7 years beyond the abatement period is estimated to be more than \$1.3 million (City of Detroit, 2013). Because the project involved public subsidies, local housing advocates were able to negotiate a funding commitment from the developer to underwrite additional relocation help for the tenants (Interview with a housing professional in Detroit, June 15, 2016). In the end, the tenants were compensated for relocation costs and provided with Section 8 vouchers, and they received relocation help from local nonprofit housing groups: the United Community Housing Coalition and the Neighborhood Service Organization.

Very little research has focused on where low-income households go when they are displaced (Helbrecht, 2017). In cities that have experienced different waves of gentrification (Hackworth & Smith, 2001) and supergentrification (Lees, 2003), such as New York City, residents, when displaced from the final frontiers of gentrification, moved to the outer reaches of the city (Wyly, Newman, Schafran, & Lee, 2010). In the Global South and East, revitalization and class remake of the central areas in Shanghai, China, and Rio de Janeiro, Brazil have also meant the displacement of low-income households to the city’s outskirts (Arrigoitia, 2017; He, 2010). In resurgent declining cities, such as Berlin, Germany, relocations mostly occurred within the district or to nearby areas (Forste & Bernt, 2017). For example, Forste and Bernt (2017) found that when displaced households in East Berlin could not access appropriate and affordable housing in the district, they moved to nearby areas that featured a similar urban structure and character so that they could remain close to the “previous centers of their lives and to the location of their social networks” (p. 52). In contrast, only a few Griswold tenants ($n = 8$) managed to remain in the neighborhood and 31% moved to adjacent neighborhoods, such as Midtown (see Table 2). The rest (more than 60%) were forced to go farther out—36.8% of tenants located housing in other areas of the city, some in the Jefferson-Chalmers area in the southeast (Interview with a housing professional in Detroit, June 15, 2016)—and 25% of tenants had to leave the city altogether.

At the level of the city’s housing affordability landscape, the impact of losing the Griswold means the loss of 127 deeply subsidized units in an already diminished supply of affordable housing in Detroit. However, at the level of the individual, the loss of the Griswold caused substantial emotional distress to many tenants who had lived in the building, in some cases for decades. One community housing worker, who worked with the Griswold tenants, recounted the traumatic experience that some tenants went through when they received the notice to move:

They knew it was coming but it came rather quickly—it’s a situation where you know it’s going to happen but you’re in shock when it finally does. It’s kinda—not kinda—it is a death. Because it’s a death of a community...

Table 2. Griswold tenant relocations.

	Count	% of total known moves
Moved within same neighborhood	8	7.5
Moved to an adjacent neighborhood	33	31.1
Moved to rest of city	39	36.8
Moved outside of city	23	21.7
Moved out of state	3	2.8
Total	106	100.0

Source: United Community Housing Coalition.

So, when it happened, the people were extremely upset. Struggling with their emotions with it; and so, my role in that was to help them, and I was able to help them through a psychologist who is a retired professor from UofD [University of Detroit] Mercy. And he came—pro bono—every Wednesday and had group sessions with them so they could verbalize all of their feelings—anger, and various things. (Interview, Detroit, June 29, 2016)

However, the impacts of the Griswold conversion are not only confined to the physical⁴ and mental health issues that come into play (see Perry et al., 2015) when frail, low-income seniors are forced to move. The impacts also involve the fraying of extant social support networks, which are vital in lower income communities. Many of the Griswold tenants had lived there for 10 years or more, according to a housing professional (Interview, Detroit, June 15, 2016): “There were several people in their 90s who had been there over 25 years, so when you’re looking at that you’re really talking about significant trauma to that person because where am I going to go, what are my support networks going to be now?” These social costs of displacement have been well researched by other scholars, such as Fullilove (2001), who documented how urban renewal resulted in psychological trauma, the scattering of tight-knit communities, and the rupturing of networks.

