



“What’s Happened to the People?” Gentrification and Racial Segregation in Brooklyn

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Abstract

This article explores the relationship between gentrification and racial segregation in Brooklyn, New York with an emphasis on Black Brooklyn. With more than 2.6 million residents, if Brooklyn was a city, it would be the fourth largest in the USA. Brooklyn is the home of approximately 788,000 Blacks with almost 692,000 of them living in an area that historian Harold X. Connolly has called Black Brooklyn. In recent decades, large portions of Brooklyn, including parts of Black Brooklyn have been gentrifying with sizable numbers of whites moving to traditionally Black neighborhoods. One would anticipate racial segregation to be declining in Brooklyn and especially in the areas that are gentrifying. However, this expectation of racial desegregation appears to be false. While there are declines in indices of racial segregation, these declines are frequently marginal, especially when the increase in the number of whites in Black neighborhoods is taken into consideration. At the same time, gentrification has contributed to the displacement or replacement of thousands of long-term African American residents from their homes. This persistence of racial segregation in a time of gentrification raises many questions about the two processes and the effects that they have on African Americans.

Keywords Gentrification · Racial segregation · Black Brooklyn · African American neighborhoods · New York City

Introduction

In the beginning of the film *My Brooklyn* (2012), Jamel Shabazz, one of the greatest photographers of New York City, shows a number of photographs that he has been taking since the mid-1970s. While he understands that many newcomers have been

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moving to Brooklyn because they need a place to live, his question is “what’s happened to the people?” He is referring to mostly Black but also Latinx people who used to live in parts of Brooklyn, culturally dominate most of its high-profile public spaces, and have been the subject of his photographs (Anderson 2012). To be sure, Brooklyn remains the home of almost 800,000 Blacks. Still, the question remains. “What’s happened to the people” who called Brooklyn their home and have been displaced or replaced because of gentrification? Shabazz is discussing demographic changes that are mostly obvious in an area that I call Northwest Black Brooklyn, though the changes are also consuming areas east of it. In 2000, most census blocks in Northwest Black Brooklyn were majority Black (Fig. 1). By 2018, very few census block groups were majority Black in the same area (Fig. 2). In recent years, Northwest Black Brooklyn has become majority white (Fig. 3) and downtown Brooklyn, one of the most popular destinations for Black New Yorkers in the last 80 years, is now dominated by commercial establishments that have little to do with Black culture.

This article examines gentrification and its relationship to racial segregation. In 2012, Edward Glaeser and Jacob Vigdor published a report entitled *The End of the*

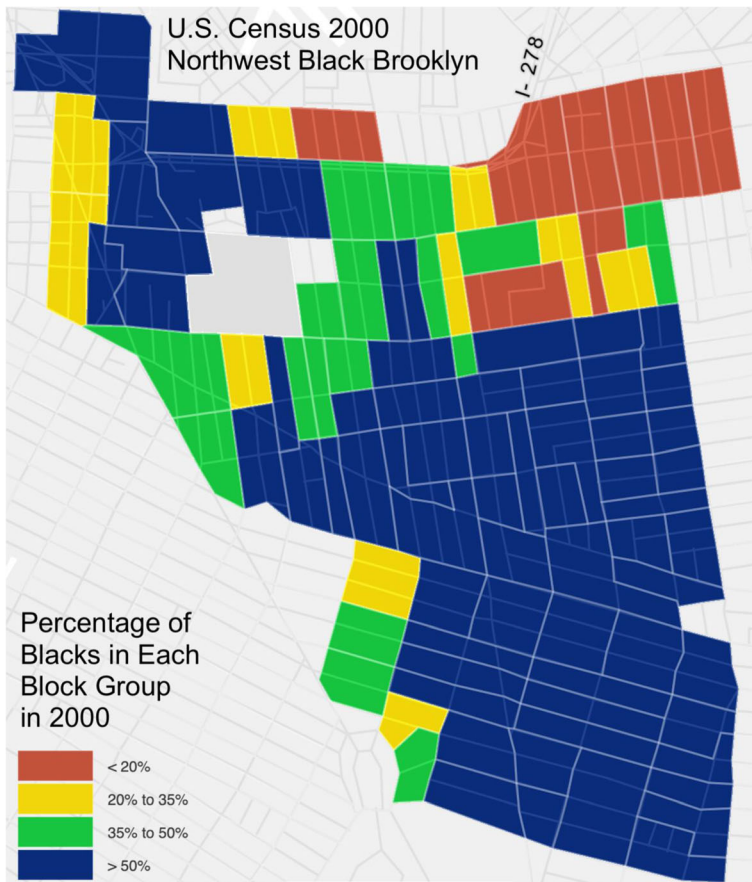


Fig. 1 Map of Northwest Black Brooklyn in 2000, which has been experiencing intense gentrification pressures. Blacks are the majority population of block groups in blue. Source: U.S. Census Survey of 2000

