

“The Bloody  
Shirt of  
Gentrification”

White People



Out of Pilsen!

Modifications  
to the Urban Fabric  
in Pilsen,  
1995–Present

BY RACHEL HYMAN

On December 13, 1997, the *Chicago Tribune* published an editorial about the response of the Pilsen community to a University of Illinois at Chicago's (UIC) proposed expansion. The editorial blasted community groups in Pilsen, a predominantly Hispanic neighborhood on the West Side, for "waving the bloody shirt of gentrification" in asserting that under UIC's plans, "poor Mexicans [would] be pushed out by an onslaught of yuppies and Starbucks coffee shops."<sup>1</sup> The editorial rhetorically deployed the idea of gentrification to lambaste community groups for attempting to block redevelopment that could be the neighborhood's "salvation."<sup>2</sup>

Two months later residents protested outside city hall that a proposed Tax Increment Financing (TIF) district in the neighborhood constituted "ethnic cleansing."<sup>3</sup> In their view, TIF-stimulated development would increase property taxes and rents and drive out Pilsen's lower-income residents. Later in 1998 Carmen Velásquez, the executive director and founder of Alivio Medical Center, said, "Our whole future is at stake

1. "Political Flak Stalls Development," *Chicago Tribune*, December 13, 1997.
2. John McCarron, "There Goes the Neighborhood," *Chicago Tribune*, February 2, 1998.
3. "Political Compromise is Pilsen's Loss," *Chicago Tribune*, February 11, 1998.

here. We know that this is the last hurrah.”<sup>4</sup> To the anti-gentrification contingent, gentrification displaces the poor and working classes and is driven by young white professionals.

The stakes of gentrification are high, so metaphors of battle and blood follow. Gentrification is a flashpoint for people’s concerns about the changes in Pilsen’s demographics, housing stock, and businesses. The bloody shirt is a rhetorical strategy, which various actors can use to express their fears, criticisms, and visions for the neighborhood’s future direction. The task of this study is to examine the component threads of gentrification in order to understand these changes.

As early as 1986 anecdotal evidence suggested that gentrification had begun in Pilsen. A local artist noted increasing property prices and construction of new condominiums; another artist was planning an anti-gentrification mural at 18th Street and Blue Island Avenue.<sup>5</sup> In 1990 the *Chicago Tribune* wrote that “creeping gentrification” from the South Loop, Chinatown, and UIC was increasing property values and rents in Pilsen and causing longtime residents to relocate.<sup>6</sup> In the mid-nineties various redevelopment initiatives and the blossoming of Pilsen as a destination to experience Mexican culture increased concerns about gentrification. A number of academic studies bolster these impressionistic claims.<sup>7</sup> I will interrogate claims of gentrification by examining the

4. Teresa Puente, “Future, Soul of Pilsen at Crossroads,” *Chicago Tribune*, April 11, 1998.

5. Marla Donato, “Urban Realism,” *Chicago Tribune*, October 22, 1986.

6. Constanza Montana, “Pilsen Residents Find a Way to Keep Calling Area Home,” *Chicago Tribune*, October 2, 1990.

7. See Matthew B. Anderson and Carolina Sternberg, “‘Non-White’ Gentrification in Chicago’s Bronzeville and Pilsen: Racial Economy and the Intraurban Contingency of Urban Redevelopment.” *Urban Affairs Review* 20, no. 10 (2012): 1–33; John Betancur, *Gentrification Before Gentrification? The Plight of Pilsen in Chicago* (Chicago: University of Illinois, 2005); Winifred Curran and Euan Hague, *The Pilsen Building Inventory Project* (Chicago: DePaul University, 2006); *Pilsen Rent Study Update* (Chicago: Nathalie P. Voorhees Center for Neighborhood and Community Improvement and the Resurrection Project, 2003); Carolina Ana

changes that Pilsen has experienced since 1995. My hope is to give a more nuanced understanding of gentrification in Pilsen. In other words, this is a “yes, but” study—yes, gentrification, but what does that functionally mean? Yes, gentrification, but what else?

This study will measure claims of gentrification against the material evidence to show how various groups invest neighborhood changes with symbolic significance. Sternberg calls this process, “imaginaries of gentrification,” with coalitions of actors constructing “mental/imaginary spaces” to serve their aligned interests.<sup>8</sup> She shows how neoliberal alliances between the local government, institutions, and developers advanced the mental image of Pilsen as decrepit, depressed, and in need of revitalized in order to “rationalize and normalize the virtues and benefits of their projects.”<sup>9</sup> Opponents to change use imaginaries to symbolize gentrification as fast and inevitable. Velásquez pointed to a Starbucks as such a symbol: “It represents gentrification. It represents Lincoln Park. It represents an Anglo, rich population that takes over a poorer neighborhood.”<sup>10</sup> In reality, a single Starbucks may not represent the demographic and physical changes of gentrification. Similarly, discussing residents’ tussle with a developer over a community garden, a *Reader* article asserts that “in a census tract where assessments and taxes are skyrocketing, the garden has come to represent more than desperately needed green space; it’s a

Sternberg, “The Dynamics of Contingency: Neoliberal Redevelopment Governance in Chicago and Buenos Aires,” PhD diss., University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, 2012, ProQuest (3570694); David Wilson, Jared Wouters, and Dennis Grammenos, “Successful Protect-Community Discourse: Spatiality and Politics in Chicago’s Pilsen Neighborhood,” *Environment and Planning A* 36, no. 7 (2004).

8. Sternberg, “Dynamics of Contingency,” 130.

9. *Ibid.*, 35.

10. Gary Marx, “Neighbors Fear UIC Plan Could Drive Out the Poor,” *Chicago Tribune*, March 12, 1997.

barrier to further upscale development.”<sup>11</sup> In 2004 the *Tribune* acknowledged how, for “both supporters and opponents,” a proposed upscale loft “has taken on a broader symbolic importance among residents uncertain whether development will give the neighborhood a boost or turn the area upside-down.”<sup>12</sup>

I looked specifically at changes in the built environment, with a focus on the residential fabric of the neighborhood. I analyzed city building permits from 2006 to 2013 to understand who was modifying buildings in what areas of Pilsen and what the modifications were—demolitions, renovations, and new construction. I used census data from 2000 to 2011 to understand demographic and economic changes. I also interviewed community leaders, who provided firsthand impressions of change in Pilsen. To assess the magnitude of gentrification with respect to existing claims of gentrification I addressed various developmental initiatives, including the work of the Resurrection Project, which builds affordable housing in the neighborhood.

I found that gentrification is occurring, but at a far slower pace and to a lesser extent than many have charged, Hispanic-led gentrification is significant, and gentrification is a more complex and nuanced process than recent studies suggest. In the last fifteen years Pilsen did see a gain in white population and a loss in Hispanic population, along with rising rents, property values, and household incomes. However, such changes were also present across the city. Rehabs, upgrades, and new construction—specifically, upscale condominiums, loft conversions, and upmarket single-family homes that are indicative of gentrification in Chicago and elsewhere—were limited in scope, happened throughout Pilsen (not just affluent census tracts), and undertaken in no small measure by Hispanic property owners.

A major finding is that Hispanics, who may have neighborhood ties, drive some of the gentrification of Pilsen. In 2009 Maya Solis, daughter of Pilsen’s alderman, Danny Solis, points to “muppies,” or

11. Linda Lutton, “Will Development Bury the Barrio?” *Reader*, April 23, 1998.

12. Oscar Avila, “Hispanic Condo Buyers Seen as Pilsen Threat,” *Chicago Tribune*, April 22, 2005.

Mexican yuppies, who return to Pilsen to raise their families. In the same article, a real estate agent and Pilsen resident confirms that muppies and yuppies are buying up older buildings and renting out apartments.<sup>13</sup> Community leaders that I interviewed confirmed that Hispanic-led gentrification exists, to some extent. Anderson and Sternberg, who study “non-white gentrification,” acknowledge that Pilsen has a “growing Latino middle class” and quoted a local official who said that the gentrifying population consists of “not only the Latino middle class but also white professionals and artists.”<sup>14</sup> They focused on the way “Latinoness” is harnessed and codified by urban redevelopers towards redevelopment ends. My study substantiates these anecdotal claims with census and building-permit data. Hispanic-led gentrification complicates the picture of gentrification. This study explores the racial dimensions of gentrification when a group of residents who may be deeply invested in Pilsen’s future and its Mexican American character are also part of the group stimulating property values, taxes, and rents.

Another layer of complexity in Pilsen is the work of the Resurrection Project (TRP), which has built a significant amount of affordable housing and helped Pilsen retain a Hispanic working-class character. TRP’s work complicates the notion of a neighborhood inexorably on the march towards full-blown gentrification, and its construction projects are a challenge to Pilsen’s future face: how to maximize benefits for the largest or most vulnerable population and reduce the negative social costs of neighborhood upgrading.

Why did I select Pilsen for a fine-grained examination? What is the broad significance of this study’s findings? First, the emerging trend of Hispanic-led gentrification makes Pilsen distinct from other instances of gentrification in Chicago and beyond. In the seventies through the nineties whites led gentrification in Lincoln Park, Wicker Park, and Bucktown, and these neighborhoods’ Hispanic populations were largely

13. Leslie Mann, “Pilsen: Where Change is Underfoot,” *Chicago Tribune*, March 6, 2009.

14. Anderson and Sternberg, “Non-White’ Gentrification,” 19, 21.

displaced by the change.<sup>15</sup> The literature on gentrification is sizable, but “the role of race in this process remains to be systematically explored” and focuses primarily on the displacement of poor, non-blacks by well-to-do whites.<sup>16</sup> Non-white gentrification is linked to the rise in the Hispanic and black middle-class population in the last three decades. Pilsen is part of this nationally emerging trend in gentrification and worthy of geographical study. In explaining why Pilsen has developed the way it has, I will also situate Pilsen in a citywide, national, and global context. The vacant factories and warehouses south of Cermak Road reflect the deindustrialization that swept through the United States and the rise of a service-based economy in Chicago and beyond in the late twentieth century. These economic shifts and central-city revitalization by the city helped to create an environment in which Pilsen was a viable site for redevelopment. Thus, this thesis can be viewed as a study of how broad dynamics like deindustrialization and neoliberal redevelopment strategies shape a geographic space in tandem with the actions of local actors.

15. Matthew B. Anderson, “The Temporal Dynamics of Neoliberal Redevelopment Governance and the Restructuring of Urban Space: Chicago’s Bronzeville (1989–Present),” PhD diss., University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, 2012, ProQuest (3571114), 51–52; John Betancur, Isabel Domeyko, and Patricia A. Wright, *Gentrification in West Town: Contested Ground* (Chicago: University of Illinois, 2001).

16. Anderson and Sternberg, “‘Non-White’ Gentrification,” 6–8; Philip Nyden, Emily Edlynn, and Julie Davis, *The Differential Impact of Gentrification on Communities in Chicago* (Chicago: Loyola University, 2006).

## Pilsen as Port of Entry: A Historical-Geographic Overview

Pilsen is located on the Lower West Side of Chicago. The area is demarcated by natural and manmade features: the South Branch of the Chicago River on the east and south, 16th Street and a railroad trunk line on the north, and Western Avenue on the west. Pilsen covers about 3.5 square miles, comprising some two hundred blocks of residential, commercial, and industrial buildings (Fig. 1).<sup>17</sup> A large industrial area,

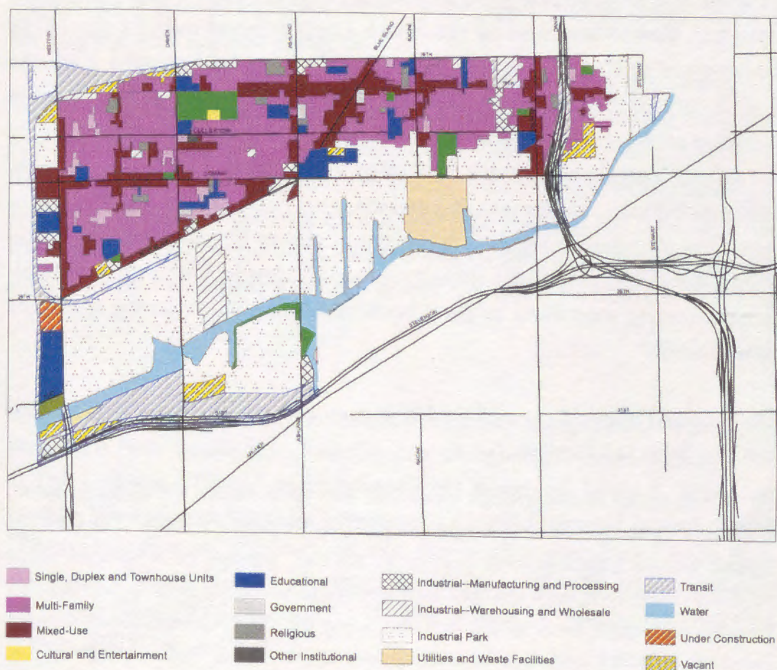


Figure 1. Land Use in Pilsen, 2005\*

*\*Author produced all figures.*

17. Betancur, *Gentrification Before Gentrification*, 5; Curran and Hague, *Pilsen Building Inventory*, 3; Sternberg, "Dynamics of Contingency," 32.



covering over nine hundred acres south of Cermak and Blue Island and next to the river, includes many decrepit or vacant structures. This part of the neighborhood is contained in the 1998 Tax Increment Financing (TIF) district and the 2005 Planned Manufacturing District, which encourage industrial uses and industrial investment.<sup>18</sup>

Pilsen's location near the Chicago River and the Loop have been instrumental to the neighborhood's genesis and development. Pilsen was settled in the 1840s by German and Irish immigrants and expanded after the Chicago Fire of 1871, which it escaped unscathed. As the city rebuilt, the lumber, railroad, and garment industries created thousands of unskilled jobs, which were located around the river's large industrial corridor, downtown, and by the South Loop railroad hub. In the 1870s Bohemians settled in Pilsen. They named the neighborhood after the Czech city of Plzeň and built elaborately embellished neo-Bohemian baroque architecture. In the twentieth century Pilsen was a port of entry for other Central and Eastern European immigrants: Lithuanians, Poles, Italians, Slovaks, Slovenians, Croatians, and Austrians in smaller numbers. The population reached its height of eighty five thousand in 1920. Pilsen exhibited the classic immigrant succession in Chicago, with residents moving westward as they became wealthier, vacating space for newcomers.<sup>19</sup>

18. "Planned Manufacturing District" is a misnomer: PMDs are not *proposed* but have been put in place.