In low-income communities, informal support networks develop over time, and by dispersing members of these networks to different locations, the result is an erosion of the informal support that served to mitigate the impacts of ever-retreating state support. In a seniors’ subsidized building, most residents do not work, so they are around the building more frequently and have developed supportive networks in which tenants help each other (Interview with a tenant organizer in Detroit, June 23, 2016). In a climate of government austerity, these informal support networks are even more necessary to help fill the gaps that a retreating social safety net has exposed because of federal retrenchment in funding for infrastructure and services (eg. social security, medicare, food stamps). However, these social networks are fragile, and if key people are removed through displacement, then those networks are more likely to become frayed. Then, the lack of formal support is further exacerbated because the informal networks that once provided much-needed support are no longer there; they have been dispersed, displaced. Thus, these populations can become even more vulnerable to social and financial crises. A tenant organizer and advocate, who also lives in one of the remaining four Section 8 buildings downtown, stated that most of the Griswold tenants are unhappy with where they have ended up because of the loss of community:

At first, they were very happy but once they got to know where they were and understood the situation, they felt isolated, they felt it wasn’t the same atmosphere. It wasn’t the same community that had been built up over eons down here. (Interview, Detroit, June 23, 2016)

Spatiotemporal Patterns of Evictions

The role of evictions⁵ has generally been underappreciated in urban displacement processes (Sims, 2016) and “neglected as a form of gentrification-led displacement” (Chum, 2015, p. 1083). By examining eviction filing data in the downtown area at a fine-grain level, we can ascertain landlord behavior (Sims, 2016) by identifying potential spatial clustering that may indicate property owners’ intentions to capitalize on rent gaps.

Evictions could be the result of gentrifying landscapes (and concomitant rising rents) but they could also be a precursor to gentrification. Thus, evictions could operate as a method to expel tenants so that landlords can rehabilitate the units and capitalize on rising housing values in a gentrifying neighborhood by reaping higher rents on renovated units. Evictions could also occur because tenants do not have the money to cover increases in rent, which result in nonpayment of rent. According to a housing legal professional, there are few tenant protections or regulations around rent increases in Detroit (Interview, Detroit, Sept. 2, 2016). There is a city rent quality control ordinance (Chapter 26, Article VII: Stabilization and Regulation of Rent Increases) that was passed by popular ballot in 1988. However, it remains unenforced because of a Michigan State Law prohibiting local governments from enacting or enforcing a rent control legislation (Michigan Compiled Laws [MCL] Section 123.411 (2)). The lawful reasons allowing landlords to start an eviction proceeding include:

- (1) Nonpayment of rent;
- (2) Illegal drug activity that has been documented through a formal police report (and provided the lease holds such a clause for termination);
- (3) If the tenant causes a “serious and continuing health hazard to exist on the premises, or causes extensive and continuing physical injury to the premises” (MCL 600.5714 (d));
- (4) “Violation of a lease provision and the lease allows for termination” (Michigan Legislature, 2017);
- (5) When someone takes possession of the premises through a forcible or peaceable entry;
- (6) Remaining in the housing units after lease termination or sale of the property.

Once the eviction notice has been properly sent to the tenant and the designated time period—24 hours, 7 days, or 30 days—has elapsed and the tenant has failed to comply (e.g., pay the rental arrears amount), the landlord can then start a Summary Proceedings action by filing a summons and complaint at the 36th District Court.

In Detroit, the eviction filing LQ maps from 2009 to 2015 (see [Figure 4](#)) show the shifting frontier of gentrification during that period. For example, eviction cases in 2009 are concentrated in the downtown and adjacent areas, and along the riverfront. However, in 2015, the geography of evictions shifted out of downtown to the North End and the Cass Park area, where the new National Hockey League stadium has been built and an entertainment district—District Detroit—is being planned. In the rest of the city, the LQ maps show that eviction filings have remained relatively concentrated in the Northeastern and Northwestern areas from 2009 to 2015. These spatial patterns illustrate that displacement is also occurring in nongentrifying contexts.