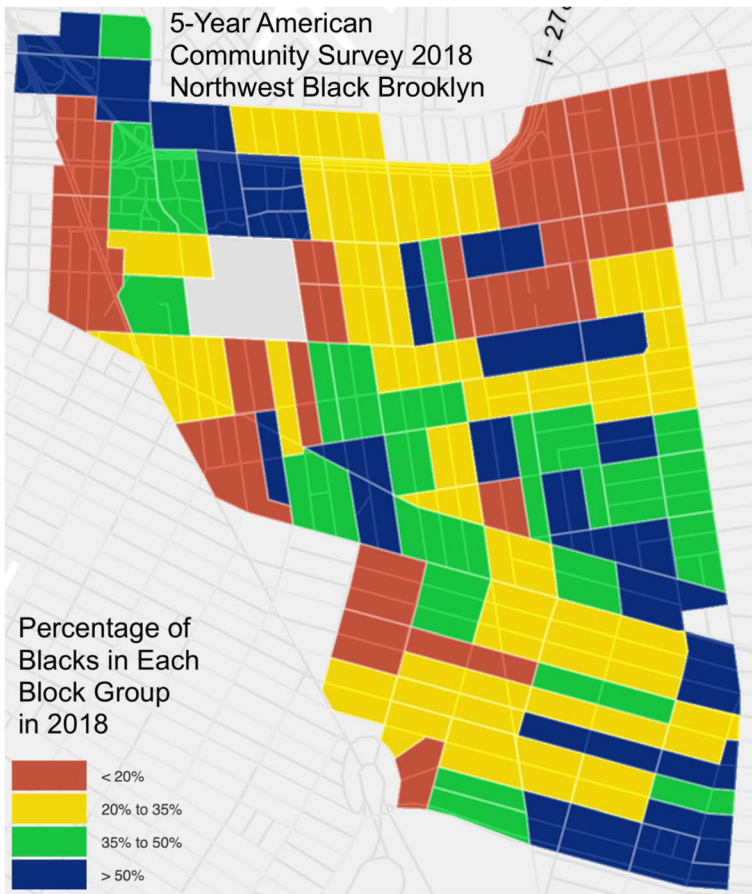


Fig. 2 Map of Northwest Black Brooklyn in 2018. Comparing to Fig. 1, it is obvious that most census tracts are no longer majority Black. Source: American Community Survey of 2018

Segregated Century: Racial Separation in America's Neighborhoods, 1890–2010. Focusing on the racial segregation of Blacks in relation to whites, Glaeser and Vigdor argued that American cities are more integrated than during any other time since 1910, that all-white neighborhoods no longer exist, that gentrification, immigration, and Black suburbanization are undermining historically high degrees of segregation, and that ghetto neighborhoods are becoming more diverse (Glaeser and Vigdor 2012). Presumably, influenced by the presidency of Barack Obama and arguments about the emergence of a post-racial America, Glaeser and Vigdor made an optimistic assessment of racial segregation in the USA and in the process reinforced Eduardo Bonilla-Silva's concept of color blindness (Bonilla-Silva 2006). However, this conclusion about a declining prevalence of racial segregation gives the wrong impression. Racial segregation has declined in some locations and gentrification has contributed to this decline. However, these declines are not as substantial and more importantly the segregated century has not ended, instead, it is getting longer.

Sociologists and other social scientists have concluded that American metropolitan areas remained hyper-segregated for most of the twentieth century with Black residents

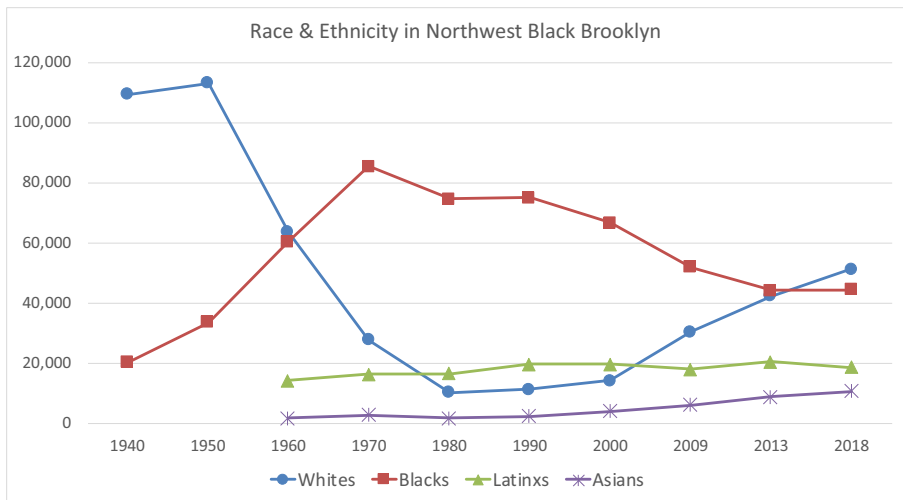


Fig. 3 Race and ethnicity in Northwest Black Brooklyn, 1940–2018. After 2013, the white population became the majority of the area for the first time in almost 60 years. Source: U.S. Census Surveys, 1940–2000, and Five-Year American Community Surveys, 2009–2018

being racially isolated and clustered together in certain geographical parts (Logan 2013; Logan et al. 2004; Massey and Denton 1993). Geographers and other social scientists have discovered that since the 1970s, a few Black neighborhoods experienced gentrification pressures and that the gentrifiers were usually middle-class African Americans (Boyd 2008; Moore 2009; Pattillo 2007). Since 2000, this has changed. Middle- and upper-middle class whites are increasingly relocating to certain African American neighborhoods displacing and replacing Black people (Chronopoulos 2016, 2019; Hyra 2017; Prince 2014).

