



# Gentrification and Neighborhood Change

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PRENTICE HALL  
**WORLD GEOGRAPHY**  
BUILDING A GLOBAL PERSPECTIVE

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PHYSICAL AND HUMAN GEOGRAPHY

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# DEFINING GENTRIFICATION

*“The transformation of a working-class or vacant area of the central city into middle-class residential or commercial use.” (Lees, Slater, and Wyly, 2008)*

*“Increases in household income, education, and/or housing costs in previously low-income, central city neighborhoods.” (Ellen & Ding, 2016)*

*“The process in which neighborhoods with low socio-economic status (SES) experience increased investment and an influx of new residents of higher SES.”  
(Hwang & Lin, 2016)*

# FROM DEFINITION TO METRICS

- How do we translate qualitative measures into quantitative ones?
  - What (if anything) gets lost in translation?
  - Even the “best” data are a proxy for the intangibles and lived experiences of residents in changing communities
- Even when conceptions of gentrification are the same, different criteria and variables can produce very different findings about where and how often it occurs
  - Understanding why we get the results we do is an important check on how useful a particular approach may be in a given context

*Measurement frames our perceptions about gentrification and its consequences*

# VARIATIONS IN MEASURES

- **Data sources**
  - Quantitative vs. qualitative
  - Time series coverage
  - Level of geographic specificity (definition of “neighborhood”)
- **Indicators**
  - Neighborhood features
  - Housing stock
  - Resident characteristics
- **Criteria**
  - Comparisons to metro/region
  - Thresholds vs. spectrum

GENTRIFICATION AND NEIGHBORHOOD CHANGE

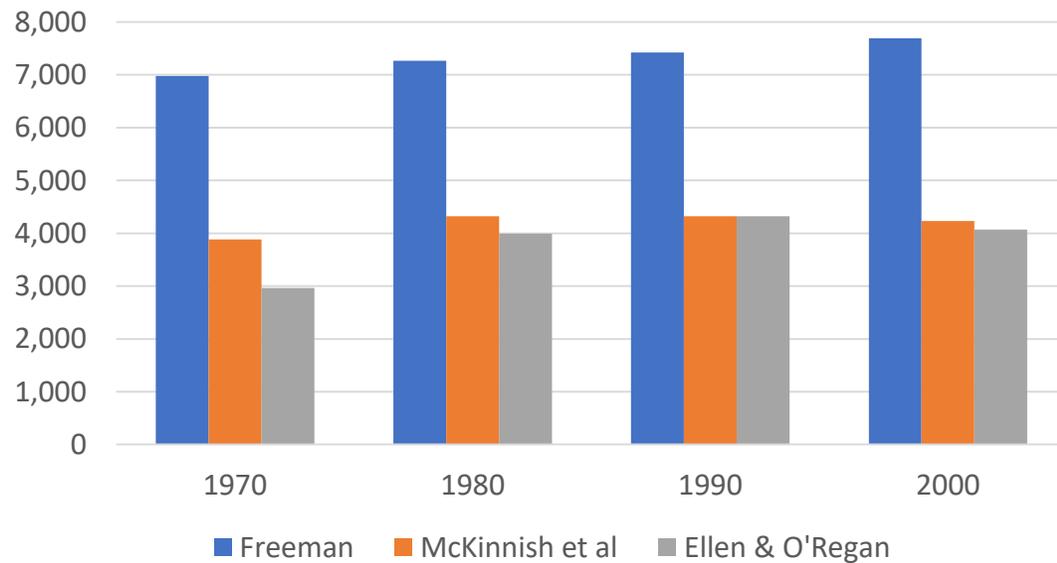
# COMPARISON OF MEASURES

Features	Freeman (2005)	McKinnish et al (2010)	Ellen & O'Regan (2008)
<b>Neighborhood designation</b>	Central city tracts in metropolitan areas at beginning of decade	Tracts in metro areas with population over 500K and within 5km of a city with population at least 100K in 1990	Central city tracts with at least 200 people and primarily non-institutionalized populations
<b>Metro area definitions used</b>	SMA/MSA/PMSA/CBSA at beginning of decade	MSA/CMSA in 2000	SMA in 1970
<b>Income measure/ criteria at beginning of time period</b>	Median household income below metro area median	Average family income in bottom 20% among all evaluated tracts nationally	Average household income below 70% of metro area median
<b>Other neighborhood conditions required</b>	Share of housing in tract built in prior 20 years below metro-area median levels	None	None
<b>Change in income measure during time period</b>	None	Real increase of at least \$10,000 over decade	At least a 10-percentage-point increase in the tract-to-metro ratio of average household income
<b>Other conditions required for gentrification</b>	Change in share of college graduates living in tract greater than metro-area median change, and any increase in real housing costs	None	None