19. When many ethnic groups dominate and then vacate the neighborhood, does any singular group have a right to a geographic part of the city? The Chicago School viewed neighborhood change a "natural" process of American urban mobility in the twentieth century. Late twentieth and early twenty-first century gentrification often involves the rich displacing the poor. Gentrification theories focus on injustice and view uneven power dynamics as "unnatural," that is, as cultural forces: "We must not ignore the fundamentally political questions that masquerade as neutral rules and laws governing urban property markets. Property is about power, control, and the right to exclude." Loretta Lees, Tom Slater, and Elvin Wyly, *Gentrification* (New York: Routledge, 2008), 83. See also Betancur, *Gentrification Before Gentrification*, 6; Curran and Hague, *Pilsen Building Inventory*, 3; Gordon C. C. Douglas, "The Near South Riverfront: A

Beginning with the Bohemians, the neighborhood had developed a pattern of dense, “crazy-quilt, mixed-use urbanism” with residences, businesses, and industries jumbled together and in close proximity to one another.<sup>20</sup> Circumscribed by the Chicago River and railroad tracks, the neighborhood became a self-sustaining enclave that fulfilled many of its residents’ needs—housing, goods, services, community, and nearby industrial employment. Its Bohemian residents, bounded by the same ethnic stock, language, and customs, developed a close-knit community, buttressed by social and political institutions. From its beginnings Pilsen developed as a working-class neighborhood with a village feel, a port of entry for recent immigrants, and an ethnic enclave for Central and Eastern Europeans.<sup>21</sup>

The majority of Pilsen’s housing stock dates from the 1880s and 1890s (Fig. 2). The buildings in the eastern part are from the late nineteenth century (1870s and 1880s), and the western part has more buildings from the early twentieth century. Bohemians built the neighborhood piecemeal, putting up a modest building at the back of a lot, then adding a larger building at the front of the lot or expanding their original home or business as they gained capital.<sup>22</sup> Two, three, and four

Social and Spatial History of the Riverside Areas of Chicago’s Near West, Lower West, and Near South Sides,” on Gordon Douglas’s personal website, 2008, 4; Erik Gellman, “Pilsen,” in *Encyclopedia of Chicago*, ed. Janice L. Reiff, Ann Durkin Keating, and James R. Grossman (Chicago Historical Society, 2005); “Pilsen Data: History,” Pilsen Portal, <http://www.pilsenportal.org>; Daniel Bluestone et al., “Pilsen Historic District, Cook County, Illinois,” *National Register of Historic Places* (Washington, DC: US Department of Interior, National Park Service, 2005), section 7, 1–2.

20. Bluestone et al. “Pilsen Historic District,” section 8, 11.

21. *Ibid.*, section 8, 12.

22. *Ibid.*, section 7, 1–2, section 8, 2; Euan Hague and Winifred Curran, *Contested Chicago: Pilsen and Gentrification* (Chicago: Pilsen Alliance and DePaul University, 2008), 3, <http://www.lulu.com>.

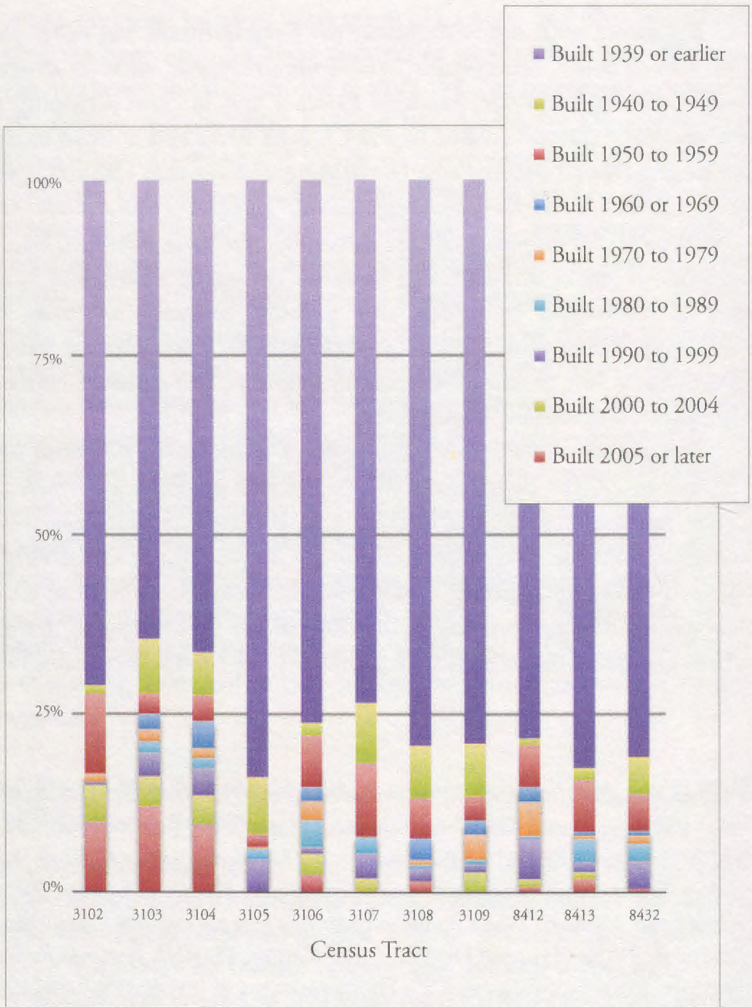


Figure 2. Pilsen Housing Stock by Year of Construction and Census Tract

flats dominate; single-family cottage homes are rarer, but certainly present. In the past as well as in the present, Pilsen has high-density mixed-use structures (businesses on the ground floor and residences above) along Halsted, 18th, Blue Island, and at intersections.<sup>23</sup>

In the 1950s Mexican immigrants began to be attracted to nearby industrial jobs and the affordable housing. Many found employment in Chicago's stockyards, meatpacking and fabricated metal plants, and steel mills. By 1960 only Poles outnumbered Hispanics in Pilsen. In 1965, five thousand residents, many of them Mexican, were displaced by the construction of UIC to the north, and some moved into Pilsen. That same year the Hart-Celler Act, which removed quotas favoring northern and western European immigrants, stimulated an uptick in Mexican migration to Chicago. By 1970 Pilsen had become Chicago's first majority Hispanic community. While the language spoken on the street and printed on facades had changed, Pilsen remained what it had been from the start: a working-class neighborhood, an enclave dominated by a single ethnic group, and a port of entry for new immigrants.<sup>24</sup>

In the 1960s John Podmajersky II, the son of Slovakian immigrants who owned a dairy in Pilsen, began buying property around Halsted and 18th. Concerned about the deterioration and destruction wrought by the construction of the Dan Ryan Expressway in 1962, Podmajersky compared the street to a war zone: "Halsted Street looks like the Ho Chi Minh Trail during the height of the Vietnam War, filled with potholes, deteriorating curbs, broken street lighting, collapsing sidewalks and a decade of unfulfilled promises for improvements, new parks and better services."<sup>25</sup> Podmajersky hoped to save properties from demolition, redevelop them, and "rejuvenate the neighborhood," in his son's words.

23. Bluestone et al., "Pilsen Historic District," section 7, 3–5; Mann, "Pilsen," *Chicago Tribune*.

24. Betancur, *Gentrification Before Gentrification*, 6–7; Diane Grams, *Producing Local Color: Art Networks in Ethnic Chicago* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2010), 42; Marx, "Neighbors," *Chicago Tribune*; Sternberg, "Dynamics of Contingency," 32–33; Wilson et al., "Spatiality and Politics," 1, 176.

25. Sternberg, "Dynamics of Contingency," 49.

His original plan was to “construct a mall or some other attraction to stabilize the area.”<sup>26</sup> Friends suggested he create an artists’ colony of live-work spaces, spurred by the existing presence of some artists in the area. In his words, he was “transplanting a different type of user” into “a very sick, dysfunctional neighborhood.”<sup>27</sup>

In the last two decades Podmajersky’s son, John Podmajersky III, has continued to invest in the area known as “Podville.” Though Podmajersky-owned spaces were meant to be affordable to artists, they ran, and still do run, at above-average prices. In 1996, according to Honoratus Lopez of Pilsen Realty, a two-bedroom apartment near 18th and Ashland in central Pilsen was \$300 per month, but \$700 to \$800 per month east of Halsted.<sup>28</sup> Twenty years later Podmajersky lists lofts for \$1,025 to \$2,495 per month (1,700 square feet).<sup>29</sup> Many of the artists who moved in initially had been priced out of River North and the South Loop; today’s artist tenants are short-term and transient, attracted to the city’s art schools. Podmajersky owns some hundred properties in the neighborhood, comprising around three hundred units.<sup>30</sup>

## Pilsen and the Neoliberal Economy

Pilsen redevelop is part of a decades-long trend of neoliberal development, undertaken by public and private actors, involving a specific vision for Chicago’s future that is focused on revitalization of the central city

26. Betty Lonngren, “Artists Tired of Being Pushed Out of ‘In’ Areas,” *Chicago Tribune*, June 14, 1992.

27. Betancur, *Gentrification Before Gentrification*, 31–32; Hague and Curran, *Contested Chicago*, 5; Douglas, “Riverfront,” 11; Sternberg, “Dynamics of Contingency,” 47–48.

28. Mary Feely, “The Richness Is the Entire Neighborhood,” *Chicago Tribune*, June 1, 1996.

29. Podmajersky: Innovation in Real Estate, <http://www.podmajersky.com>.

30. Grams, *Producing Local Color*, 167–8; Lonngren, “Artists,” *Chicago Tribune*.

and the new economics of globalization. In the late twentieth century the national economy started to transform from industrial production to knowledge-based information technology and the service sector. With technology and mechanization, industry, agriculture, and related sectors shrank. An “hourglass economy” of high-skilled jobs requiring advanced education and low-skilled jobs requiring little education exacerbated wage gaps and economic inequalities. Chicago lost 32 percent of its manufacturing jobs between 1969 and 1983 and, almost simultaneously, the service economy arose.<sup>31</sup> Much of Chicago’s industry moved to the suburbs and the labor force followed. Like many working-class black and Hispanic neighborhoods affected by this economic restructuring, Pilsen was plagued by high unemployment rates, which rose from 10 percent in 1970 to 21 percent in 2000; the proportion of households below the poverty line increased from 19 percent to 31 percent.<sup>32</sup> Deindustrialization also left many vacant structures in Pilsen’s industrial zone.<sup>33</sup>

Another large-scale process with implications for Pilsen was globalization. Increased global economic connectivity has created “a new urban hierarchy, with the positions of particular cities dependent on their ability to attract and facilitate global flows of capital, labor, commodities, cultures, images, and information.”<sup>34</sup> Globalization is linked to the rise of neoliberalism, which is characterized by an entrepreneurial type of governance, privatization of public programs, and an attenuation of the welfare state, with the ultimate aim of “achieving economic success, attracting investment, and inducing job growth in competition with other cities.”<sup>35</sup>

31. John P. Koval et al., eds., *The New Chicago: A Social and Cultural Analysis* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2006), 8.

32. Wilson et al., “Spatiality and Politics,” 1, 176.

33. *Ibid.*, 4–9

34. Koval et al., *New Chicago*, 20.

35. Sternberg, “Dynamics of Contingency,” 2.

Instead of the social redistribution and service provision of the welfare state, the prime concern of local governments becomes economic competitiveness, drawing in investment capital, and creating a hospitable environment for business. Neoliberal policies aim to “refashion urban space as an arena both for market-oriented economic growth and for elite consumption practices.”<sup>36</sup>

After WWII the city’s economy was lagging and the central business district was in decline, with property values and retail sales falling and jobs and population migrating out. In 1973 a coalition of business organizations and the city released “Chicago 21: A Plan for the Central Area Communities.” Chicago 21 advocated for the transformation of working-class areas around the central business district, including Pilsen, into middle-class communities for workers in the downtown, which would remain the focal point of commerce and culture. Richard J. Daley, mayor from 1955 to 1976, shored up the city infrastructure investment and worked with the business elite to create a “growth machine” of residential, business, and commercial development in the central city. Richard M. Daley, mayor from 1989 to 2011, ramped up his father’s efforts and “institutionalized neoliberal policies and practices.”<sup>37</sup> The younger Daley beautified the Loop; attracted businesses; created retail, office, and residential developments in the Loop; and boosted tourism, including conventions and trade shows. The city center became a site for cosmopolitan culture and consumption. In the nineties gentrification “steam-rolled across inner-city neighborhoods,” many of them Hispanic, like Wicker Park and Bucktown. Mayor Daley’s effort to fashion Chicago into a global city “formalized gentrification into urban policy and practice.”<sup>38</sup>

36. Koval et al., *New Chicago*, 19, 25; Sternberg, “Dynamics of Contingency,” 13, 22–23.

37. Anderson, “Temporal Dynamics,” 51.

38. Quotations from Anderson, “Temporal Dynamics,” 51–52; Koval et al., *New Chicago*, 26–27; Grams, *Producing Local Color*, 160; Sternberg, “Dynamics of Contingency,” 34.

With its close proximity to the Loop Pilsen possessed a tempting potential to be redeveloped and revitalized. The “neoliberal redevelopment governance”—a conglomeration of actors, including Alderman Solis, developers and builders, the Commercial Club of Chicago, and auxiliary players like UIC and the media—pushed on various fronts to redevelop Pilsen. They believed that their vision played a “role in helping Chicago polish up its culture, refine its aesthetics, and help the city go global.”<sup>39</sup> Neoliberalism made gentrification a “central policy instrument” for Pilsen and for Chicago at large.<sup>40</sup>

## Gentrification: A Theoretical Overview

Scholars have long criticized gentrification, as a theoretically and empirically “chaotic concept” that is framed as “both saviour and destroyer of central city vitality.”<sup>41</sup> Visual and physical improvements are often embraced, but displacement of people and conflicts over ownership of space cause controversy. Gentrification is a public-policy tool, and it has become harder to decouple local changes from broad economic, social, and political shifts. As is evident from newspaper editorials, gentrification is a “politically loaded term, making dispassionate debate and analysis difficult.”<sup>42</sup> Stances on gentrification come with normative assumptions about the right to space, whether certain processes of change are natural, and the sort of local development that is desired.

Gentrification was coined in 1964 by the British sociologist Ruth Glass to describe the process of the middle-class gentry “inwad[ing]”

39. Sternberg, “Dynamics of Contingency,” 34.

40. *Ibid.*, 29.

41. Rowland Atkinson, “Introduction: Misunderstood Saviour or Vengeful Wrecker? The Many Meanings and Problems of Gentrification,” *Urban Studies* 40, no. 12 (2003), 2,343; Lees et al., *Gentrification*, 221.

42. Atkinson, “Introduction,” 2,344.



working-class neighborhoods, rehabbing the aging housing stock, and over time, displacing the working-class inhabitants.<sup>43</sup> Glass also identified shifts from renting to home ownership and increases in property prices as characteristic of gentrification.<sup>44</sup> Similar definitions of gentrification have followed, such as Peter Marchuse in 1999, who defines gentrification as

the movement into a previously working-class area by upper-income households, generally professionals, managers, technicians, the new gentry, resulting in the displacement of the former low-income residents.<sup>45</sup>

Neil Smith in 2000:

The reinvestment of capital at the urban center, which is designed to produce space for a more affluent class of people than currently occupies that space.<sup>46</sup>

And Gina Pérez in 2004:

An economic and social process whereby private capital (real estate firms, developers) and individual homeowners and renters reinvest in fiscally neglected neighborhoods through housing rehabilitation, loft conversions, and the construction of new housing stock...gentrification is a gradual process...displacing poor and working-class residents unable to afford to live in "revitalized" neighborhoods with rising rents, property taxes, and new businesses catering to an upscale clientele.<sup>47</sup>

43. In Lees et al., *Gentrification*, 4.

44. *Ibid.*, 5.