This article is sensitive to these racial trends and departs from most existing studies that either focus on gentrification or segregation. In that sense, this article combines the concepts of gentrification and racial segregation in Brooklyn and examines them from a historical perspective. Brooklyn (which is part of New York City) has more African American residents than any city in the USA except for New York and Chicago. In recent decades, the western and northern parts of Brooklyn are among the most rapidly gentrifying areas in the USA and this has a ripple effect in Black Brooklyn where majority Black neighborhoods are in the process of becoming majority white. At the same time, the movement of whites to these neighborhoods has contributed to limited patterns of desegregation, showing that the relationship of gentrification and racial segregation is more complex than previously anticipated.

In a political-economic sense, both racial segregation and gentrification convey inequality exhibited in space. Racial segregation signifies the spatial maldistribution of government resources, municipal services, economic opportunities, and life chances. In that sense, the rise of Black Brooklyn allowed white Brooklynites (living elsewhere) to take advantage of a greater share of government benefits, public services, and decent housing. Gentrification implies that more affluent populations replace or displace low- and moderate-income people from their neighborhoods. In Brooklyn, gentrification has recently acquired a racial dynamic as whites are moving to African American

neighborhoods that they had previously abandoned and in the process are undermining the housing chances of Black people.

Project Design and Geography

This article discusses gentrification and racial segregation in Brooklyn with an emphasis on Black Brooklyn (Fig. 4), which is the home of more people of African descent than any other contiguous area in the USA (Fig. 5). Black Brooklyn comprises of the following neighborhoods: Fort Greene, Clinton Hill, Bedford-Stuyvesant, Prospect Heights, Crown Heights, Brownsville, Ocean Hill, East New York, Canarsie, Flatlands, East Flatbush, Flatbush, parts of Bushwick, and parts of downtown Brooklyn. I determine the boundaries of Black Brooklyn by using the following principles. First, the majority of the population in each census tract was Black in the U.S. Census of 2000 (in this case, almost all of the census tracts located in Black Brooklyn were majority Black in 2000). Second, neighborhoods with a majority Black population are included even if not every census tract was majority Black in 2000. Third, the census tracts and the neighborhoods that comprise Black Brooklyn are contiguous.

At the macro-level, when it comes to gentrification and racial segregation, Black Brooklyn is compared to West and North Brooklyn and to the entire borough of Brooklyn. West and North Brooklyn (Fig. 4) is also contiguous and includes many of the neighborhoods near the East River: Greenpoint, Williamsburg, DUMBO, Brooklyn Heights, Boerum Hill, Cobble Hill, Carroll Gardens, Red Hook, Gowanus, and Park Slope. This is one of the most rapidly gentrifying areas not only in Brooklyn (or New York City) but also the USA. Very few African Americans live in West and North Brooklyn (Fig. 6) and every neighborhood in that area is currently majority white even when all other racial and ethnic groups are put together.

At the micro-level, Black Brooklyn is compared to Northwest Black Brooklyn (Figs. 1, 2, and 4) and North Black Brooklyn. Both Northwest and North Black Brooklyn are parts of Black Brooklyn. Moreover, Northwest Black Brooklyn is a part of North Black Brooklyn. Northwest Black Brooklyn comprises of the following areas: Fort Greene, Clinton Hill, west Bedford-Stuyvesant, Prospect Heights, and parts of downtown Brooklyn. This area is experiencing the most extreme gentrification pressures in Black Brooklyn and recently became majority white (Fig. 3). North Black Brooklyn includes Northwest Black Brooklyn, the rest of Bedford Stuyvesant, Crown Heights, and parts of Bushwick (Figs. 7 and 8). Comparing to Northwest Black Brooklyn, North Brooklyn in its entirety is experiencing more moderate levels of gentrification.

My methodology includes spatial analysis accompanied by the reading and making of maps; the reading of primary and secondary writings about these areas of Brooklyn; ethnographic research conducted in various parts of Brooklyn since the late 1990s; and the use of quantitative data in order to demonstrate the patterns of gentrification, racial segregation, and demographic shifts. The statistics presented in this article are derived from the U.S. Census Bureau's decennial surveys of 1900–2000, and the Five-Year American Community Surveys of 2009, 2013, and 2018. Unless otherwise stated, monetary figures that refer to individuals and households are adjusted for inflation to 2015 U.S. dollars using the Consumer Price Index of the Bureau of Labor Statistics.