Neil Smith’s rent gap theory illustrates how long-term disinvestment in certain areas in Detroit has created the conditions for future revalorization, which has served to initiate the process of gentrification. Rent gaps are obviously the highest in nongentrifying neighborhoods, and eviction-based displacement is to be expected in these areas “as landlords and developers realise that systematic disinvestment has reached a point where neighbourhoods can be redeveloped at substantial profit” (Slater, 2009, p. 305). However, concentrations of eviction filings are also occurring in nongentrifying areas unlikely to experience future gentrification, and where profit is most probably not extracted through the closing of the rent gap but through the exploitation of the lack of housing choices available to poor households (Desmond, 2016) and through predatory speculative activity (Akers & Seymour, 2018). Thus, eviction-based displacement in nongentrifying areas may not be fully explained by the rent gap theory, as certain disinvested neighborhoods may never experience gentrification despite the huge gap between the actual and potential ground rent. In other words, not all displacement in Detroit is attributable to gentrification. Desmond’s (2016) work shows that profit can be extracted from poor and abandoned neighborhoods in ways that do not invoke gentrification processes. Desmond and Gershenson (2017) found that renters living in disadvantaged neighborhoods in Milwaukee, Wisconsin, have a higher likelihood of eviction compared with those residing in gentrifying neighborhoods. Moreover, a study by Akers & Seymour (2018) shows the ways in which bulk tax foreclosure buying is connected to rising evictions in Detroit and is part of predatory property relations. These foreclosure investors—who purchase single-family rental properties in bulk from tax auctions in nongentrifying areas outside of Detroit’s greater downtown—extract profit through serial eviction and new land contract sales (Seymour & Akers, 2019). There are “three waves of dispossession and displacement,” Akers and Seymour (2018, p. 129) argue: the first wave consists of mortgage foreclosures, the second involves tax foreclosures, and the last entails evictions.

In downtown Detroit, evictions have been dissipating from 2009 to 2015, which could be because the most vulnerable tenants have been filtered out. In other words, evictions could be more prevalent in early stages of gentrification as buildings undergo renovation to cater to higher income newcomers. [Tables 3](#) and [4](#) show how the number of eviction cases has decreased in the three downtown CTs from 2009 to 2015. In CT 5207—which includes the remaining four Section 8 seniors’ buildings—eviction filings have decreased by more than 54%. CT 5172 has also seen a slightly higher decrease (almost 60%) in the number of eviction filings during the same period, although eviction