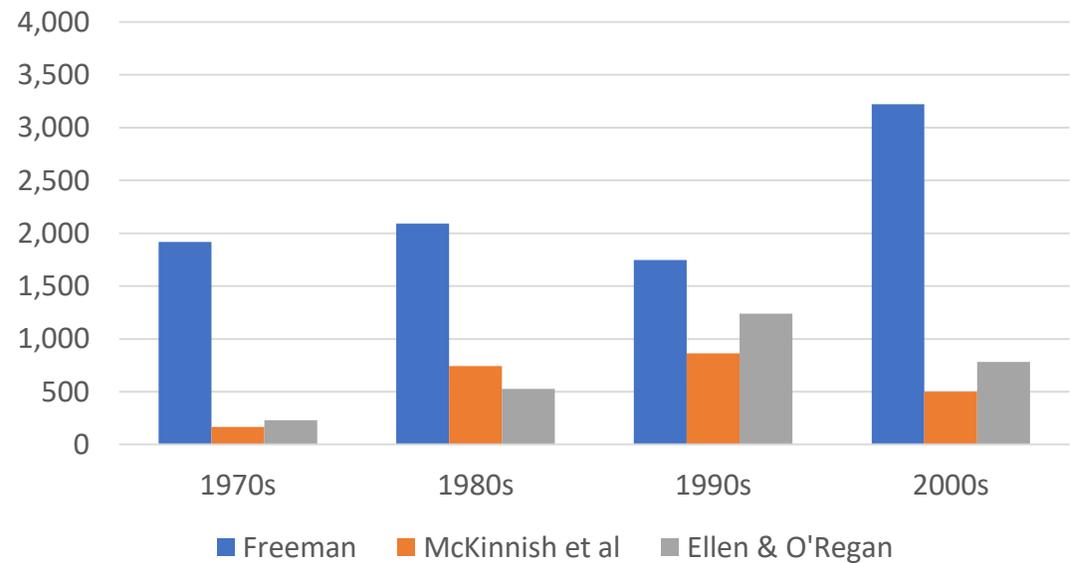
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# COUNT OF TRACTS

Eligible to Gentrify at Start of Decade



Gentrified during Decade



Note: Counts are of tracts in the 95 cities in which all three definitions applied in each of the four decades evaluated (n=14,152).  
Source: Calculations of the Geolytics, Inc. 1970-2010 Neighborhood Change Database.

# THE GENTRIFICATION COMPARISON TOOL

- **Interactive mapping tool to visually and quantitatively assess different measures of gentrification over time**
  - Customizable by city and decade
  - Shows both eligibility at start and gentrification observed during decade
  - Calculates degree of overlap in gentrification measures
- **Intended to demonstrate variation across gentrification measures**
  - Connect each to local knowledge and experience
  - Display the ever-changing nature of neighborhoods
  - Highlight the reach of gentrification and persistence of disinvestment
- **Available at <https://www.enterprisecommunity.org/policy-and-advocacy/policy-development-and-research/gentrification-comparison-tool>**

# WHY IT MATTERS

- **Gentrification is rarely a binary condition**
  - **Neighborhood change can be gradual and lacks clear start/end points**
- **Inconsistent views about where gentrification occurs lead to different findings about its impacts on communities, including**
  - **rising housing costs**
  - **displacement of existing residents**
  - **changes in crime rates**
  - **effects on school quality**
- **The lack of consensus/precision in measuring gentrification can limit policymaking guidance**
  - **Lumping a diverse set of communities together under the banner of gentrification, mutes meaningful differences**
  - **May lead to ineffective or even counterproductive responses to changing neighborhood conditions**

# MOVING THE CONVERSATION FORWARD

- **Respond to local concerns with local solutions**
  - Local conditions require local considerations
  - Holistic approach to address multiple aspects of community change
  - Engage residents in identifying challenges and developing solutions
- **Proactively address housing and community needs**
  - Monitor conditions in real time; augment lagged data with local sources
  - Develop nimble and adaptive tools to meet range of needs
  - Do not fear change
- **Promote opportunity in all communities**
  - Exclusive focus on gentrification ignores majority of disadvantaged communities
  - Develop affordable options in existing high-opportunity areas *and* in low-opportunity ones to ensure a wider range of affordable and desirable communities



# Questions?

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