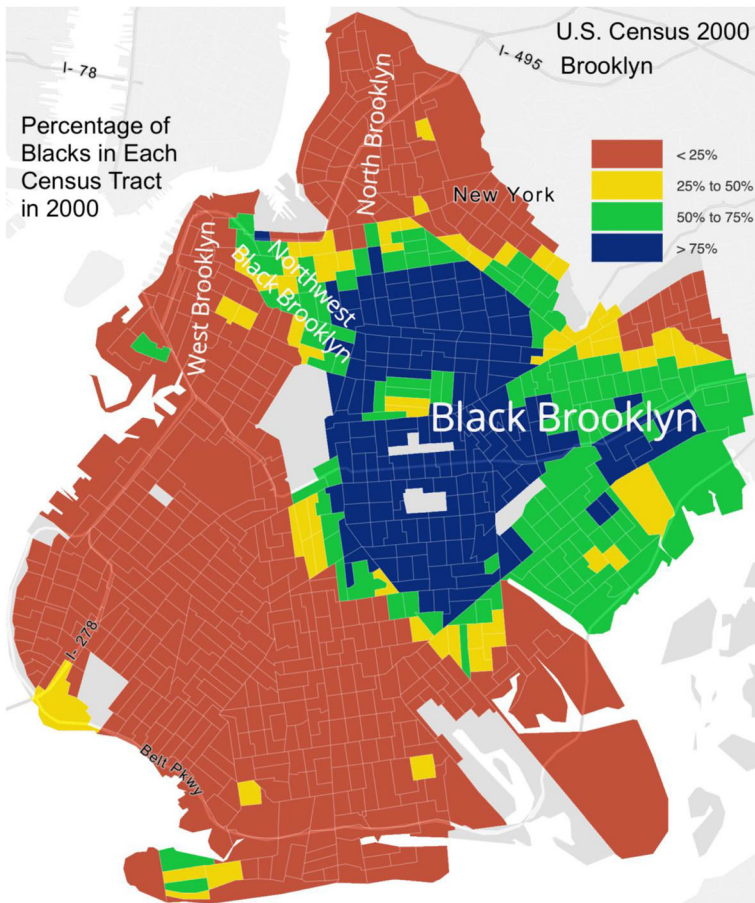


Fig. 4 Map of Brooklyn indicating the percentage of Blacks in each census tract in 2000. Source: U.S. Census Survey, 2000

In this article, I use various ways to measure racial segregation. First, I subdivide Black Brooklyn, Brooklyn, West and North Brooklyn, and Northwest Black Brooklyn into census tracts and measure racial segregation since 1970. Census tracts are the conventional spatial units for such measurements and in that sense, the outcomes can be compared to existing studies about larger areas. Second, I subdivide Black Brooklyn, North Black Brooklyn, Northwest Black Brooklyn, and West and North Brooklyn into block groups, which are smaller areas than census tracts, and measure racial segregation since 2000. Smaller areas provide us with more accurate segregation numbers, as they subdivide space even more. Otherwise, I use three indices to measure racial segregation.

1. The dissimilarity index of each area. This index compares the spatial distribution of Blacks and whites without taking into consideration their numbers. A minority group is segregated, if this spatial distribution is uneven and high numbers indicate high segregation patterns.

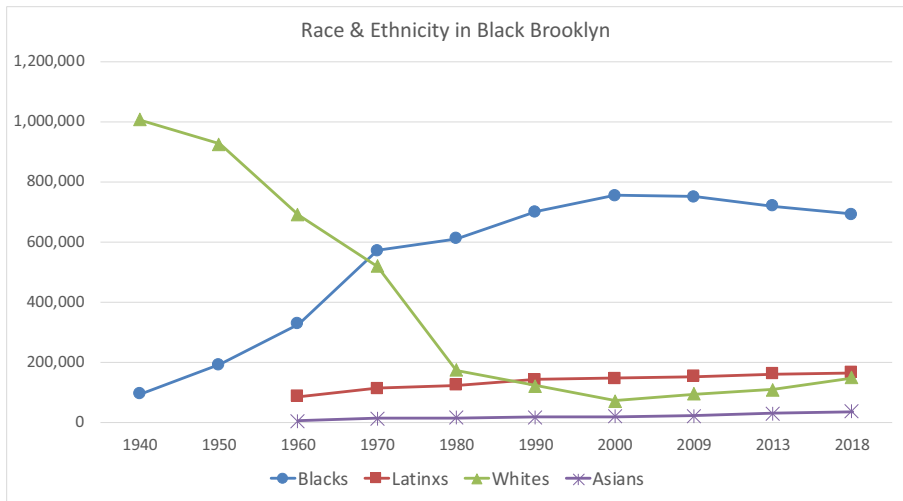


Fig. 5 Race and ethnicity in Black Brooklyn, 1940–2018. Source: U.S. Census Surveys, 1940–2000, and Five-Year American Community Surveys, 2009–2018

2. The isolation index of Blacks in each area, which is the probability that a Black person shares a unit area with a white person (or with a Black person). This index takes into consideration both the spatial distribution of racial groups and their numbers (an important aspect given that the numbers of whites have increased in recent years). High numbers indicate that the Black population of an area is racially isolated.
3. The interaction of whites with Blacks. This index also takes into consideration both the spatial distribution of racial groups and their numbers. Low numbers mean that only a small proportion of whites is living next to Blacks.