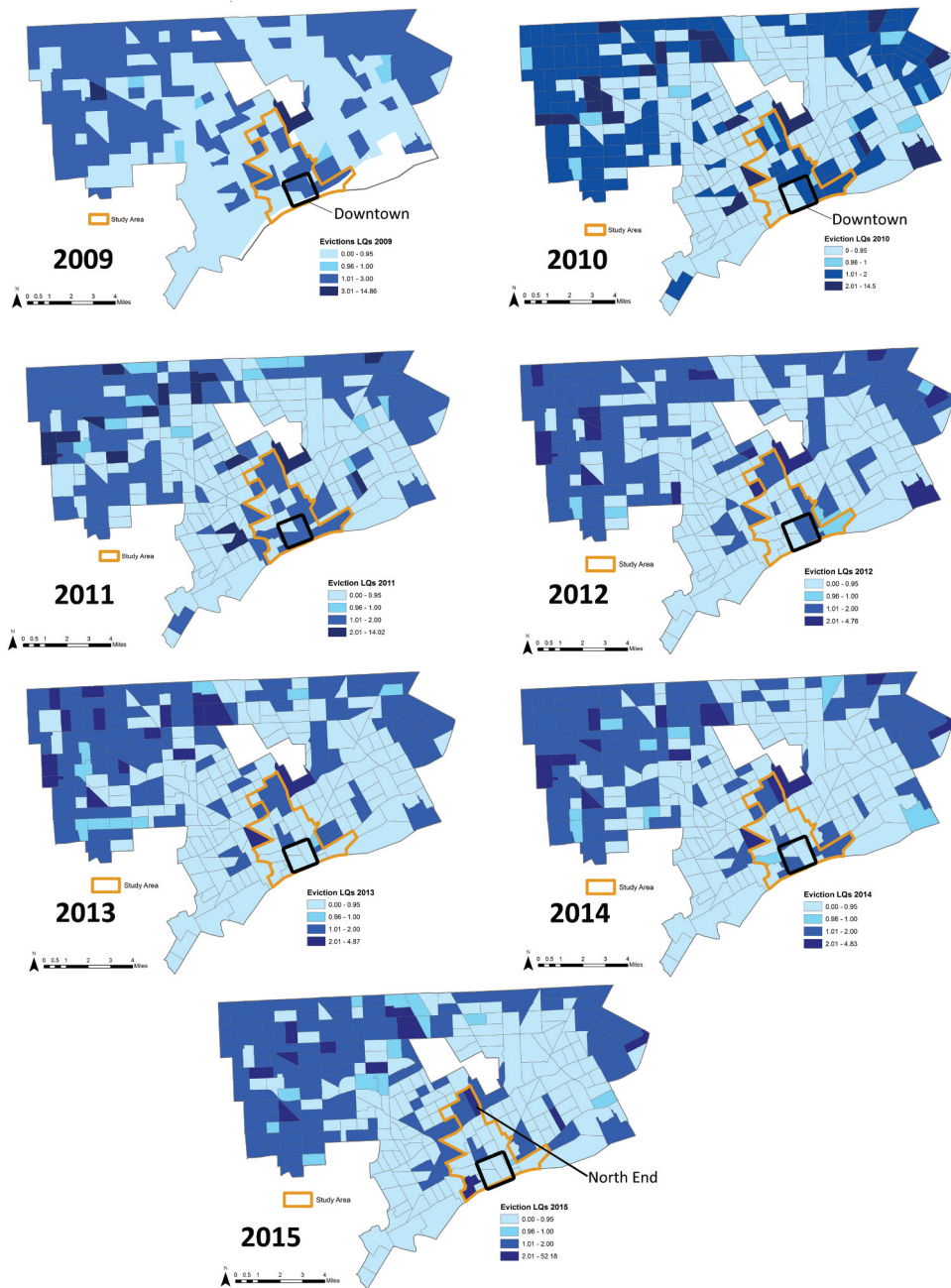


Figure 4. Eviction filing location quotients (LQs), 2009 to 2015.

Table 3. Number of eviction filings downtown, 2009–2015.

Downtown census tract	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015
5172	213	255	226	138	105	69	88
5207	436	336	274	303	253	257	200
5208	150	164	246	152	124	158	136

Table 4. Eviction filing location quotients (LQs) downtown, 2009–2015.

Downtown census tract	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015
5172	1.45	1.78	1.58	1.09	0.65	0.46	0.55
5207	1.05	0.89	0.68	0.89	0.61	0.66	0.51
5208	0.73	0.92	1.37	0.94	0.69	1.02	0.73

numbers and LQs in CT 5208 have remained steady. The lower LQs for 5172 and 5207 from 2009 to 2015 suggest that the prevalence of evictions decreases as an area experiences gentrification. Thus, it is expected that the rate of eviction cases downtown will continue to decrease as lower income residents continue to be filtered out of the area (Chum, 2015).

Examining evictions data at the building level also reflected the fact that eviction filings are decreasing over time in the downtown. To conduct a more fine-grained analysis, I organized the data by address and by year, which revealed the top eight buildings downtown with the most eviction filings in 2009 (see Table 5). The analysis shows that the number of eviction filings decreased from 2009 to 2015 in some buildings, such as 111 Cadillac Square and 1431 Washington Blvd, and remained steady in others, such as 100 and 200 Riverfront Drive. The table also shows an interesting pattern regarding 1511 First Street, currently known as Town Residences. From 2012 to 2014, the level of filings increased—from 25 and 27 in previous years to 76 and 60 in 2012 and 2013, respectively. Anecdotally, mention was made of Town Residences (then known as Town Apartments) having expelled tenants with Section 8 Housing Choice Vouchers. Town Residences began \$5 million worth of renovations in 2014 (Pinho, 2014) and is presently owned by Triton Investment Company, a Denver, Colorado-based firm that started investing in Detroit in 2009. City staff investigated the management practices of Triton concerning their treatment of tenants, based on the written concerns of City Councillor Mary Sheffield (City of Detroit, 2015). They did not find evidence of any wrongdoing, although their investigation did not entail consulting with current or previous tenants (City of Detroit, 2015). There was also anecdotal evidence regarding two other downtown buildings pushing tenants out—555 Brush, currently called Renaissance City Club Apartments (formerly known as Millender Center Apartments), and 1431 Washington Boulevard, or Detroit City Club Apartments (formerly known as Trolley Plaza). Renaissance City Club Apartments was bought by Village Green (the same company behind Detroit City Club Apartments) in 2013 and renovations began in the same year (Beshouri, 2013).