45. In Sternberg, "Dynamics of Contingency," 34

46. In Lees et al., *Gentrification*, 9.

47. In Japonica Brown-Saracino, ed., *The Gentrification Debates* (New York: Routledge, 2010) 12–13.

Scholarly debates about the *causes* of gentrification, as distinct from its effects, are also politically tinged. As Brown-Saracino notes, the dominant approach is to “attend narrowly to debates surrounding the relationship between political economy and gentrification, specifically to how elites’ interests are prioritized over and above those with less economic or political capital and how this inequality, in turn, is reproduced in and marks urban lives and landscapes.”<sup>48</sup> Hackworth and Smith identify three historical waves of gentrification in the United States. In the most recent wave, neoliberal local governances under pressure to generate tax revenues take a more interventionist role in gentrification and work with business interests with significant capital. Thus, Chicago’s “neoliberal redevelopment governance” and increasing use of gentrification as a public-policy tool are linked to national shifts in the role of the state in driving gentrification.<sup>49</sup>

The British geographer Neil Smith describes how capital investment in a market economy create a “locational see-saw” wherein areas cycle between disinvestment/devalorization and reinvestment/revalorization “as capital jumps from one place to another, then back again, both creating and destroying its opportunities for development.”<sup>50</sup> As one group of capitalists disinvests and devalorizes a place then the incentives for revalorization and profit from a place grow and are acted upon by another group.<sup>51</sup> In Smith’s view the rising rents and displacement of residents are not incidental occurrences but are “symptoms of the fundamental inequalities of capitalist property markets, which favor the creation of urban environments to serve the needs of capital accumulation.”<sup>52</sup> In Hamnett’s phrasing, for Smith “it is capital, and the institutions of the

48. Brown-Saracino, *Gentrification Debates*, 5.

49. Jason Hackworth and Neil Smith, “The Changing State of Gentrification,” *Tijdschrift voor Economische en Sociale Geografie* 92, no. 4 (2001): 466–70.

50. In Lees et al., *Gentrification*, 50.

51. Brown-Saracino, *Gentrification Debates*, 71–84; Lees et al., *Gentrification*, 50–55.

52. In Lees et al., *Gentrification*, 73.

capitalist land market—developers, real-estate agents, mortgage lenders and the like—who hold the key to understanding gentrification.”<sup>53</sup>

Consumption-side theories look to the shift from manufacturing- to service-based cities to explain the increase in middle-class professionals with a preference for urban living. This economic shift triggers “consequent changes in occupational structure, income distribution, gender relations, the housing market, and cultural tastes.”<sup>54</sup> In the postindustrial city, the middle class, employed in the business-services sector and in creative industries, has expanded and the working class, employed in the industrial sector, has dwindled. In a broad sense, the middle class has replaced, not displaced, the working class in urban cores. This expanding middle class has “different educational backgrounds, cultural values, preferences, and orientations,” which includes a desire for urban living—hence, gentrification.<sup>55</sup>

Richard Lloyd looks at how artists created a new bohemian neighborhood in Wicker Park, setting the stage for white-collar professionals in creative industries who thoroughly gentrify the neighborhood. The influx of professionals priced out the earlier artist residents, who themselves had played a part in displacing poor Hispanic residents.<sup>56</sup> Similar to Pilsen, Wicker Park once had a large Hispanic population and then a large artists’ presence. From 1990 to 2000 Wicker Park saw substantial jumps in median household income (134.9 percent) and median housing values (264 percent), whereas Pilsen’s gains in those categories (35.9 and 110.3 percent, respectively) were more modest (Fig. 3). Even accounting for inflation and comparing each neighborhood’s changes to

53. Chris Hamnett, “Gentrification, Postindustrialism, and Industrial and Occupational Restructuring in Global Cities,” in *A Companion to the City*, ed. Gary Bridge and Sophie Watson (Oxford: Blackwell, 2008), 331–41.

54. *Ibid.*, 333.

55. *Ibid.*, 334, 336; Lees et al., *Gentrification*, 90–93.

56. Richard D. Lloyd, *Neo-Bohemia: Art and Commerce in the Postindustrial City* (New York: Routledge, 2006), 8–18, 122; Lees et al., *Gentrification*, 118–20; Brown-Saracino, *Gentrification Debates*, 175–84.

|                         | WICKER PARK |         | PILSEN  |           |
|-------------------------|-------------|---------|---------|-----------|
|                         | 1990        | 2000    | 2000    | 2007–2011 |
| Median Household Income | 23,327      | 54,791  | 26,975  | 36,664    |
| Median Housing Value    | 109,913     | 400,100 | 138,508 | 291,309   |

Figure 3. Income and Housing-Value Comparison in Wicker Park and Pilsen

citywide changes, this suggests that gentrification is not progressing in Pilsen at nearly the rapid pace as it did in Wicker Park.

Rose and Van Crieking and Decroly criticize the 1970s “stage model” of gentrification: first a few pioneer households initiate gentrification “in search of urban niches in run-down neighborhoods which provide space for alternative lifestyles”; then middle-class households move in and developers fix up properties and resell them at a profit, displacing the initial and first-wave-gentrification residents; and finally, a new upper-class status is solidified.<sup>57</sup> Van Crieking and Decroly argue for distinct neighborhood renewal processes that fulfill various criteria of transformation, not all of which end in gentrification. “Marginal gentrification,” “upgrading,” and “incumbent upgrading” fulfill some but not all of these criteria, like improvements to the built environment and social-status growth. Each of these processes has their own set of causal factors, for example, middle-class households who are “richer in cultural capital than economic capital” drive marginal gentrification.<sup>58</sup> Similarly, Owens creates a typology that classifies places

57. Quotes from Mathieu Van Crieking and Jean-Michel Decroly, “Revisiting the Diversity of Gentrification: Neighbourhood Renewal Processes in Brussels and Montreal,” *Urban Studies* 40 no. 12 (2003): 2,451–4; Damaris Rose, “Economic Restructuring and the Diversification of Gentrification in the 1980s: A View from a Marginal Metropolis,” in *Cities and Citizens: Critical Perspectives to Canadian Urbanism*, ed. Jon Caulfield and Linda Peake (Toronto, ON: University of Toronto Press, 1996), 131–72.

58. Van Crieking and Decroly, “Diversity of Gentrification,” 2,454–6.

experiencing an improving socioeconomic status (SES) “regardless of socioeconomic origin, outcome, or process, with gentrification only one type of change falling under this umbrella.”<sup>59</sup> The “Hispanic enclave” subtype occurs when upwardly mobile immigrants establish ethnic communities in their current neighborhoods, instead of migrating out. A Hispanic enclave is not initially low-SES and the white population is declining, neither of which fit Pilsen’s current state of affairs, but it offers evidence for a trend of Hispanic-led improvement. Owens does not say whether or not this subtype of neighborhood ascent displaces lower-income residents.<sup>60</sup> While popular understanding of gentrification adheres to the 1970s stage model, these alternative models suggest that neighborhoods can experience upgrading and socioeconomic ascent that are not equivalent to wholesale gentrification. Pilsen could be exhibiting incremental upgrading that does not inevitably result in a more thorough, or “late stage,” gentrification.

The material evidence of gentrification is relevant to this study. Gentrification in Chicago generally involves rehabs to the existing housing stock or teardowns and new construction. In an empirical study of gentrification in four US cities, Wyly and Hammel look to “visible evidence of reinvestment in the housing stock, either through rehabilitation or new construction,” examining “the quality and style of repainting, ornamentation, signage and renovations to apartment buildings.”<sup>61</sup> Suchar describes a typical cycle of upgrading of the housing stock in gentrifying Chicago communities. First are internal rehab improvements to older homes, such as new plumbing, heating and cooling systems, and walls. Second is “building-out and up,” where more rooms and space are added, often by building out to the property line. Finally,

59. Ann Owens, “Neighborhoods on the Rise: A Typology of Neighborhoods Experiencing Socioeconomic Ascent,” *City & Community* 11, no. 4 (2012): 346.

60. *Ibid.*, 345–69.

61. Elvin K. Wyly and Daniel J. Hammel, “Modeling the Context and Contingency of Gentrification,” *Journal of Urban Affairs* 20, no. 3 (1998): 307.

and increasingly common, are teardowns of existing buildings and construction of townhomes, luxury condominiums, or enormous single-family homes.<sup>62</sup> Considering Pilsen's building stock, the conversion of derelict industrial spaces into lofts is also a possibility.<sup>63</sup>

## Contested Gentrification: Developmental Initiatives in Pilsen

Pilsen is "ripe for gentrification" and a likely candidate for redevelopment, similar to other areas close to the central business district, like Wicker Park, Bucktown, West Town, and the South Loop that gentrified during the nineties.<sup>64</sup> It seems logical that developers and the city would turn to the next closest areas that have yet to be as redeveloped. From 1990 to 2000 assessed property-value increases radiate out from the Chicago central business district into neighborhoods that once were or currently are predominantly Hispanic, putting those communities "in the path of neighborhood gentrification."<sup>65</sup> Pilsen's housing stock is relatively affordable, with both rents and property values below the city median. The neighborhood's high rate of transience ensures that there will be fresh properties available, and the high incidence of renters creates the potential for early stage gentrifiers like artists to move in. The

62. Charles Suchar, "Icons and Images of Gentrification: The Changed Material Culture of an Urban Community," *Research in Urban Sociology* 2 (1992): 165–92. These changes can be tracked through City of Chicago building permits, which I will do later. Luxury condos have proliferated in well-gentrified West Loop. Pilsen's current zoning doesn't allow for towering buildings, but, in newspaper accounts, new condos are a repeated source of consternation to community members.

63. Koval et al., *New Chicago*, 74.

64. Betancur, *Gentrification Before Gentrification*, 14; Curran and Hague, *Pilsen Building Inventory*, 3; Glenn Jeffers and Rachel Osterman, "Pilsen Uneasy with Development," *Chicago Tribune*, December 31, 2003.

65. Nyden et al., *Differential Impact*, 24.

housing stock is aging and in poor condition, with 87 percent of residential buildings over one hundred years old,<sup>66</sup> and vacant lots stud the neighborhood, creating opportunities for rehabbing and new construction.

Pilsen's zoning also makes it vulnerable to gentrification; many properties are zoned RT-4, which allows for three- to four-story multiunit buildings. Other Pilsen RT-4 properties are single-family homes, which could be torn down and replaced with multistory condos. Similarly, industrial concerns occupy a number of sites zoned residential, which could pave the way for residential conversion, though they mostly sit in a planned manufacturing district, which makes residential conversion tricky.

## Contestation of Gentrification

In 1998 Alderman Solis (25th Ward) told the *Reader*: "Every development project in Pilsen has been questioned, and not only questioned, but there's been allegations that it's part of a conspiracy to ethnically cleanse the area or to gentrify the area."<sup>67</sup> Wilson et al. describes the opposition to gentrification in Pilsen as "protect-community." Pilsen residents first organized to fight the Chicago 21 Plan in the mid-1970s and the proposed Chicago World's Fair in 1992, claiming that the plans would destroy the community and served the interest of developers and builders, not local residents. In the 1980s residents opposed Podmajersky's development schemes, speaking up at community and city hall meetings. In 2002 Podmajersky said that many developers had put their projects on hold in Pilsen or turned to places like Bucktown and Wicker Park, "realizing the anger and hostility they would face if they moved into the area."<sup>68</sup> A "protect Pilsen" coalition led by the Resurrection Project

66. Laura Levy, "Mapping Gentrification in Pilsen: Community Empowerment through GIS Technology," *Creating Knowledge 2* (2009): 37.

67. Lutton, "Development," *Reader*.

68. Wilson et al., "Spatiality and Politics," 1,184-5.

and Pilsen Neighbors emphasizes struggling against a profit-driven, community-destroying alliance of private developers and the local government, protecting Pilsen for current residents, and creating affordable housing.<sup>69</sup> From the industrial TIF district to UIC's expansion to Chantico Lofts (detailed below), residents feared that rising property taxes and rents would price out low-income residents. In the 2005 controversy surrounding the Chantico Lofts one activist and longtime resident said: "We need to send a message to developers that it's not going to be a walk in the park to develop Pilsen."<sup>70</sup> Velásquez of Alivio Medical Center told a reporter in 1998: "Pilsen is one of the best neighborhoods in the city... It has all the ingredients that developers want, that yuppies want, that downtown folks want. But you know what? They're not gonna get it."<sup>71</sup> A second concern is the cultural change that comes with displacement. Gabriel Villa, an artist and Pilsen resident for fourteen years, said: "[There] is a tension that I notice in Pilsen... It's about Mexicans not wanting to lose the Mexican culture, which people have worked really hard to create."<sup>72</sup> Hector Saldaña of the Eighteenth Street Development Corporation concurs that residents are concerned about maintaining the Mexican culture in Pilsen, calling the neighborhood "a gem we need to preserve."<sup>73</sup>

69. Ibid. During my post-1995 study period, the Pilsen Alliance was the major community group contesting gentrification. Pilsen Neighbors is not mentioned in the *Chicago Tribune* after 2005. The Resurrection Project does not take a strident stance against gentrification. Drawing on newspaper articles and my interview with Eleazar Vazquez, TRP vice president, TRP recognizes the difficulties in balancing the benefits of gentrification (reduced gang violence, upgraded streets) against the costs (displacement).

70. Avila, "Hispanic Condo Buyers," *Chicago Tribune*.

71. Lutton, "Development," *Reader*.

72. Linda Lutton, "Racial Change in Pilsen," *WBEZ*, August 30, 2012, <http://www.wbez.org>.

73. Hector Saldaña (director of industrial development, Eighteenth Street Development Corporation), interview with the author, February 28, 2013.



The mechanics of gentrification-induced displacement are as follows. As a property's value increases, property taxes rise in tandem. Assessed property values are sensitive to the values of nearby properties, raising taxes for lower-income and higher-income property owners alike. Even if new development does not directly displace residents, it may cause landlords to increase rents to cover increased property taxes, which can price out poorer renters. A survey of 5,002 lots in Pilsen found that from 2001 to 2005 43 percent of residential properties saw a 25 to 49 percent increase in their assessed value, while 23 percent saw an assessed value increase of 50 to 74 percent. These increases ranged from \$30,000 to more than \$200,000. Business, commercial, and manufacturing properties also saw large increases in their assessed values from 2001 to 2005.<sup>74</sup> Renters occupy 72 percent of Pilsen's housing units, well above the city average of 53 percent. Moreover, 20.2 percent of renters pay over 30 percent of their gross income for rent, which is the federal threshold for affordability.<sup>75</sup> Landlords who raise their rents may seek tenants who can afford to pay more, whether moneyed college students or young Hispanic professionals. Lower-income homeowners may be unable to pay increased property taxes, while some will see a windfall if they sell their homes. By one estimate each \$1,000 increase in assessed values leads to a \$165 increase in property taxes.<sup>76</sup> Finally, both renters and owners alike, aware of how the community is changing, may self-select and move out in anticipation of not being able to afford Pilsen in the future—anticipatory out migration makes the true impact of gentrification difficult to track. The effect of all these factors is a change in the character of Pilsen.

Contestations against gentrification center just as much on *fear* and *anticipation* of gentrification's ills (displacement of residents, loss of cultural diversity) as they do on clear, systematic evidence of those ills. Statistics on the increase in property values and rents or the decrease in

74. Curran and Hague, *Pilsen Building Inventory*, 7.

75. *American Community Survey, 2007–2011* (Washington, DC: US Census Bureau, 2012).

76. Curran and Hague, *Pilsen Building Inventory*, 7.

Hispanic population are cited both to create an ominous picture of Pilsen's future and to demonstrate that current gentrification has changed the soul of "la 18," as the area is sometimes known. Concerned community members invest anecdotal changes, such as a trendy bar opening, with symbolic significance. Gentrification is seen as an inevitable force before it has even reached peak intensity—hence the title of Betancur's 2005 report, "Gentrification *Before* Gentrification? The Plight of Pilsen in Chicago." My concern in this study will be to find whether objective and material evidence of change in Pilsen supports or calls into question these symbolic and anecdotal claims.