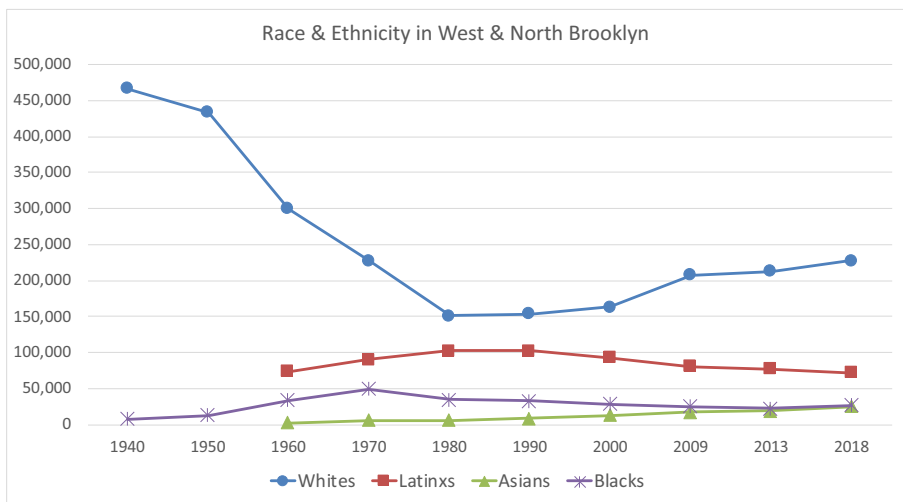


Fig. 6 Race and ethnicity in West and North Brooklyn, 1940–2018. Source: U.S. Census Surveys, 1940–2000, and Five-Year American Community Surveys, 2009–2018

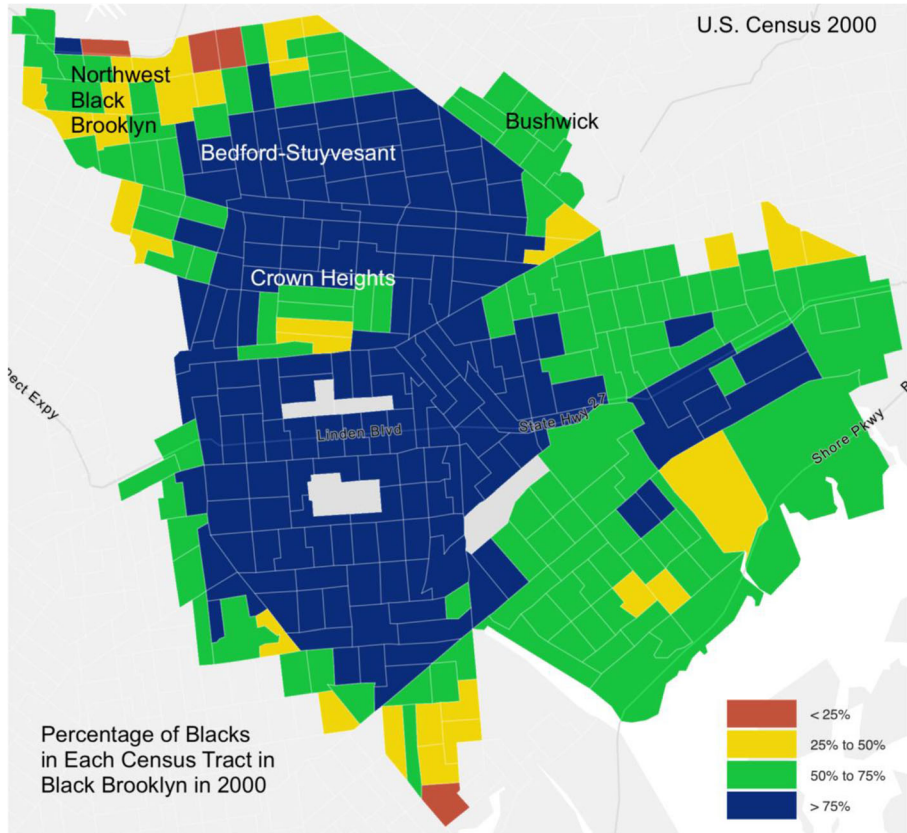


Fig. 7 Map of Black Brooklyn indicating the percentage of Blacks in each census tract in 2000. Source: U.S. Census Survey, 2000

Since the project has a historical dimension, it is the trends that offer us explanations over what happens when an area gentrifies. In parts of Brooklyn, gentrification began in the 1960s, though it became identifiable in the 1970s and intensified considerably from the 1980s onward. A sizable influx of white gentrifiers in Black Brooklyn began in 2000.

The Making of Black Brooklyn

The Black population of New York City grew rapidly in the twentieth century and up until the 1950s, the majority of this population lived in Manhattan (Fig. 9). Harlem became the neighborhood where most Black New Yorkers lived and this is when Harlem was imagined as a symbol of Black life and the capital of Black America (Fearnley and Matlin 2019). Harold X. Connolly (1977) argues that by 1930 “although Brooklyn had no contiguous compacted ghetto such as existed in Harlem or South Side Chicago, the demographic distribution of blacks pointed toward the possible evolution of Central Brooklyn into the primary place for residence for that borough’s black population.” Craig Steven Wilder (2000) shows how after 1930 the segregation of