Based on what I heard through formal and informal discussions, I selected these three buildings for a more detailed examination. The spatial and temporal dimensions of evictions data enable researchers to potentially trace the movement of tenants over time, if their names appear as a defendant at another address at another point in time. So, I gathered all eviction filings from these buildings between 2009 and 2011 ($n = 642$) and cross-referenced tenant names with eviction filings in 2012 to 2014 to determine whether their names showed up again as a defendant at a different address. In this way, we could potentially trace the movement of evicted tenants and map where they were pushed out to during the study period. Underpinning this inquiry is the assumption

Table 5. Top eight residential buildings downtown with the most eviction filings, 2009–2015.

Address	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	Total
1. 400 Bagley	81	69	74	68	81	72	70	515
2. 111 Cadillac Square	93	76	74	43	53	38	47	424
3. 200 Riverfront Drive	40	56	77	69	51	47	38	378
4. 100 Riverfront Drive	49	54	79	48	34	59	46	369
5. 555 Brush Street	51	80	86	79	13	7	2	318
6. 1511 First St	34	25	27	76	60	55	37	314
7. 1431 Washington Blvd	90	66	43	18	4	22	12	255
8. 2305 Park Ave	41	34	28	38	35	32	23	231
Total	479	460	488	439	331	332	275	2,804

Source: 36th District Court.

that an exact match based on names actually represents the individual (i.e., defendant) in question and not another tenant with the same name. To prevent this likelihood as much as possible, I avoided common names such as Smith, as these typically yielded too many matches in that different addresses were referenced in the same time period—in which case it could safely be assumed that multiple people were involved, rather than one unique individual. Therefore, the analysis focused on more unique names, as it would be more likely that someone with the same unique first and/or last name actually was the same defendant listed in an earlier filing. This approach yielded 44 matches and eight possible matches. I then checked these matches by accessing the 36th District Court's Register of Action database to obtain more information on each case. If it appeared likely that the matched name referred to the same individual, the name and new address(es) were then added to the final list.

In the end, the search yielded 34 matches from the original list of eviction filings from the three downtown buildings. These matches and tenant moves are represented as a flow map (see Figure 5). This map clearly shows that whereas a few tenants have managed to stay put downtown, most tenants have been pushed outside of downtown and the study area altogether. In some cases, the data suggest that some tenants had two moves between 2012 and 2014 after leaving one of the downtown buildings. For example, in one case, the tenant (AY) moved from Detroit City Apartments (1431 Washington Boulevard) to a place on Woodward Avenue in the study area, and then to the west side. This move represents an estimated 17-min automobile trip from downtown, given the easy access into downtown Detroit via the extensive highway system, but can take 50 min to an hour via public transit. Displaced tenants in this analysis moved to various neighborhoods on the periphery of the city. For example, one tenant moved into Warrendale on the city's far west side, which is a working-class neighborhood that has been "battered by blight and the foreclosure meltdown" (Derringer & Kurth, 2017).