It is important to address, for example, why gentrification has not progressed as quickly as it did in other Chicago neighborhoods. When Podmajersky's artist colony plan was contested in the 1980s "the city and Podmajersky were told that builders, developers, and new tenants could expect hostility, pickets, and contestation from people who had successfully opposed such projects previously. In this context, Podmajersky and other developers opted to stall projects or to reinvest in nearby neighborhoods."<sup>77</sup> This indicates that residential opposition to certain redevelopment projects may have scared some developers off, which would suggest the contestations have had some success. Though to suggest an even playing field between residents who contest gentrification and those who push it forward would be false. The pro-gentrification bloc (developers, the city, and to an extent Alderman Solis) has more power and more capital. Although outspoken community members have criticized this difference in power, most of initiatives have proceeded, though sometimes with compromises won. For instance, in 2005 the developers of the upscale Chantico Lofts worked with with the Resurrection Project to set aside 21 percent of units at below-market rates. If residents had not voiced their opposition, those affordable units might not exist. Pilsen residents also successfully put a community zoning board in place in 2004 to review proposals for zoning changes. On the balance, though, full victories have been rare. Contestation of gentrification has probably helped slow gentrification in Pilsen, but

77. Wilson et al., "Spatiality and Politics," 1,177.

contestation will not stop it. What follows is an overview of four major development initiatives (an industrial TIF district, the UIC expansion, the Chantico Lofts, and the Podmajersky developers) and their contestation by residents, with an assessment of the initiatives' effect on gentrification.

## Industrial TIF District

Tax Increment Financing districts, or TIFs, are one of the principal redevelopment tools of neoliberal governance; Chicago has over one hundred fifty TIFs. TIF-designated areas must meet certain criteria for blight, like age, dilapidation, excessive vacancies, code violations, etc. Under TIF guidelines, for twenty-three years after a TIF is established, property taxes above a certain base level are put into a redevelopment fund. The amount of property tax money going to public schools, parks, and similar public entities, remains frozen during that time. TIF dollars can be used to subsidize private developers, fund infrastructure improvements, and pay off bonds that were issued for redevelopment projects. TIFs are meant to encourage development in depressed areas that would not otherwise attract investment.<sup>78</sup>

In 1997 discussions started about a TIF district in Pilsen, which would cover 907 acres, mostly in the industrial corridor south of Cermak to the Chicago River, including 107 acres of vacant land and 300 warehouses and factories, 85 percent of which were either deteriorated or abandoned.<sup>79</sup> The TIF was intended to preserve remaining industry, draw in new industries, and create jobs. Initial project proposals involved repairing streets and sidewalks, upgrading commercial corridors along 18th, Ashland, and Blue Island, which Solis had requested, and a Mexican-themed public plaza with a large bronze statue of an eagle.

78. "Tax Increment Financing Program," City of Chicago, <http://www.cityofchicago.org>.

79. "That Pilsen May Finally Prosper," *Chicago Tribune*, June 12, 1998.

Pilsen residents, sometimes numbering in the hundreds, protest the TIF at city hall seven times in as many months. Solis responded by removing the commercial corridors from the proposal in February 1998. Residents' criticisms centered on what sort of industrial jobs would be generated and whether they would go to Pilsen residents, the lack of say that community residents and industry owners had over the allocation of TIF funds, the possibility for TIF boundaries to later expand to the commercial districts that Solis originally wanted, and potential zoning changes from industrial to residential use, which would attract loft developers.<sup>80</sup> Carlos Arango, executive director of Casa Aztlan, a community organization, said at the time:

No one has ever spelled out what this TIF will mean for the community... How is this going to impact our property taxes? What impact is this going to have in terms of whether residents are going to be able to keep living in Pilsen? When they talk about jobs, jobs for whom? When they talk about commercial development, whose commercial development? It's not that residents are against progress in the community, but if there's progress in this community, it has to be a progress that's going to benefit everyone. It has to be a progress in which residents are included and in which they can express their interests and their necessities. We don't want to see Wicker Park in Pilsen, we don't want to see the University of Chicago in Pilsen. The only thing that type of development has done is displace people. We want Pilsen for the Mexicans!<sup>81</sup>

80. Lutton, "Development," *Reader*; Sternberg, "Dynamics of Contingency," 37–40; "Political Compromise," *Chicago Tribune*; "That Pilsen May Prosper," *Chicago Tribune*.

81. Lutton, "Development," *Reader*.

The City Council approved the modified Pilsen Industrial Corridor TIF in June 1998, with protestors making one last stand outside of the city hall. The city would invest \$42 million into the area's infrastructure, with that sum to be recouped by TIF revenues. City officials estimated that the TIF district would create 4,100 jobs and generate \$114 million in private investment.<sup>82</sup> According to a representative of the Pilsen Alliance the TIF marked the beginning of troubling change in Pilsen.<sup>83</sup> David Aragon, an organizer with the Pilsen Neighbors Community Council, said, "This is a direct attempt at the gentrification of Pilsen. It's just a shame."<sup>84</sup>

As of 2013 the industrial TIF did not gentrify the neighborhood significantly. With the benefit of hindsight, TIF opponents' protestations look overblown. James Isaacs, the executive director of the Eighteenth Street Development Corporation, pointed out at the time that maintaining the integrity of the industrial zone is "a very good pro-low-income community strategy," because it helps to "discourage housing development" like loft conversions.<sup>85</sup> The industrial zone was designated a Planned Manufacturing District in 2005, which helps to protect industrial uses and prevent residential conversion, by making zoning changes from industrial to other uses more difficult. In 2011 the industrial corridor contained 240 businesses, with around 43 properties still vacant, and employed 9,249 people, down from about 11,000 in 2006.<sup>86</sup> Many employees are community residents. Eighteenth Street

82. Sternberg, "Dynamics of Contingency," 37–40; "That Pilsen May Prosper," *Chicago Tribune*.

83. Sternberg, "Dynamics of Contingency," 37.

84. Gary Washburn and Andrew Martin, "City OKs Pilsen Redevelopment Plan," *Chicago Tribune*, June 11, 1998.

85. Lutton, "Development," *Reader*.

86. Bethany Salmon, *Pilsen's Tax-Increment Financing District* (Chicago: University of Illinois at Chicago, College of Urban Planning and Public Affairs, 2012).

Development Corporation's director of industrial development estimated that 60 percent of employees at H. Kramer, a brass smelter, are from Pilsen and neighboring Little Village.<sup>87</sup> TIF funds were also used to create an athletic field at Benito Juárez high school, improve the streetscape, and invest in industrial businesses like the Chicago International Produce Market and American Linen Corporation. Funds also went to corporations that may not directly benefit Pilsen residents like the Cole Taylor Bank and Target, which built a store in the nearby McKinley Park neighborhood, at 1940 West 33rd Street. According to Saldaña the industrial TIF has had mixed success. Some creative businesses (artists, photographers, clothing designers), small-scale distributors, and even hydroponic farmers rent space in the corridor, but other businesses, like DHL and the *Sun-Times* printing facilities, have left. Businesses have not used much TIFWorks money, which funds workforce training.<sup>88</sup> In sum, the TIF district has had moderate success in attracting industry, but did not stimulate renovation or construction of upscale residential offerings, as opponents feared. The industrial TIF's effect on furthering gentrification in Pilsen has been minimal.<sup>89</sup>

## University of Illinois at Chicago Expansion

From 2000 to 2008 UIC undertook a major expansion called the South Campus project,<sup>90</sup> which would be located in the area of the historic Maxwell Street Market. The end result was "University Village," sixty-

87. Saldaña, interview.

88. Ibid.

89. Saldaña, interview; Curran and Hague, *Pilsen Building Inventory*, 8; "Protecting Chicago's Industrial through Planned Manufacturing Districts." ICIC: Initiative for a Competitive Inner City, 2012, <http://www.icic.org>; Salmon, *Tax-Increment*; "TIF Projection Reports, 2012–2014," City of Chicago Data Portal, <https://data.cityofchicago.org>.

90. Mark Rosati and Bill Burton, "UIC's South Campus Project Approved by City Hall," UIC News Tips, November 10, 1999, <https://www.uic.edu>.

eight acres containing 913 housing units (upscale condominiums, townhouses, lofts, and single-family homes) and mixed-use (academic and commercial) development in an area bounded by Roosevelt Road, 15th Street, the Dan Ryan Expressway, and Morgan Street. Though 20 percent of the housing units were set at affordable, below-market rates, they remain out of the price range and size needs of a typical Pilsen family; at the time of construction, affordable one-bedroom condos started at \$170,000; market-rate townhomes were priced in the \$400,000s. Rents are similarly higher than in Pilsen and are more comparable to the rents in expensive North Side neighborhoods like Lincoln Park.<sup>91</sup>

Located immediately north of Pilsen's east side, the UIC expansion was hotly contested since the 1990s, with the fear that it would affect Pilsen. In July 1996 UIC chancellor, David Broski, met with a number of community organizers, who expressed their concerns that the UIC development could drive out poor and working-class Pilsen residents and local businesses that serve lower-income customers. Jesús García, a state senator, who was sympathetic to the Pilsen cause and involved in the negotiations with UIC, stated: "We are not against development. The question is what kind of development should be taking place there."<sup>92</sup>

Existing scholarly work shows that the UIC development did stimulate gentrification (increased property values, taxes, and rents) on Pilsen's east side. The median value of owner-occupied properties in census tract 3103, directly south of University Village, increased 547 percent between 1990 and 2000 to reach \$270,000, the highest figure in Pilsen. Median gross rent also rose 47.7 percent from 1990 to 2000 on the Lower West Side, compared to the citywide increase of 38.4 percent.<sup>93</sup>

91. Betancur, *Gentrification Before Gentrification*, 16–18; Sternberg, "Dynamics of Contingency," 52–58.

92. *Ibid.*

93. Sternberg, "Dynamics of Contingency," 58.

## Chantico Lofts

In 2005 a local developer, Lipe Property Company, planned to convert a 44,000 square foot warehouse at 16th and Carpenter, formerly the site of the Lerner Box Company, into lofts. Lipe applied for a zoning change to RM-5 (medium- to high-density apartment buildings) so the project could contain more housing units. Opponents feared that the lofts would “open the floodgates to more high-priced housing” and held a rally, organizing under the slogan, “Pilsen is not for sale.”<sup>94</sup> The Pilsen Alliance disseminated fliers imploring residents to “prevent Lipe Properties from profiting off our displacement.”<sup>95</sup>

Further controversy developed when Lipe change the project’s name from Lerner Box to Chantico Lofts, in reference to the Aztec goddess of the home. Steve Lipe claimed he made the change at the request of residents. Alejandra Ibañez, executive director of Pilsen Alliance, rejected his claim: “People are up in arms. It’s pretty offensive. How dare they use the community’s icons to displace us? You’re going to use the *virgen* to sell us some expensive condos?”<sup>96</sup> Despite opposition, Chantico Lofts was completed in 2007; forty-two sold for between \$150,000 and \$375,000. The building features bright orange balconies and geometric patterns reminiscent of Aztec art. Lipe’s Chantico South at 1621 S. Carpenter contains two- and three-bedroom apartments with rents starting at \$1,800 per month.<sup>97</sup> An agreement between Lipe and the Resurrection Project set aside 21 percent of units at below-market rates.

Chantico Lofts is an example of Hispanic-led gentrification in Pilsen. The majority of the lofts’ residents were Mexican or Mexican American and many came from the neighborhood. J. Ignacio González, a twenty-nine-year-old police officer, was accused by another Pilsen resident of “kicking out his ‘own people’.” In response, González said,

94. Avila, “Hispanic Condo Buyers,” *Chicago Tribune*.

95. *Ibid.*

96. *Ibid.*

97. Lipe Property Company, <http://www.lipeproperty.com>.



"I'm not trying to kick anyone out. I'm trying to attain part of that American dream, which is to own a piece of property." Maria Balderas, a longtime Pilsen activist, criticized potential Hispanic buyers: "We're the ones who did all the hard work to make Pilsen a better place. But we're not going to benefit from it. They are." Opponents accused Lipe of legitimizing the project by hiring Vanessa González, who once lived in Pilsen. For González, "It's like they are questioning my patriotism or my commitment to the neighborhood, saying you don't belong here if you moved out." Raul Raymundo, executive director of the Resurrection Project, acknowledged concerns about the project but said, "I'd rather have a young person look up to a doctor from the neighborhood than a gangbanger."<sup>98</sup>

It is harder for critics to assail gentrifiers as invaders when they share a common race and ethnicity. On the one hand, Hispanic loft buyers could be positive role models in a community with its share of gang violence and crimes. On the other hand, they can be seen as traitors to their own people, complicit in a process of gentrification that ultimately drives lower-income residents out. Gentrification, by definition, is a process of class-based upgrading; when both the displaced population and the gentrifiers are of the same minority race, the responses are ones of ambivalence and anger.

## Podmajersky's Continuing Influence

John Podmajersky II and John Podmajersky III's colony of artists' studios and commercial holdings was the first development in east Pilsen, and local residents have opposed their development plans over the years. In 1986 Mexican artists were concerned that poor Mexican families would be displacement by the Podmajerskys' activity.<sup>99</sup> In 1998 the Podmajerskys butted heads with residents when they attempted to turn a vacant city-owned lot at 19th Place and Sangamon into a parking lot for a

98. All quotes in this paragraph are from Avila, "Hispanic Condo Buyers," *Chicago Tribune*.

99. Donato, "Urban Realism," *Chicago Tribune*.

planned loft. This plan initiated “a major debate” among neighborhood residents and stirred up “virulent opposition” against the Podmajerskys, campaign contributors to Alderman Solis. Solis attempted to broker a compromise.<sup>100</sup> As of 2013 the lot is still vacant. In 2007 the Podmajerskys bought a city-owned property at Union and Canalport, adjacent to the Dan Ryan Expressway ramp, which had been a community-tended garden for twelve years. Residents gathered in the lot to protest, again with signs that read, “Pilsen is not for sale!”<sup>101</sup> Residents feared that they would be “pushed out as gentrification brings coffee shops, new lofts, and rising property taxes.”<sup>102</sup>

In 2002 Podmajersky III rebranded “Podville” as the “Chicago Arts District,” with “the goal of creating a destination art community and economic stability for artists looking to become entrepreneurs.”<sup>103</sup> This designation encompasses a number of activities: 2nd Fridays, a monthly opening night of thirty galleries; showPOD, a series of storefront installations along Halsted; the Pilsen East Artists’ Open House, which began in 1970; and various other events. The press has targeted the Podmajerskys, together with UIC, as the source of the neighborhood’s gentrification. They have formed a consensus that east Pilsen is the gateway for gentrification:

Many on the west side of Pilsen said Halsted marks the point where gentrification has already taken root. “That’s the line right there,” said Teresa Fraga, president of the Pilsen Neighbors Community Council.<sup>104</sup>

100. Melita Marie Garza, “Solis Plays Solomon on Pilsen Garden,” *Chicago Tribune*, June 18, 1999; Sternberg, “Dynamics of Contingency,” 49.

101. *Ibid.*; Kristen Kridel, “Purchase of Green Space Has Residents Seeing Red,” *Chicago Tribune*, June 15, 2007.

102. Sternberg, “Dynamics of Contingency,” 49.

103. Chicago Arts District, <http://chicagoartsdistrict.org>.

104. Puente, “Future, Soul of Pilsen,” *Chicago Tribune*.

The biggest change was coming not from the Pods but from an even larger landowner—the University of Illinois at Chicago... The city's streetscaping improvements zipped through University Village into Podville, and so has a new wave of gentrification.<sup>105</sup>

Some academics agreed with the popular press:

Gentrification has recently emerged on Pilsen's eastern flank, along Halsted Street... [The Podmajersky family] has been one central actor responsible for the social and economic changes that have occurred in East Pilsen.<sup>106</sup>

The presence of an artists' community in East Pilsen makes Pilsen extremely palatable to "gentrifiers"... Demographic shifts appear to coincide with the expansion of Podmajersky's artists community and ensuing development to the east and the border with University Village. Gentrification has advanced subtly in [the east] side of Pilsen.<sup>107</sup>

In recent years many of the attributes that make the community so special are in danger of being lost as a result of development and displacement pressures associated with gentrification. Expansion of the University of Illinois at Chicago from the north and an artists' district from the east have heightened awareness of the pressures mounting in Pilsen.<sup>108</sup>

105. Deanna Isaacs, "East Pilsen's Makeover," *Reader*, December 11, 2003.

106. Sternberg, "Dynamics of Contingency," 34, 47.

107. Betancur, *Gentrification Before Gentrification*, 33, 67.

108. *Pilsen Rent Study*, 6–7.