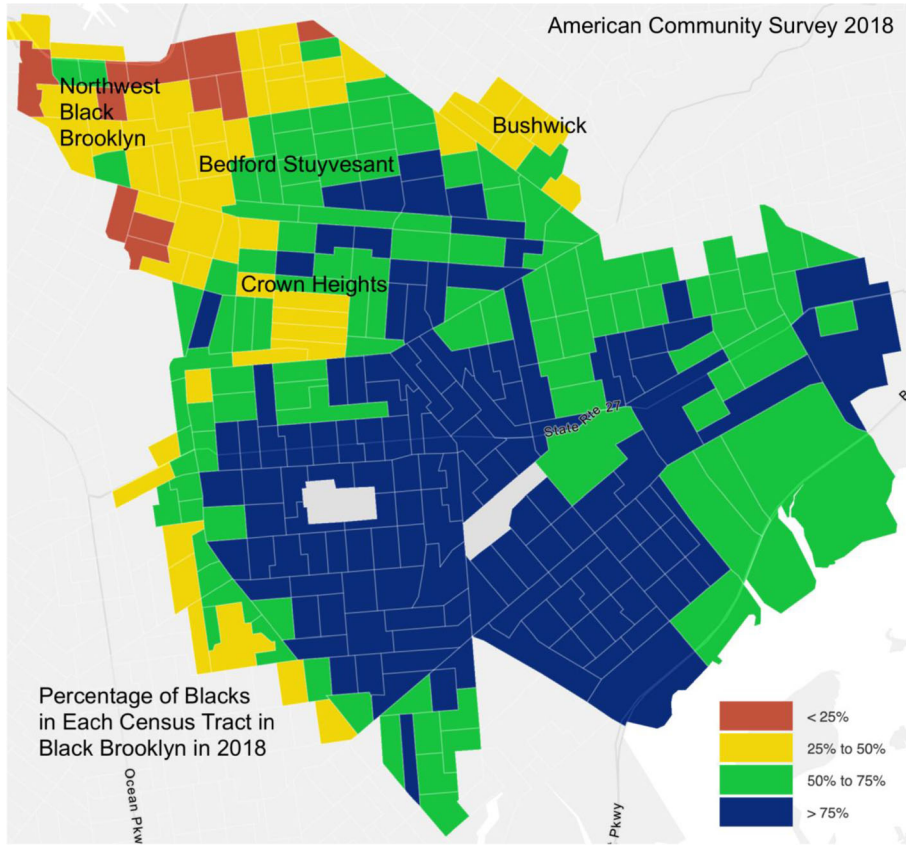


Fig. 8 Map of Black Brooklyn indicating the percentage of Blacks in each census tract in 2018. Source: American Community Survey, 2018

Blacks crystalized; by 1945 most Black Brooklynites lived in Central Brooklyn and by 1953, a “vast black ghetto stretched across Brooklyn and was becoming the largest concentration of its kind.” Wilder contends that it was that the policies of the Home Owners’ Loan Corporation (HOLC) that contributed to this racial segregation of Blacks in Brooklyn. The HOLC was a New Deal entity that was expected to stabilize the mortgage market, so that foreclosures and bank failures could be avoided. The HOLC under the advice of real estate interests and banks, graded and color-coded neighborhoods according to desirability and produced maps (Hillier 2003). Although many neighborhood standards were taken into consideration for the grading, the criteria were not scientific and race, ethnicity, religion, and immigration status played an important role. In the end, neighborhoods that received the worse grade “D” were color-coded red. This is where the term redlining originated. Redlined neighborhoods were generally excluded from the mortgage market and properties in these areas were devalued (Wilder 2000). As early as 1940, more than 90,000 out of almost 110,000 Blacks in Brooklyn lived in a small redlined portion of what became known as Black Brooklyn (Figs. 5 and 10). This small portion was the neighborhood of Bedford-Stuyvesant and areas around it (Federal Home Loan Bank Record 1935).

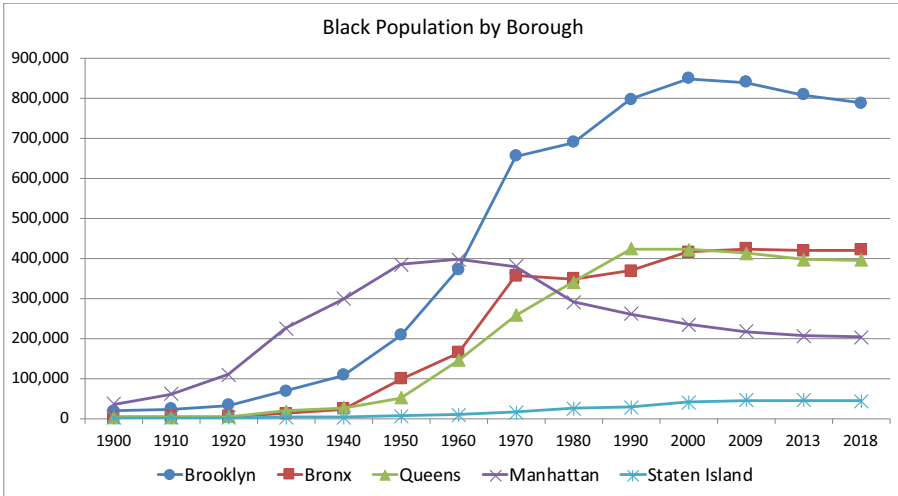


Fig. 9 Black population in each borough of New York City, 1900–2018. Source: U.S. Census Surveys, 1900–2000, and Five-Year American Community Surveys, 2009–2018