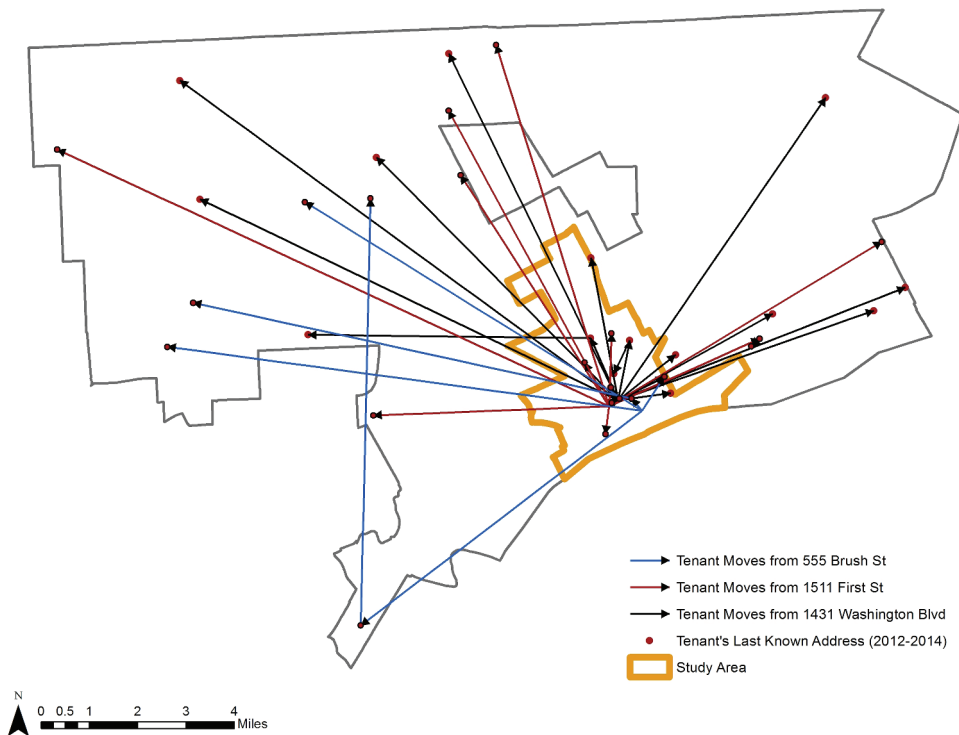


Figure 5. Tenant flows out of downtown, 2012–2014, based on eviction filings.

By following repeat defendants from these three downtown buildings, we clearly see that there has been a movement out of downtown between 2012 and 2014. Put another way, the tenant flow map indicates that the evicted get pushed out of a gentrifying downtown to the periphery of the city. This leapfrogging may also suggest how gentrification occurs in Detroit in terms of displacement patterns. Tenants who are forced to leave the greater downtown area cannot just move to nearby areas because the adjacent neighborhood may be highly abandoned or contain a large concentration of substandard housing and abandoned properties. In general, many of the neighborhoods outside of the greater downtown area have not been a part of the renaissance that has been occurring in Detroit (Doucet & Smit, 2016), although revitalization initiatives have been underway in some areas, such as Fitzgerald, Islandview, and the greater villages. Many of these neighborhoods have been severely impacted by the mortgage and tax foreclosure crises, which involved more than 70,000 mortgage foreclosures in Detroit since 2005 and about 110,000 repossessed homes through tax foreclosures from 2002 to 2016, with the majority occurring after 2009 (Seymour & Akers, 2019).

This analysis deepens our understanding of how displacement occurs within a shrinking city's context, which enables a better understanding of how gentrification differs from place to place. Gentrification is different in Detroit not because its impacts are less severe or deleterious for disadvantaged residents, but the displacement effects and social impacts might be even more serious given that there is an uneven housing landscape. So, if low-income tenants are forced out of downtown, they may not simply be pushed out to an adjacent neighborhood because the housing in that neighborhood may be uninhabitable, dilapidated, or unaffordable. Instead, they may have to move out much farther because of these major gaps in the decent and affordable housing landscape. Lastly, because of the large-scale foreclosure crises, an increase in rental demand from former low-income homeowners translates into greater competition for a limited supply of decent affordable rental options, which can lead to greater housing precarity.