Among academics, Grams, in *Producing Local Color*, offered the strongest criticism of the Podmajerskys on grounds of homogenizing the architecture (the “creation of sterile, minimalist design spaces”) and corporatizing the art scene in Pilsen (co-opting of the art walk, which had formerly been organized by artists). In Grams’s view, the gentrification led by the Podmajerskys aimed to exclude Mexican Americans (a thirty year “whitewashing” of the local ethnic culture), attract affluent professionals as tenants, and increase their properties’ value.<sup>109</sup>

In accessing the claims of Grams, other academics, and the press, the relevant question is whether the Podmajerskys have played a significant role in driving gentrification and displacement in Pilsen. In the least charitable interpretation, the Podmajerskys effort to promote east Pilsen as not just any arts district, but *the* Chicago Arts District, are self-interested, profit motivated, and not geared towards the needs of the Pilsen community at large. On the other hand, though they may charge higher rents than the rest of Pilsen, their efforts to retain the artist population may halt a more advanced-stage gentrification. The Podmajerskys rent out residential units, offices, and light industrial and retail space, but are not selling their buildings. While rental spaces exercise speculative pressure on property values in the surrounding area, it is possible that without the Podmajerskys’ control over so much of the area, gentrification would have progressed even faster, driven by developers and speculators. To judge if these hypothetical scenarios are true I will use census data spanning 2000 to 2011 and building permits to determine the extent of gentrification in the neighborhood.

109. Grams, *Producing Local Color*, 179.

## Querying Gentrification's Extent, Part One: Census Indicators of Change, 2000–2011

From 2000 to 2010 Pilsen's total population shrank from 44,031 to 35,769. Hispanics went from 89 percent to 82.4 percent; whites increased from 8.1 percent to 12.4 percent. In absolute numbers, the Hispanic population shrank from 39,144 to 29,486 (a 24.7 percent decrease) and whites increased from 3,587 to 4,447 (a 24 percent gain) (Fig. 4, 5, and 6). The 860-person increase in whites is certainly a significant change, but is hardly stunning.<sup>110</sup>

Hispanic population loss in Pilsen over the last decade and a half is associated with more than gentrification-induced displacement, including broad shifts in where first- and second-generation immigrants have decided to live.<sup>111</sup> From 2000 to 2010 the regional nexus of the Hispanic population moved westward from suburban Cook County almost to the border with DuPage County. In a classic case of immigrant succession, middle-class Mexican Americans left the city for the suburbs, where

110. This chapter draws on three datasets from the US Census Bureau: the 2000 and 2010 decennial census and the 2007–2011 American Community Survey (ACS) 5-year estimates. The ACS collects detailed data on demographic, social, economic, and housing characteristics. These data are estimates from a sample of the population. The 2010 census contains basic demographic data; the 2000 census contains data of the sort found in both the 2010 Census and the ACS. Caution must be taken when comparing ACS data and 2000 census data for two reasons: (1) the ACS data are estimates for a certain period, whereas decennial censuses represent data in a fixed point in time; and (2) certain measures, like median gross rent, cannot be compared across the 2000 census and the ACS, because of differences in the universes they survey or changes in census collection methods. Between 2000 and 2010, there was consolidation of the census tracts in Pilsen from fifteen to eleven; when applicable, the 2010 tracts are used to compute and map changes.

111. Roger Waldinger, *Strangers at the Gates: New Immigrants in Urban America* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2001).

they were joined by recent immigrants. Recent immigrants using suburbs as ports of entry is a new nationwide trend, linked to economic and occupational restructuring that have relocated many low-skilled jobs in outlying suburbs. As Father Charles Dahm of St. Pius V in Pilsen noted: “At least half of our members from our parish come [to worship] from outside of our zip code.”<sup>112</sup>

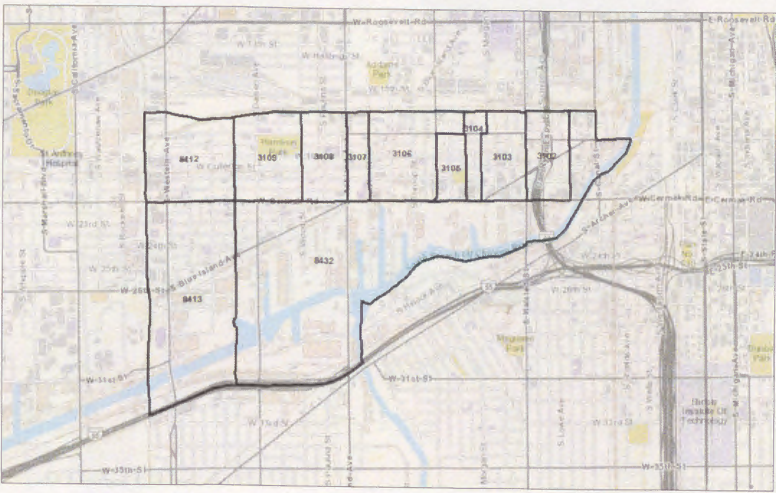


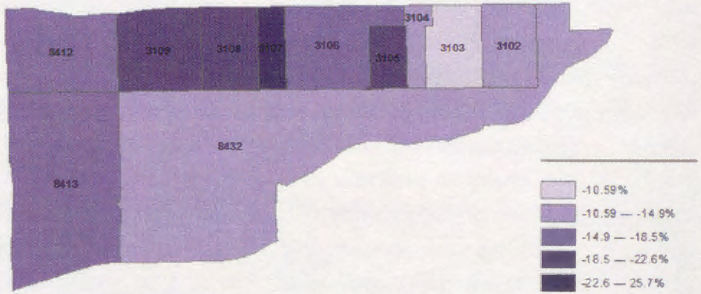
Figure 4. Census Tracts Reference Map\*

\*NOTE: Tract 3102 borders Halsted on the left; Tract 3105 borders Racine on the left; Tract 3107 borders Ashland on the left; and Tract 8412 runs just west of Western, to the railroad tracks. The northern border of the top row of tracts (3102–3108 and 8412) is 16th Street and the southern border is Cermak Road.

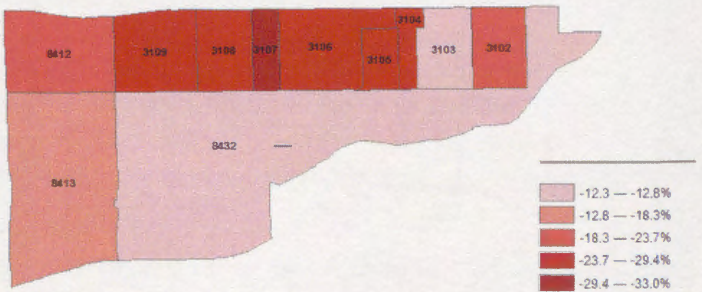
SOURCES (for all maps): Esri, DeLorme, NAVTEQ, TomTom, Intermap, increment P Corp., GEBCO, USGS, FAO, NPS, NRCAN, GeoBase, IGN, Kadaster NL, Ordnance Survey, Esri Japan, METI, Esri China (Hong Kong), and the GIS User Community.

112. Matt Sledge, “Chicago Latino Population Spreads to Suburbs, Presenting New Regional Challenges,” *Huffington Post*, August 10, 2011, <http://www.huffingtonpost.com>; Charles Dahm (associate pastor of St. Pius V parish), interview with the author, February 18, 2013.

Percentage Change in Total Population, 2000–2010



Percentage Change in Hispanics, 2000–2010



Percentage Change in Whites, 2000–2010

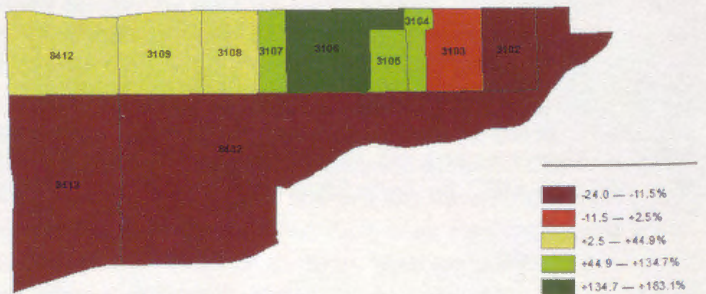
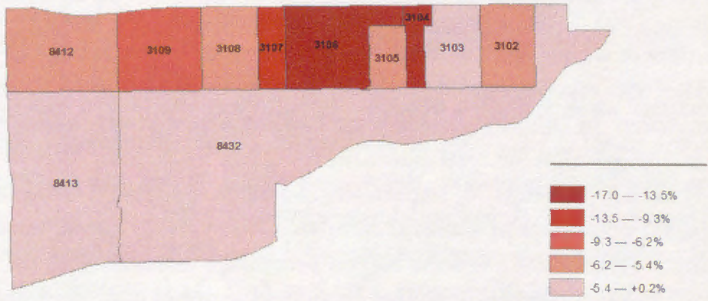


Figure 5. Percentage Change in Total Population, Hispanics, and Whites, 2000–2010

Change in Hispanics as % of Total Population, 2000–2010



Change in Whites as % of Total Population, 2000–2010

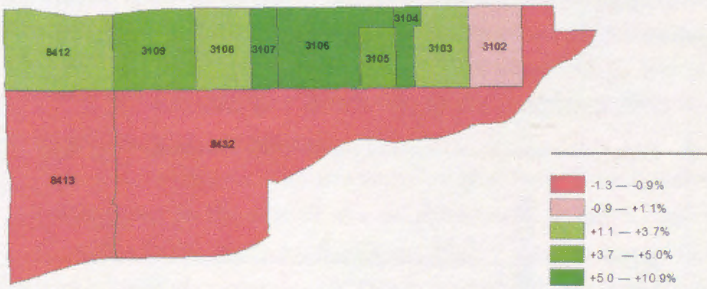


Figure 6. Change in Hispanics and Whites as Percentage of Total Population, 2000–2010



Tracts 3104–3108, an area from Morgan to Wood and 16th to Cermak, lost 23.7 percent to 33 percent of the 2000 Hispanic population. Tract 3106, a large area from Racine to Ashland, had the biggest influx of whites, with a 183.1 percent increase. Tracts 3104, 3105, and 3107 also saw large gains of whites, ranging from 44.9 to 143.7 percent increases. In 2010 the eastern tracts had the largest percentages of whites as a proportion of total population—29.9, 24.5, and 17.3 in tracts 3102, 3103, and 3104, respectively. So while the eastern tracts had the largest percentage of whites as compared to the rest of Pilsen, the central tracts (3104–3107) saw the biggest percentage increases (Fig. 6).

I next broke down median household incomes into white and Hispanic householders from 2007 to 2011 (Fig. 7). Tract 3103 had both the highest median household income (\$81,563 for whites, \$47,981 for Hispanics) and the highest income disparity between whites and Hispanics. Median household income was also high in tract 3102 (\$42,214

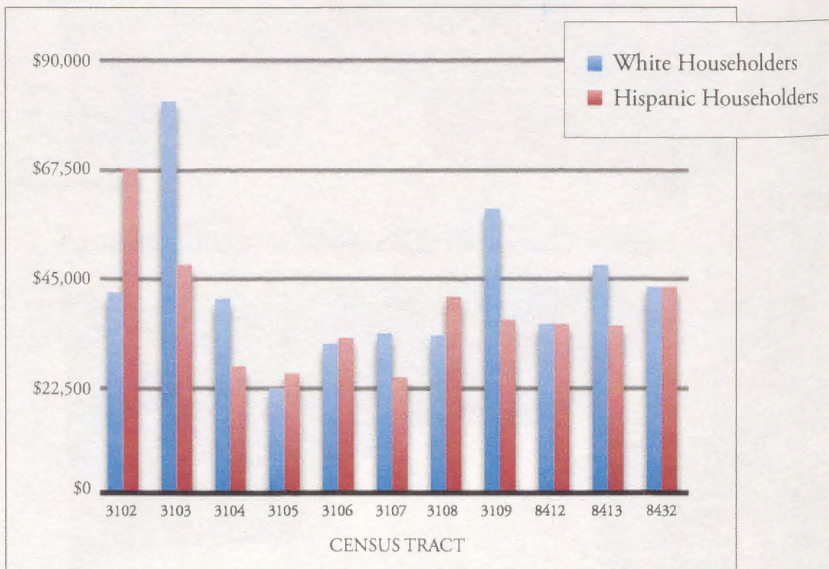


Figure 7. Median Household Income in Last Twelve Months, 2007–2011

for whites, \$67,868 for Hispanics), with Hispanic incomes exceeding whites by over \$25,000. The household incomes for whites and Hispanics were closely matched in other tracts, with Hispanics earning more in tracts 3105, 3106, and 3108.

Another indicator of gentrification might be a decrease in the number of family households (Fig. 8). From 2000 to 2007–2011, Pilsen saw a 20.4 percent decrease in family households, dropping from 9,289 to 7,396. (Some of this reflects the total population loss during this period.) Central tracts 3104, 3105, and 3106 saw the biggest percentage drop in family households—13.6, 16.3, and 19.7, respectively. In 2010 east and central Pilsen clearly had a lower concentration of family households (Fig. 9). Looking at the population employed in professional occupations, which the census classifies as management, business, science, and the arts, tracts 3102 and 3103 had the highest percentage of professionals (32.1–56.4), followed by tracts 3104 and 3106 (22.1–32.1). Except for tract 3105, professionals as a percentage of the total labor force decreased steadily from east to west (Fig. 10).

This census data corroborates the assertion that east Pilsen is more gentrified compared to the rest of the neighborhood: it has a higher concentration of whites, more professionals, higher median household incomes, and a lower concentration of family households. Central tracts and tract 3102 in east Pilsen had the biggest increases in the white population and median incomes for Hispanic householders higher than whites householders, which suggests an influx of white students with lower incomes and no families.