Between 1940 and 2000, the white population of Brooklyn declined by 67%; the Black population increased by 682.9% (Fig. 10). In Black Brooklyn, the number of whites went from 1,006,716 in 1940 to 69,685 in 2000; the number of Blacks increased from 94,032 in 1940 to 755,156 in 2000 (Fig. 5). Almost 90% of Black Brooklynites have lived in Black Brooklyn for more than half a century (Fig. 11). Although this geographical concentration of Black people was obvious by 1940, it continued and achieved a larger scale in the postwar period. And these demographic trends were hardly the natural outcome of a large number of Southern Blacks moving to Black Brooklyn and a large number of whites moving out of Black Brooklyn.

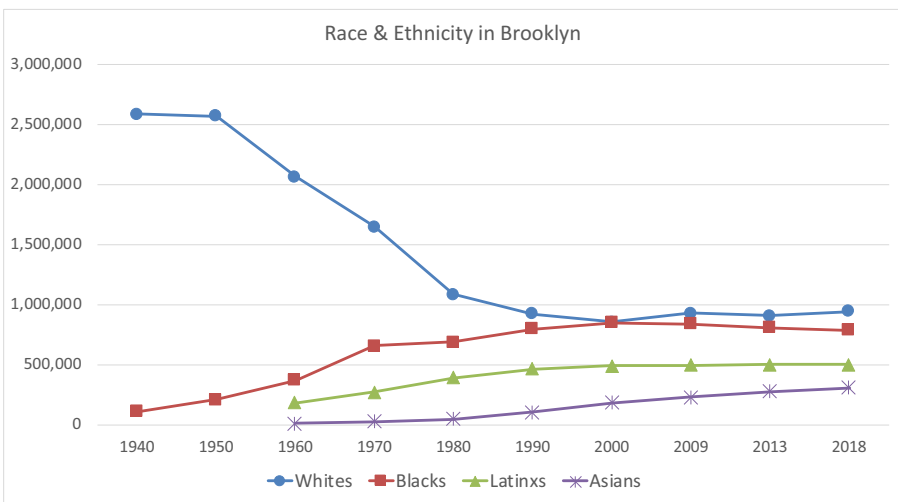


Fig. 10 Race and ethnicity in Brooklyn, 1940–2018. Source: U.S. Census Surveys, 1940–2000, and Five-Year American Community Surveys, 2009–2018

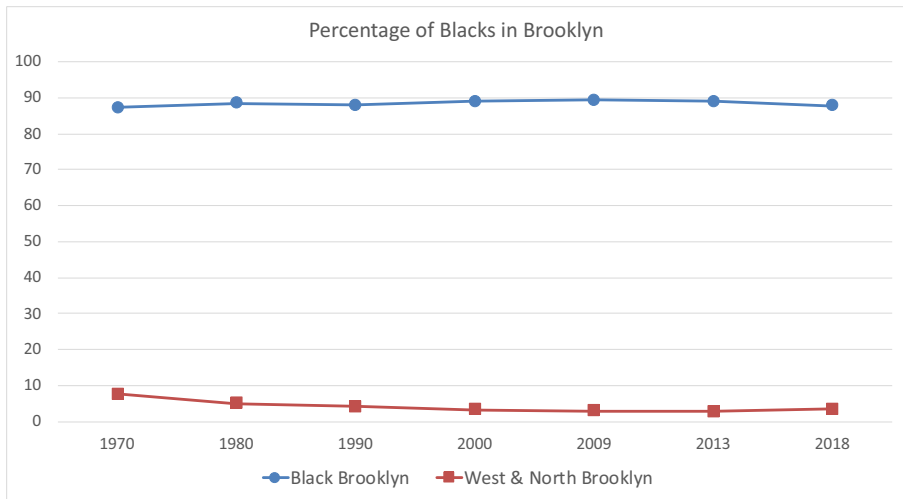


Fig. 11 Percentage of Blacks in Brooklyn. There is also a very small percentage of Blacks living in other parts of Brooklyn. Source: U.S. Census Surveys, 1970–2000, and Five-Year American Community Surveys, 2009–2018

Racial segregation crystalized and intensified in Brooklyn for a number of interrelated reasons. Whites kept on moving out from undesirable neighborhoods that had originally received the worst grades from the HOLC, because holding on to devalued properties in continuously declining neighborhoods made little economic sense; instead moving to a more desirable part of Brooklyn or the suburbs meant that they could obtain government-guaranteed mortgages in neighborhoods where property values were increasing. Moreover, whites were not prepared to risk the downgrading of their areas by accepting the settlement of Blacks and other minorities and tried everything to make existing non-white residents move away (Connolly 1977; Pritchett 2002; Wilder 2000). Finally, white Brooklynites became increasingly engaged in the practice of neighborhood defense against Black and Latinx populations.