Conclusion

Displacement mechanisms in Detroit involve the erosion of the supply of government-assisted housing, which is contributing to direct displacement. More than 100 Section 8 tenants from the Griswold were displaced from Detroit's downtown largely because of capital reinvestment and redevelopment in the area. The new owners of the Griswold opted out of renewing the subsidized housing contract and converted the building into luxury market rental units. Physical dislocation also involved the dislocation of social networks. The displaced Griswold tenants may be able to recreate the social and support networks in their new places of residence if they are fortunate, or they may be able to maintain existing networks if they have access to transportation or were among the few tenants who managed to stay in the same neighborhood. However, as Mazer and Rankin (2011) illustrate, the social world of a low-income person is spatially smaller than that of a more affluent individual. For higher income residents, their social networks span larger expanses of territory, so relocation does not carry the same impact. For less affluent residents, proximity enables social networks to exist and flourish, and the loss or fraying of these networks carry greater weight as these networks often help with basic needs and quotidian survival. In the wake of the market conversion of the Griswold, community organizations and housing advocates have worked to prevent further direct displacement by preserving the remaining Section 8 buildings in the downtown area as subsidized housing.

Through an examination of eviction filings (2009–2015), this study found that eviction cases in downtown Detroit were at their highest in 2009 or 2010 and then decreased in the following 5 years. During this same period, development activity in the downtown area began to increase substantially, and changes to the built environment and retail composition became more pronounced. In the early stages of gentrification, direct displacement appears to be more prevalent; however, as gentrification advances, direct displacement tapers off as lower income tenants get filtered out (Chum, 2015). So, where do they go? Only a few tenants from the Griswold were able to stay put in the downtown area, with the majority (60%) being relocated outside of the adjacent area—and among them, 25%

left the city altogether. Further, examining the evictions data at a more granular level enabled the creation of a tenant flow map that suggests that when tenants are forced out of downtown, they are pushed out not to adjacent neighborhoods but to the periphery of the city.

Notes

1. The project-based Section 8 program is a federal housing assistance program, established under the Housing and Community Development Act of 1974. The program has a production component (Section 8 New Construction and Substantial Rehabilitation program) and a tenant-based component (Housing Choice Voucher). The project-based program has resulted in the construction of over 1.2 million units—all of which were built before 1980 (Reina & Winter, 2019). The Housing Choice Voucher, or Section 8 voucher, is a form of tenant-based assistance that enables recipients to use the voucher in the private rental market (Defilippis & Wyly, 2008).
2. “A writ of restitution authorizes a landlord to forcibly remove a tenant from the disputed property following a judgment for the plaintiff” (Desmond et al., 2018, p. 36).
3. The evictions data also appear to include commercial eviction cases, although what proportion of these cases actually involve commercial tenants cannot be ascertained precisely, either in the data themselves or by looking up the Register of Action filed in the 36th District. However, from 2009 to 2011, 808 filings appear to involve commercial entities, which comprises 0.8% of total filings. If commercial eviction cases are significant in one CT, then the calculated LQ may be an overestimate. However, if commercial and renter-occupied units are included in the denominator, the calculated LQ suffers a greater risk of being severely underestimated. Thus, the decision was made to exclude commercial units in the denominator during the calculation of LQs, which may present a limitation of this method to accurately indicate spatial concentrations of residential evictions; however, commercial eviction proceedings can also be indicators of gentrification pressure.
4. The developer began demolition and construction of certain units and retail areas while residents were still living in the building, and they experienced breathing problems. According to a housing and community worker: “We also had a situation where the workers were wearing masks because of the air quality but not offering anything to the residents. So now you have a situation where the residents are really feeling like they are out of the loop; they are not cared about. Nobody cares” (Interview with a housing and community worker in Detroit, June 29, 2016). The city eventually stepped in and forced construction to stop.
5. Following Desmond et al. (2018), an “eviction occurs when a landlord forcibly expels a tenant from a residence” (p. 2).

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Julie Mah, PhD, is an urban planning scholar who studies affordable housing policy, gentrification, evictions, and equitable development approaches. Her research examines the impacts of gentrification on the housing affordability landscape and explores tenant experiences with direct and indirect displacement.

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