Housing data is especially relevant as gentrification is in part a process of upgrading the housing stock, which leads to swelling property values and rents. Tracts in east Pilsen had the highest median gross rents (\$511–\$577 in 2000 and \$861–\$1,026 from 2007 to 2011) (Fig. 11, 12). It is worth noting that there is not a clear decreasing rent gradient from east to west: from 2007 to 2011 tracts 8432 and 3108 were the next most expensive. Central tract rents were at the lower end of the range (\$662–\$682 and \$682–\$739). I cannot compute percent changes, due to different survey universes, but it is clear that rents did increase through-

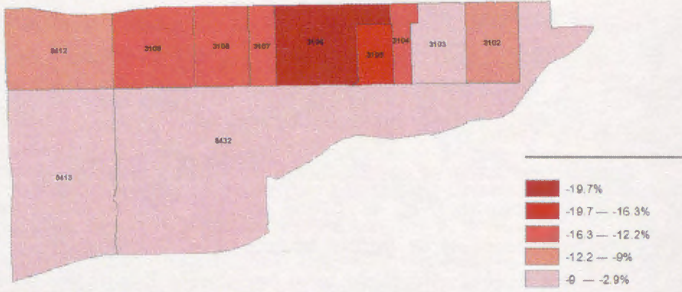


Figure 8. Change in Family Households as Percentage of All Households, 2000–2010

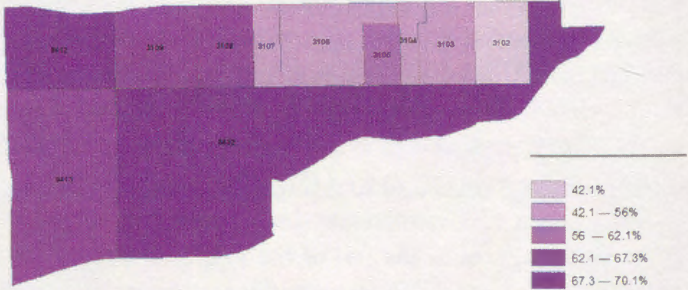


Figure 9. Family Households as Percentage of All Households, 2010



Figure 10. Percentage of Labor Force in Professional Occupations, 2007–2011

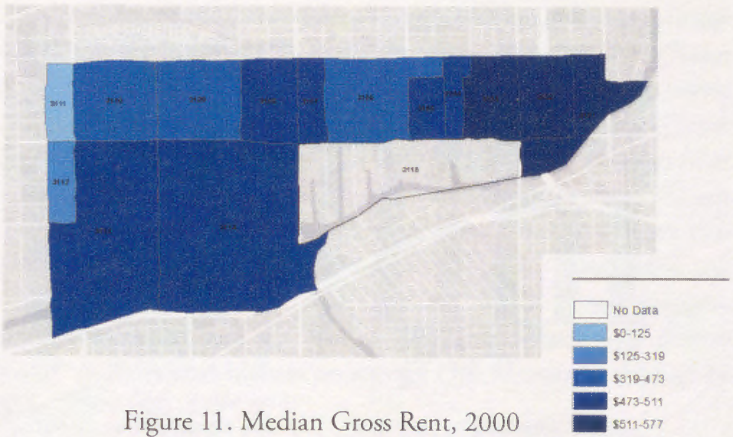


Figure 11. Median Gross Rent, 2000

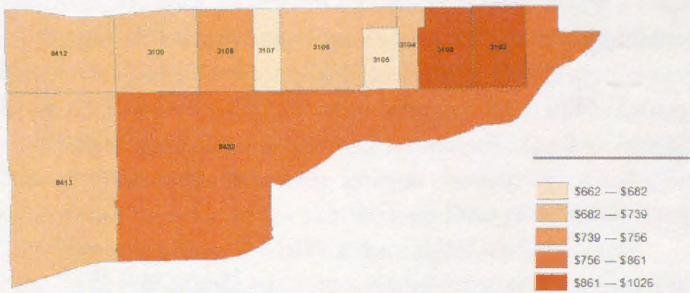


Figure 12. Median Gross Rent, 2007–2011

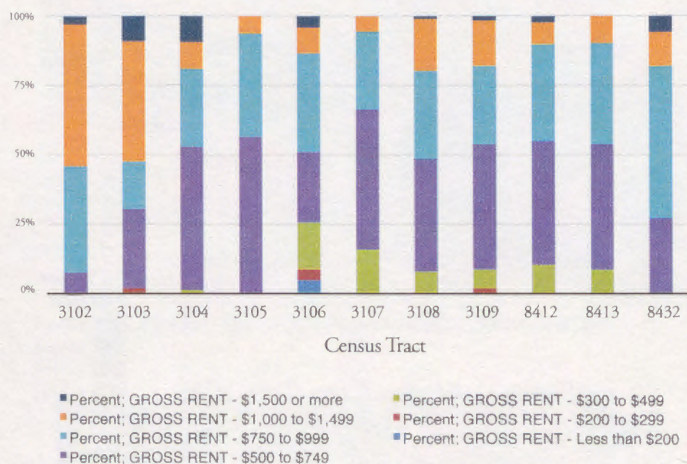


Figure 13. Gross Rents in Pilsen within Tracts, 2007–2011

out Pilsen since 2000.<sup>113</sup> Looking at distribution of gross rents *within* tracts (Fig. 13), eastern tracts 3102 and 3103 (along with 8432) had a greater proportion of higher rents (\$750–\$999, \$1,000–\$1,499, and \$1,500 and up). The central and western tracts had a greater supply of affordable apartments: moving westward there were practically no \$300–\$499 units until tract 3106.

From 2007 to 2011 tract 3102 had the highest median property values for owner-occupied housing units (\$485,300) (Fig. 14). Eastern tract 3103 and central tracts 3105, 3106, and 3107 had the next highest value (ranging from \$274,800 to \$297,100). Tract 3102 had the largest increase in median property value between 2000 and 2007–2011 (265 percent) (Fig. 15). Surprisingly, tract 8412, on the western boundary of Pilsen had the next highest percentage increase (137 to 175). Tracts 3104, 3108, 3109, and 8413 (almost all in the western half of Pilsen) had the next highest percentage increases (75 to 137). Central tracts 3105, 3106, and 3107 saw more modest increases. Most surprisingly,

113. See *Pilsen Rent Study*.

tract 3103, which borders University Village, had the lowest percentage increase (57). Averaged across all Pilsen tracts median housing value went from \$138,508 in 2000 to \$291,309 in 2007–2011, representing a 110.3 percent increase. For the city of Chicago median housing value went from \$144,300 to \$260,800, an 80.7 percent increase. Apart from tract 3102, outsized increases were largely in west Pilsen, not in the east or center. The distribution of property values within tracts shows that affordable housing increased in western tracts (Fig. 16). Tract 3102 had 78.4 percent of owner-occupied units in the highest categories (\$300,000–\$499,999 and \$500,000–\$999,999). Surprisingly, central tract 3107 had the next highest percentage (36) of units in the highest category (\$500,000–\$999,999).

Tracts 3103, followed by 3102 and 3110, had the highest percentage of housing built from 1990 to 1999 (Fig. 17). There was also a fair amount of construction during the nineties in tracts 3106 and 3108. Tracts 3102–3104 had the highest percentage of housing units built from 2000 to 2011, with tract 3106 also seeing a fair amount of construction (Fig. 18). Most new building, at least as a percentage of total housing units, happened in tracts 3102–3104 (Fig. 19). A dot map for all housing units built from 1990 to 1999 and from 2000 to 2011 shows concentrated development in the eastern tracts over the last two decades, but the rest of Pilsen was not lacking for new construction either (Fig. 20). Additionally, in the nineties the western part of Pilsen seems to have had more new units built than the eastern half (Fig. 17).

Except for tracts 3104 and 8432 the rate of transience across all tracts was very high: about 50 percent or greater of householders moved in 2005 or later (Fig. 21, 22). Tracts 3102, 3103, and 3107 had the highest proportion of their householders moving in 2005 or later. Tracts 3104, 3105, and 3108 had the highest percentage of longtime householders who moved in before 1979 or between 1980 and 1989). While eastern tracts 3102 and 3103 saw the highest rates of transience (moved in 2005 or later), non-eastern tracts 3106 and 8432 also had high transience (moved in 2000–2004). The census evidence did not unequivocally indicate that western tracts were populated by longtime residents, while the eastern and central tracts saw a transient population of renters; instead,



Figure 14. Median Property Values of Owner-Occupied Units, 2007-2011



Figure 15. Percentage Increase in Median Value of Owner-Occupied Housing Units, from 2000 to 2007-2011

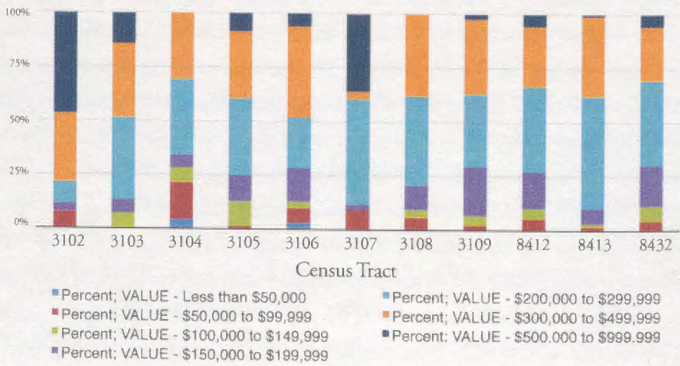
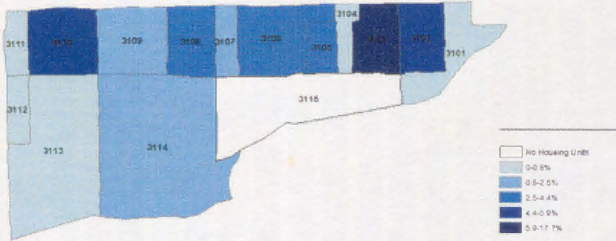
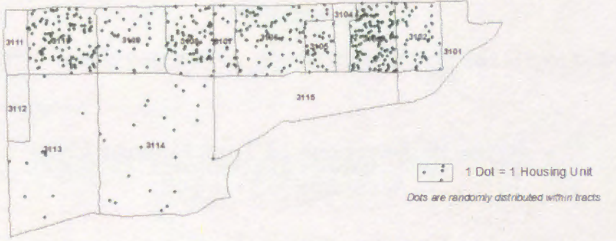


Figure 16. Property Values in Pilsen within Tracts, 2007-2011



• Percentage of Housing Units Built 1990-1999



• Number of Housing Units Built 1990-1999

Figure 17. Percentage and Number of Housing Units Built, 1990–1999



Figure 18. Percentage of Total Housing Units Built from 2000 to 2007–2011



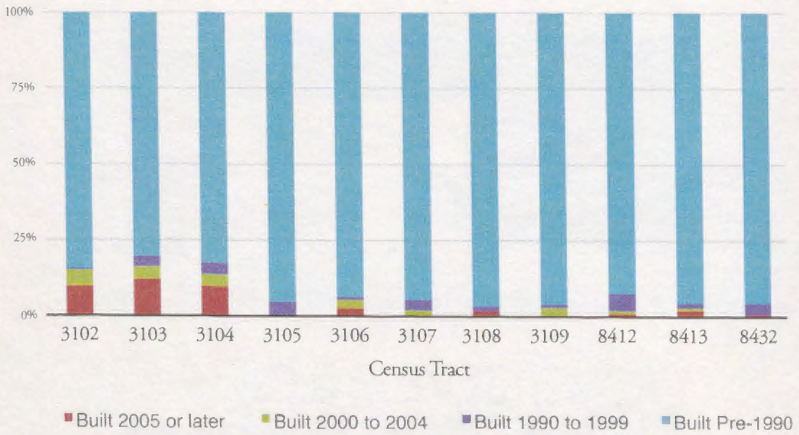


Figure 19. Percentage of Total Housing Units According to Year Built

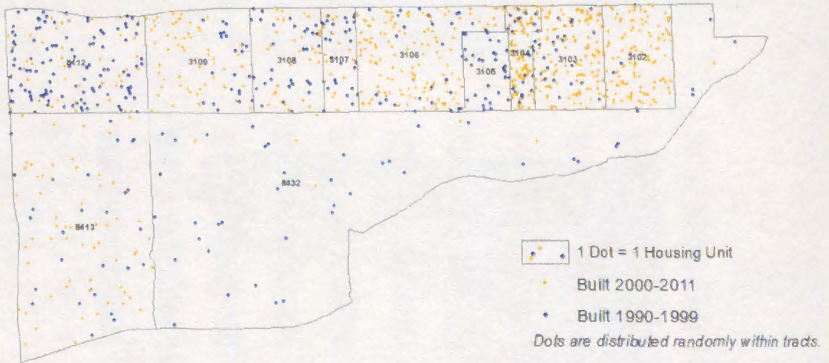


Figure 20. Number of Housing Units Built, 1990-1999 and from 2000 to 2007-2011

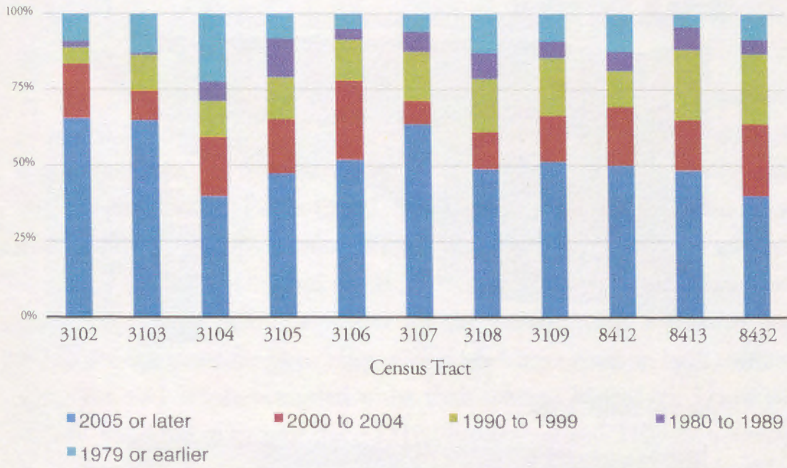
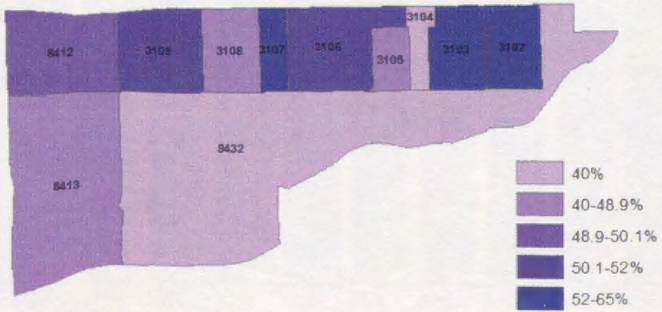


Figure 21. Percentage of Householders by Year Moved into Unit

Moved in 2005 or later



Moved in 2000–2004



Moved in 1990–1999

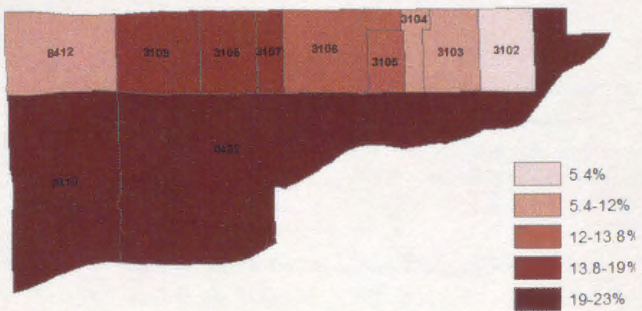


Figure 22: Percentage of Total Householders by Year Moved into Unit

all tracts had a high rate of transience, with a transient population slightly more likely in eastern tracts.

The final map I examine is tenure by race to see the changes in owner-occupied and renter-occupied units populated by whites and Hispanics (Fig. 23). Hispanics had the greatest positive change in owner-occupied units in tracts across Pilsen (3102, 3108, and 8413) and in eastern tract 3103 for renter-occupied units. Whites had the biggest increase in owner-occupied units in 3104 and tracts 3104 and 3106 for renter-occupied units. This is compelling evidence for the assertion that Hispanics are partly driving gentrification. Hispanics made bigger gains in both owner-occupied and renter-occupied units than whites. Moreover, Hispanic activity occurred in eastern tracts (3102 for owners and 3103 for renters) as well as non-eastern tracts (3108 and 8432 for owners). Meanwhile, whites were renting in central tracts 3104 and 3106. The proportion of

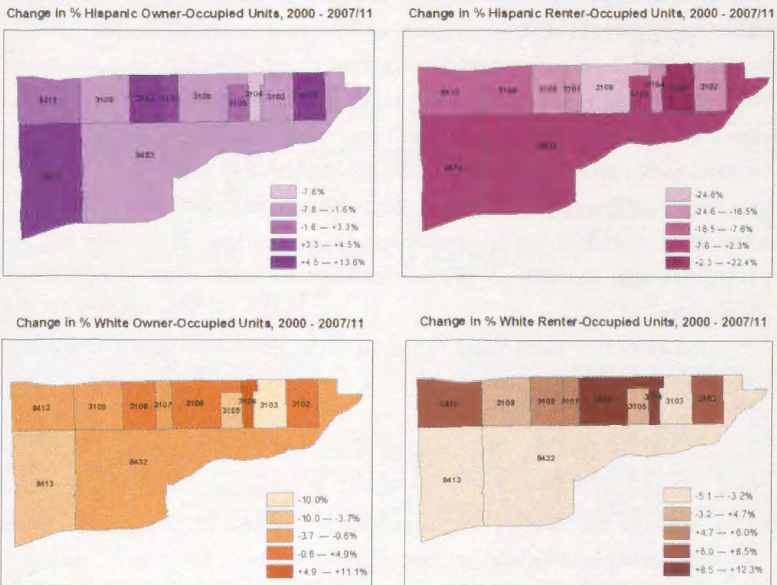


Figure 23. Tenure by Race, from 2000 to 2007–2011

white owners was smaller than for Hispanics and not localized in the east: tract 3104 saw the biggest gain in white owner-occupied units, followed by 3102, 3106, and 3108, which are in all parts of Pilsen. Therefore, Hispanic renters and owners were propelling much of the housing change, which saw marked gains in the eastern tracts but in other parts of Pilsen as well. This map is the strongest evidence that Hispanics are helping to gentrify the neighborhood. My analysis cautions against attributing gentrification to an influx of whites, when, in fact, many of those whites were probably students with low incomes. This does not exclude the student population from playing a hand in gentrification, but the census data provides a clue into the trend of Hispanic-led gentrification.

The census demographic, economic, and housing data from 2000 to 2011 indicates a clear bifurcation between the east and the rest of Pilsen in terms of rents, property values, professionals workers, and white population. Western Pilsen saw large increases in its property values and new construction in the nineties. Pilsen did lose some of its Hispanic population and modest gains in whites; I surmise from household incomes and family households that much of this central gain in the white population might be young students. In a stage model of gentrification students are like canaries in a coalmine, making an area palatable to a less adventurous population and paving the way for a more advanced gentrification by young affluent professionals with more capital. I also uncovered evidence for Hispanic-led gentrification: Hispanics buying properties and renting in the pricier eastern tracts, but elsewhere in Pilsen too.

This evidence challenges the simplistic claim that gentrification is only approaching from the east like a wave. Hispanics are also helping to drive gentrification, and some changes are happening in central and western Pilsen as well. The eastern tracts do look markedly different from the rest of Pilsen, both physically and through census data. But white students are also flocking to central Pilsen and Hispanics are buying and renovating homes and renting expensive units, both in the east and other parts of Pilsen, which indicates that gentrification is proceeding in a more diffuse manner. UIC's expansion and the Podmajerskys'

development were instrumental in *initiating* gentrification in east Pilsen, but that does not necessarily imply that gentrification will progress linearly from east to west. The new trend of Hispanic-led gentrification complicates claims that the east is the frontier of gentrification. Hispanics are gentrifying parts of the neighborhood away from the east, and central Pilsen could gentrify as well with students serving as pioneer gentrifiers (much like artists in east Pilsen and elsewhere). The central tracts are better situated than the eastern ones for gentrification, as they are closer to a public-transit train line and the attractive 18th Street commercial corridor. Moreover, if the Podmajerskys retain control over so much property, the artist population may stay, thereby halting or slowing more advanced stages of gentrification in the east. Rather than suggesting that gentrification is neatly proceeding from the east, the census data shows that it will likely arise in a more granular, scattershot fashion, with clear hotspots in the east and increasingly in central Pilsen. While this may exacerbate the economic and housing divide with west Pilsen, data from building permits suggest that new construction and upgrades are happening across Pilsen, and are certainly not confined to the eastern part. I will turn now to that data.

## Querying Gentrification's Extent, Part Two: Built Environment Modifications through Building Permits, 2006–2013

The City of Chicago provides data on all building permits granted from 2006 to the present.<sup>114</sup> By looking at modifications to the built environment and who is undertaking them, I can continue to assess the scope of gentrification. Building permits let me analyze upgrades to the housing stock, in a way that census data does not. I examined three categories

114. "TIF Projection Reports, 2012–2014."

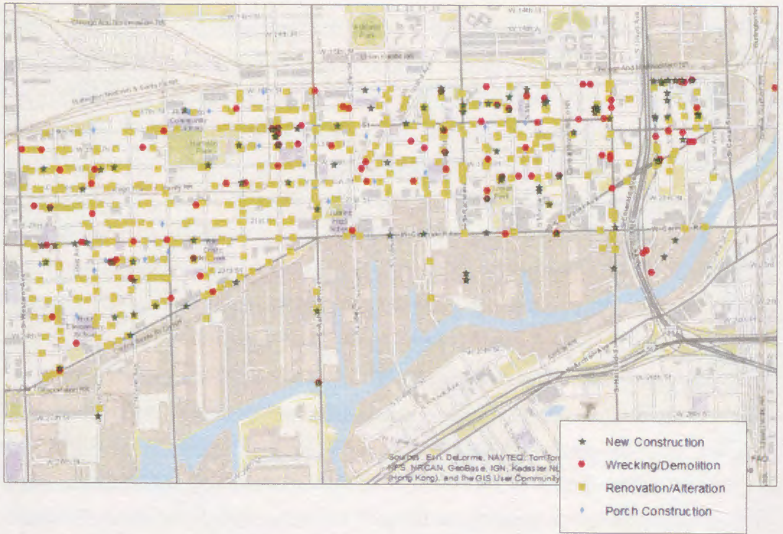


Figure 24. All Building Permits, 2006–2013

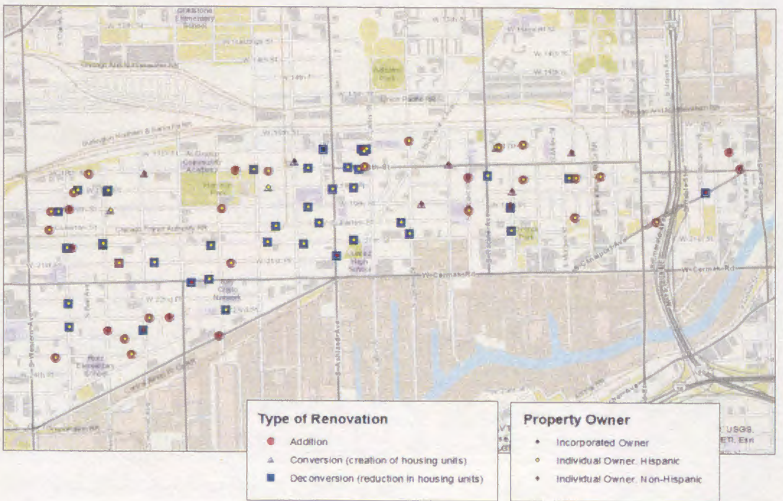


Figure 25. Selected Renovation Permits, 2006–2013

of building permits: new construction, demolition, and specific types of renovations. Where the volume of permits was small enough I looked at the name of the property owner to determine whether an owner was Hispanic, non-Hispanic, or a corporation. (An LLC indicates a property developer or a group like the Resurrection Project.)

Permits in the three main categories, plus porch construction, indicated that renovations lack of a clear pattern (Fig. 24). Renovations occurred across Pilsen, and certainly not just in the east. These might be just routine upgrades,<sup>115</sup> but suggest that there is enough capital in the neighborhood to undertake these renovations. I then looked at selected types of renovation permits: additions (most commonly, attic dormers or extra floors), conversions (which created more housing units), or de-conversions (which led to a reduction in housing units) (Fig. 25). I classified these permits by whether the owner was Hispanic, non-Hispanic, or incorporated. De-conversions and additions were the most common renovations and are more dominant in the western half of Pilsen. Individual Hispanic owners undertook the vast majority of these renovations; almost none were incorporated owners, suggesting that these specific renovations are serving smaller-time property owners. This map is extremely suggestive of Hispanic-led gentrification, due to the high proportion of Hispanic property owners undertaking these changes to the housing stock, along with the large amount of capital it doubtlessly takes to own property in the first place and then modify the building. These west Pilsen renovations pose a challenge to the claim of gentrification sweeping in from the east, suggesting a more diffuse process, or at the very least evidence of significant changes being made to the housing stock away from the east.

Demolition permits show data points throughout the neighborhood, though perhaps slightly more concentrated in the east, particularly by the Dan Ryan expressway (Fig. 26). Incorporated owners did the

115. Incumbent upgrading of the housing stock can be a process distinct from gentrification with discrete stages. Van Crielingen and Decroly, "Diversity of Gentrification," 2,454-6.



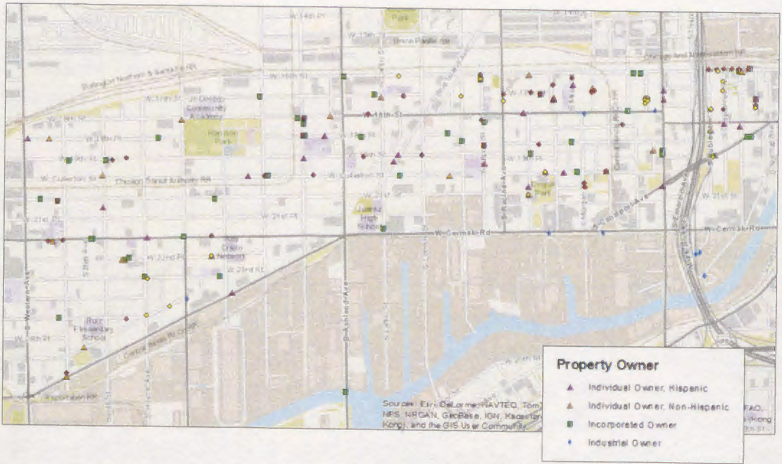


Figure 26. Selected Demolition Permits, 2006–2013

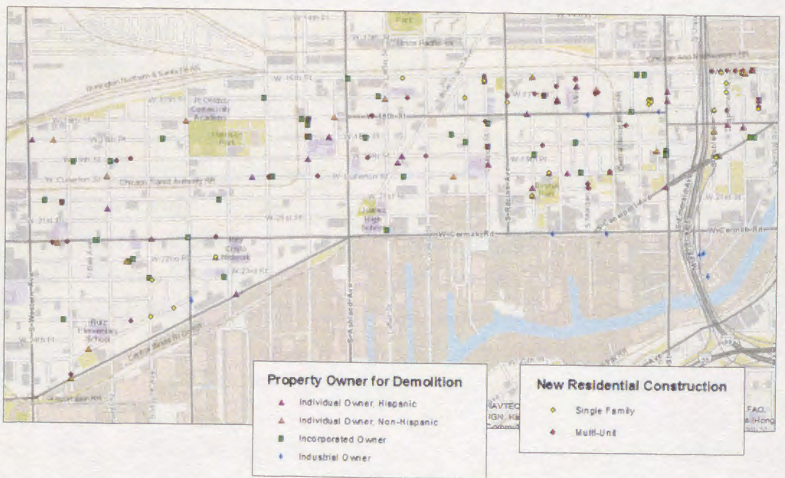


Figure 27. Demolition Permits and New Residential Construction Permits, 2006–2013

majority of demolitions; the need to hire workers and the ability to go without income from the property is easier for organizations that own other profit-generating properties. For individuals doing demolitions, Hispanic property owners were a bit more common than non-Hispanics, especially in the west half of Pilsen. Looking at demolitions followed by new residential construction, there were not many teardowns (Fig. 27). This provides evidence that gentrification is moving slowly without a hallmark of full-throttle gentrification—the replacement of small derelict buildings with multistory condos.

Permits for new construction show some concentrated development of multiunit buildings just east of the expressway (the Union Row townhomes), between Morgan and Racine, and a cluster of single-family buildings just west of Halsted (Fig. 28). There was a lesser amount of new construction, mostly multiunit residential buildings, in west Pilsen. Incorporated owners built most multiunit residential constructions, and individual Hispanic property owners built most single-family homes (Fig. 29). Of the multiunit constructions built by individuals, Hispanic and non-Hispanic owners were evenly matched. The amount of new multiunit construction was small, just a few buildings per tract, which may be due to the housing crisis in 2008.

I can draw two major conclusions from this analysis of building permits for renovations, demolitions, and new construction: (1) while new development and demolitions are a bit more concentrated in east Pilsen, specific renovations (additions, de-conversions, and conversions) are more common in west Pilsen; and (2) many modifications to the housing stock are undertaken by Hispanic property owners. New development, whether modest or high end, and upgrading of the housing stock effect surrounding property values, taxes, and rents. This is the criticism leveled at large residential developments like University Village, but the same is true of the sum incremental upgrades to Pilsen's housing stock. While upscale residential developments clearly serve a different population than the working class, Hispanic property owners, too, are helping to revalorize the neighborhood. In a certain sense, they are complicit in its gentrification, even if they might normatively oppose gentrification and its ill effects. Activities like physical upgrades and

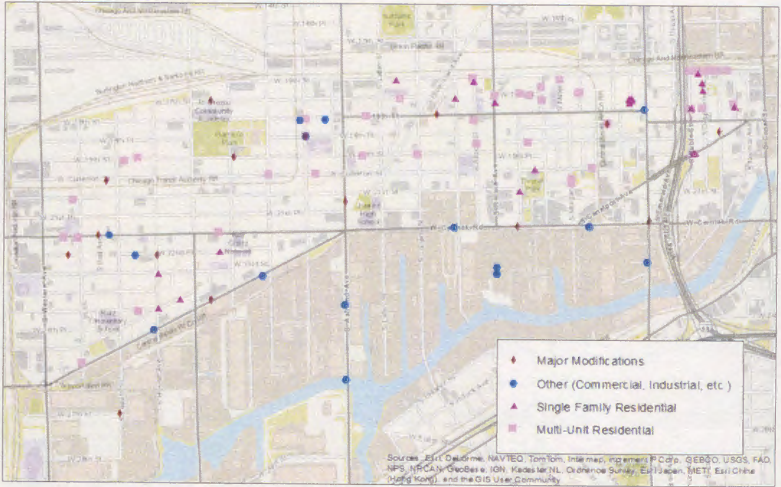


Figure 28. New Construction Permits, 2006–2013

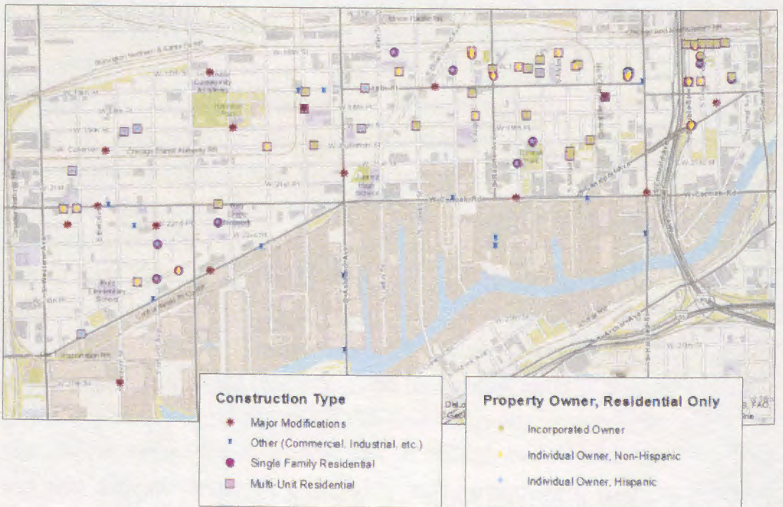


Figure 29. Property Owners and New Residential Construction Permits, 2006–2013

investment may accrue benefits to some, maybe even many, but ultimately come at a cost to others. Gentrification is a chaotic and multivalent pattern with many actors, including Hispanics taking out building permits, buying new condos, or paying higher rents to live in nicer apartments.

The trend of Hispanic-led gentrification poses a challenge to the binary—us vs. them, good vs. bad—discourse on gentrification. It certainly creates a conceptual bind for Hispanics, such as the loft buyer who was accused of kicking out his “own people” like a traitor, and the activist who criticized loft buyers for being the ones to benefit from all the work that longtime residents had done to improve the neighborhood.<sup>116</sup> Saldaña of the Eighteenth Street Development Corporation wholeheartedly stated: “I am gentrifying the neighborhood.”<sup>117</sup> He chose to move into a neighborhood that reminds him of his roots, paying higher rent for a decent apartment in Pilsen. The presence of self-proclaimed Hispanic gentrifiers is a novel finding of this study, particularly considering that in Chicago gentrification has so often been driven by whites in largely Hispanic neighborhoods. Gentrification becomes an even more fraught issue when both gentrifier and gentrified are united by their Hispanic ethnicity; if anything, the situation magnifies how much of a class-based process gentrification is. More work is needed to probe into Hispanic-led gentrification and understand how the ethnic dimension influences the process. On a practical level, this research reveals a quandary for stakeholders concerned about the neighborhood’s future: how does one maximize gentrification’s benefits, upgrading of the housing stock and beautification, while minimizing the social costs, the displacement of lower-income populations? An organization called the Resurrection Project has gone far in answering, and acting upon, that question.

116. Avila, “Hispanic Condo Buyers,” *Chicago Tribune*.

117. Saldaña, interview.

## Development without Displacement: The Work of The Resurrection Project

The Resurrection Project (TRP) was founded in 1990 by a coalition of leaders from six Catholic parishes, who saw their parishioners dealing with similar issues of crime, housing, and schools.<sup>118</sup> The next year Mayor Daley's New Homes for Chicago (NHFC) program was established. The city sold vacant lots to developers for one dollar each and added sewer and water hookups, waived some permit costs, and upgraded streets, sidewalks, and alleys. The city also helped families acquire mortgages at below-market interest rates and, over the life of the mortgage, contributed a \$20,000 subsidy to keep the purchase price of the home low (\$70,000 in 1991, affordable for a family with an annual income of \$22,000). The homes were marketed to low- to moderate-income residents earning a certain percentage of the city's median income, who could afford a 5 percent down payment and city-subsidized mortgage payments.<sup>119</sup>

In 1991, along with two other Pilsen community groups, the Resurrection Project received NHFC funds in the first round to build twenty-five single-family homes. Many of the initial lottery winners were moderate-income residents of Pilsen who lived in overcrowded, shoddy housing.<sup>120</sup> In 1996 the city approved TRP's plan to build two-unit buildings, single-family homes with garden-level units that families

118. Dahm, interview.

119. *New Homes for Chicago: City Lots for City Living Application* (Chicago: City of Chicago, Department of Community Development, 2006).

120. John McCarron, "Empty Lots of Inner City Given Hope," *Chicago Tribune*, January 31, 1991; Matt Murray and James Hill, "Housing Lottery Answers Some Pilsen Dreams," *Chicago Tribune*, September, 4, 1991; Teresa Puente, "Making Pilsen [a] Household Name," *Chicago Tribune*, November 18, 1998; Eleazar Vazquez, (vice president of property management, the Resurrection Project), interview with the author, February 20, 2013.

could rent. TRP continued to receive funding in successive rounds of NHFC, taking the lead in building affordable single-family housing in Pilsen, where three and four flats predominant. In the mid-nineties TRP expanded their affordable housing initiative and began buying small buildings and rehabbing them. TRP owns and operates the buildings, which it rents to lower-income tenants. TRP also converted a former warehouse at 963 West Cullerton, now called Casa Guerrero, into twenty-five apartments in 1997. Over the years, TRP has built affordable housing and spread their community-focused initiatives to Little Village, Back of the Yards, and Melrose Park. One of their largest projects, Casa Puebla, was a \$14.8 million development comprised of five buildings (four in Pilsen) and seventy-four apartments. TRP has continued building in the twenty-first century. In 2010 the environmentally friendly Casa Maravilla opened at 2021 South Morgan, offering seventy-two apartments for senior citizens. Casa Maravilla works with Alivio Medical Center to provide nearby affordable medical care for residents. Casa Maravilla serves as a senior satellite center for the City of Chicago's Department of Family and Support Services, which provides programming and education for tenants and community members. La Casa, another project, opened in 2011 at 18th and Paulina to much fanfare; it offers dormitory rooms and resources to one hundred lower-income college students; rooms costs \$350–\$700 per month, compared to UIC dorm rooms, which cost \$1,100 a month.<sup>121</sup>

TRP persuaded Alderman Solis to institute a set-aside policy, wherein any developer building more than ten units of housing in the neighborhood must set aside 21 percent of units for households earning 60 to 85 percent of the metro area's median income. They brokered such a compromise with the developer of Chantico Lofts. TRP is a formidable presence in the Pilsen community, with manifold community initiatives around education, the arts, immigration reform, and other areas. In 1999 LISC (the Local Initiatives Support Corporation) Chicago selected TRP to lead LISC's New Communities Program, which supports

121. "New Communities Network," LISC Chicago, <http://www.lisc-chicago.org>; Vazquez, interview; Michael Winerip, "A Dorm For All Colleges," *New York Times*, November 2, 2012.

comprehensive community development in sixteen struggling neighborhoods. All told, TRP has built and sold 141 single-family homes to low- and moderate-income residents; they also manage 330 affordable rental units across various neighborhoods. TRP's first ninety homes are scattered across the neighborhood, including the eastern side and east of the Dan Ryan expressway (Fig. 30).<sup>122</sup>

The impact and implications of the Resurrection Project's housing projects are enormous. They have removed vacant lots that are eyesores and a magnet for gang activity and have significantly increased the supply of affordable housing for different populations—homebuyers, renters, senior citizens, and college students—likely to be hurt by gentrification. TRP's vice president of property management estimates that 60 percent of the residents and tenants taking advantage of TRP housing were already living in Pilsen or had grown up in the neighborhood. They are 80 to 85 percent Hispanic and a mix of first- and second-generation immigrants.<sup>123</sup> As early as 1990, when TRP was running workshops but had not started building, the *Tribune* encapsulates their work: "By showing local people that they can afford to buy property in the area, the organizations are attempting to limit the disruptive effects of redevelopment by outsiders and keep the West Side an affordable neighborhood."<sup>124</sup>

As redevelopment and gentrification have intensified and threaten to displace lower-income populations this core function of TRP's work has become more important. According to TRP's executive director, Raul Raymundo: "The development going on adjacent to Pilsen is starting to have an effect... This is a working-class community and we want to retain that. We want to ensure that lifelong residents can continue to live in the community and not be displaced by higher property values and gentrification pressures."<sup>125</sup> For Raymundo and TRP, "the best way

122. Web Behrens, "Pilsen Gentrification: Can Pilsen Pull Off Responsible Development?" *TimeOut Chicago*, February 16, 2009; Vazquez, interview.

123. Vazquez, interview.

124. Montana, "Pilsen Residents," *Chicago Tribune*.

125. Patricia Richardson, "Pilsen's Progress," *Crain's Chicago Business*, June 2, 2003.



Figure 30. The Resurrection Project's First Ninety Single-Family Homes

to stem gentrification is to create opportunities for the residents, to create affordable housing.”<sup>126</sup> A comparison of the number of affordable units, both homes and rentals, that TRP has constructed to the number of upscale condo units built during the same time period shows that TRP is outpacing private developers. High-end developments have an outsize effect on the community and property values, so one might say that TRP is fighting a defensive battle, but regardless, they have played a significant role in easing gentrification-caused displacement.

TRP also creates and mobilizes community leaders who are invested in maintaining a thriving neighborhood. For 1996 homebuyer Rosa Perez owning a home was not enough, she wanted to revitalize the neighborhood by becoming the president of her block club: “This is for

126. Teresa Puente, “Pilsen Fears Upscale Push May Shove Many Out,” *Chicago Tribune*, November 4, 1997.



my children. I want to improve the neighborhood for them.”<sup>127</sup> TRP offers leadership development courses to encourage all residents to get involved in parishes and schools. Moreover, by generally working to improve quality of life in the neighborhood—through physical upgrades, economic development, partnering with other organizations to open a daycare center–Head Start program, and many more such initiatives—TRP is making Pilsen a more attractive place for families, professionals, and others, regardless of their income level. A 1998 *Tribune* article observed: “Community leaders like [Raul Raymundo], especially those with a college degree, could have left the neighborhood for greener pastures.” Instead, “they decided to stay and help it thrive.”<sup>128</sup> Raymundo said that TRP has “begun to combat the notion of home ownership head-on. So that [people] recognize when you buy a home in the community you’re not just buying a piece of property—you’re buying a piece of the community.”<sup>129</sup> As a TRP community organizer said at a Casa Guerrero tenant meeting: “We don’t just build buildings. We want to create a community.”<sup>130</sup> By working on so many fronts to improve the community, TRP is helping Pilsen to retain its working-class population.

The efforts of the Resurrection Project adds complexity to gentrification’s progress in Pilsen. Where an organization like Pilsen Alliance “takes a hard-line stance against gentrification,” the Resurrection Project is charting a more moderate course by working to foster and capture the positive aspects of redevelopment and reinvestment, and to distribute those benefits to the community at large.<sup>131</sup>

The 1998 *Tribune* article points out: “Yet some of the same assets that have kept people like Raymundo are what make Pilsen potentially

127. Puente, “Making Pilsen,” *Chicago Tribune*.

128. Puente, “Future, Soul of Pilsen,” *Chicago Tribune*.

129. Lutton, “Development,” *Reader*.

130. Teresa Puente, “Pilsen Expands on Family Foundations,” *Chicago Tribune*, December 26, 1997.

131. Behrens, “Pilsen Gentrification,” *TimeOut Chicago*.

appealing to developers and newcomers."<sup>132</sup> Vazquez said that in the nineties, before the housing boom began, TRP was one of the only groups developing in Pilsen, which, in turn, "really kicked up new development," some of it speculative.<sup>133</sup> This is the two-sided coin of development: the Resurrection Project has created ample opportunities for low- and moderate-income residents to stay in Pilsen, but, in undertaking development and improving the neighborhood, they have also helped to make the area more attractive for investment. Even so, the Resurrection Project has done remarkably well in walking the line of equitable development. More so than any other development initiative that Pilsen has seen, successful or failed, the Resurrection Project has maximized the benefits of gentrification, like physical upgrading and reinvestment, while also minimizing the disadvantages of gentrification, displacement and lower ethnic and class diversity.

## Pilsen's Prognosis and Closing Remarks

This study measured claims about gentrification in Pilsen against the situation on the ground, using a number of different methods: analysis of major redevelopment initiatives, exploration of census and building-permit data, and evaluation of the Resurrection Project's strategy of building affordable housing. Pilsen *is* gentrifying. Over the past decade, Pilsen's east side is whiter, has higher rents and property values, a higher rate of professional employment, scattered new construction, and various redevelopment initiatives. However, this study has also interrogated the received wisdom that gentrification from the east will, like a wave, soon crash over the rest of Pilsen. To that end, I have drawn three main conclusions:

132. Puente, "Making Pilsen," *Chicago Tribune*.

133. Vazquez, interview.

**1. Gentrification in Pilsen is slower than fears would suggest.** The neighborhood has not seen the rapid changes in demographics or housing stock of other gentrifying or gentrified neighborhoods in Chicago.

**2. While the east side of Pilsen is a magnet for redevelopment, upgrades occur throughout Pilsen.** Central Pilsen has seen the biggest increase in whites; when paired with income statistics, this seems attributable to an influx of students. Moreover, certain types of renovations (additions, de-conversions, and conversions) are more common in west Pilsen, which also saw greater increases in property values than some eastern or central tracts. This suggests that the neighborhood is not at an advanced or rapid stage of gentrification.

**3. Hispanics drive some of Pilsen's gentrification.** Some Hispanics have the means to pay higher rents for better apartments or to upgrade the housing stock. Hispanic-led gentrification is overlooked in the literature, partially because of the newness of the phenomenon. It complicates the simplistic view of white yuppies displacing ethnic immigrants and creates ambivalence in both Hispanic gentrifiers and the Hispanic gentrified in Pilsen.

The conflict over the appearance of Hispanic-led gentrification raises a questions about the right to urban space: who gets to reap the benefits of concerted efforts from multiple parties to revitalize the neighborhood, and whose priorities will shape Pilsen? Hispanics in Pilsen are not singularly aligned against gentrification or united behind any one vision of the neighborhood's future. Though they share a common ethnicity, a Hispanic young professional, an immigrant family, and a migrant worker have different needs and preferences. They all might want the neighborhood to remain the jewel of Mexican American life and culture in Chicago, but class change is a pressing issue, and it seems probable that the lower-income population in Pilsen will slowly decrease. The market imperatives that promote gentrification are powerful, and the consequences of gentrification are evident in other formerly Hispanic neighborhoods. A middle- to upper-class Hispanic enclave in

the center of Chicago would be remarkable, but it would likely come at the expense of the poor and working class.

Pilsen's condition is shaped by citywide, national, and global processes that go far beyond this West Side neighborhood. For decades, the city has used gentrification as a policy tool to revitalize central neighborhoods. The power and capital of the actors behind policy-prescribed gentrification and the momentum in that direction make it likely that Pilsen will gentrify eventually, even if slowly. The decrease in industrial employment and the migration of industrial jobs to the suburbs also make gentrification more likely. Gentrification is not just a matter of who moves in, but also who moves out and whether or not that outflow is tied to gentrification. The loss of a quarter of Pilsen's Hispanic population, almost ten thousand people, from 2000 to 2010, eases the way towards gentrification.<sup>134</sup>

The Resurrection Project offers a promising solution to gentrification through equitable development. TRP works towards the upgrading and revitalization of Pilsen while mitigating displacement by increasing the neighborhood's supply of affordable housing. Maximizing the benefits of gentrification while minimizing its social costs seems like an aim that most stakeholders in Pilsen can agree upon. Residents want development that is driven by the needs of everyone, including vulnerable populations who often do not have a say in directing neighborhood change. Returning to the words of Carlos Arango, the executive director of Casa Atzlan, at a TIF protest in 1998: "If there's progress in this community, it has to be a progress that's going to benefit everyone. It has to be a progress in which residents are included and in which they can express their interests and their necessities."<sup>135</sup> Alejandra Ibañez, the executive director of Pilsen Alliance, echoes this sentiment: "The community demands a voice in the future development of Pilsen to

134. Note that this large loss of Hispanics inflates the figure of whites as a percentage of the total population.

135. Lutton, "Development," *Reader*.

protect our families, our livelihood and the cultural identity of [this] neighborhood.”<sup>136</sup> In light of the emerging trend of Hispanic-led gentrification and the community leadership of organizations like the Resurrection Project Pilsen could become a thriving, mixed-income Hispanic neighborhood and secure the benefits of redevelopment while minimizing displacement. The bloody shirt of gentrification will inevitably enter the discourse, but residents on the ground could remain secure in their neighborhood despite that. ○

136. Antonio Olivo, “Voters in Pilsen Back Limits on Condo Projects,” *Chicago Tribune*, March 23, 2006.

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