Neighborhood defense included real estate agents and landlords who resorted to unofficial discrimination and refused to rent or sell housing to minority populations; financial institutions that denied mortgages and other loans to minority populations trying to relocate or open a business in a white neighborhood; white neighborhood residents who verbally and physically harassed minority residents who managed to rent or buy a property or youths who attacked minorities attending schools or using the public spaces of white neighborhoods; and the police that hassled minorities because they were frequenting white neighborhoods. In a general sense, neighborhood defense was an effort to maintain the racial exclusivity of white neighborhoods during a period of political mobilizations by African Americans demanding equality. It resulted in the hoarding of benefits and resources by white populations through the denunciation of Black advancement and the embrace of political entrepreneurs from the right (C. Anderson 2016; Delmont 2016; Hannah-Jones 2012; Perlstein 2008).

In Brooklyn, neighborhood defense succeeded in some neighborhoods and failed in others; still, the extreme racial segregation that defines Brooklyn has much to do with neighborhood defense. This practice did not work almost at all in Bedford Stuyvesant

and areas around it. As African Americans encountered housing shortages and racial barriers, they moved to the limited number of areas that they could. By the late 1940s, African Americans comprised the majority in downtown Brooklyn, Fort Greene, Clinton Hill, Prospect Heights, Bedford Stuyvesant, and Crown Heights (Connolly 1977; Pritchett 2002; Woodsworth 2016).

Public policies also contributed to the eventual racial segregation of neighborhoods and Brownsville represents such a case. According to Pritchett (2002), the Blacks and whites (mostly Jews) of Brownsville were determined to avoid racial conflict and tried to improve their community. As African Americans lived in the worst housing in Brownsville, local activists lobbied for public housing in the area, though they wanted this housing to be integrated. While this was the case when the Brownsville Houses opened in 1948, Robert Moses who was in charge of slum clearance and the New York City Housing Authority (NYCHA) had other plans. According to Joel Schwartz (1993), under Moses, subsidized housing projects had racial overtones. Public housing projects accepted only white or Black tenants, depending on whether they were built in white or Black neighborhoods (Schwartz 1993). In Manhattan and especially south of Harlem, with his slum clearance projects, Moses removed Black and Latinx populations and built housing for mostly white middle-income people (Chronopoulos 2011, 2014a; Schwartz 1993; Zipp 2010). Not only was there no effort to integrate housing but also, once Moses and his staff realized that opposition to public housing in white Catholic areas could lead to a political backlash, they focused on constructing such housing in Black, Latinx, and Jewish areas (Schwartz 1993). Brownsville was viewed as a racially changing area from white to Black and the removal of Blacks from Manhattan and other areas made this view a self-fulfilled prophesy. Brownsville became one of the few places in New York where Blacks could move. Moses built even more public housing projects in Brownsville, which became one of the neighborhoods with the largest concentration of public housing in the USA. Gradually, Brownsville became predominantly African American (Pritchett 2002). Brownsville became one of many minority neighborhoods in New York to be neglected and suffer from the maldistribution of municipal services (Chronopoulos 2014b).

Most Brooklyn neighborhoods that eventually became majority Black had two sections. The first section was smaller, comprised of decrepit housing, and became the home of minorities because whites abandoned it. The second section was occupied by whites, usually comprised of better housing, and was often a site of white neighborhood defense. This was the case in East New York and East Flatbush. For example, in East New York, the industrial quadrant located in the northwest part of the neighborhood was the first to be occupied by Blacks and Puerto Ricans. Whites in East New York did not worry about this trend because the industrial quadrant was isolated and quite undesirable; it was filled with deteriorated housing, empty lots, junkyards, automotive body yards, and industry. The rest of East New York changed racially not because of the construction of public housing as in Brownsville, but because of predatory real estate practices. In 1960, East New York's population was overwhelmingly white. By 1966, it was overwhelmingly Black. According to Thabit (2003), East New York turned from white to Black in only 6 years because about 200 real estate firms resorted to blockbusting: "'Ripe' blocks were flooded with scare literature; brokers and speculators paraded black families up and down the streets to frighten whites into selling. Middle-income minority families bought houses at inflated

prices during the early 1960s” (Thabit 2003). Something similar happened in East Flatbush which became almost exclusively Black in the 1960s. The northeastern part of East Flatbush having the worst housing and located adjacent to Bedford-Stuyvesant, Crown Heights, and Brownsville changed first. Then blockbusting motivated the process of racial transition in the rest of the neighborhood (Rieder 1985; Thabit 2003). White neighborhood defense in East New York and East Flatbush did not work as well. By the mid-1970s, most of Black Brooklyn (Fig. 7) was in existence.

African Americans were unable to move in large numbers to the rest of Brooklyn. Large sections of North Brooklyn, which comprise of the neighborhoods of Williamsburg and Greenpoint, remained white because of neighborhood defense. To be sure, this did not work in the Southside and other southern parts of Williamsburg or in the northern parts of Greenpoint, but it worked in the core area of central Greenpoint and the Northside of Williamsburg (Chronopoulos 2013). In most of West Brooklyn, neighborhood defense was not as extreme, though in some sections such as Carroll Gardens, this occurred. Brooklyn Heights remained white because it was an affluent area, otherwise, in some cases, Black Brooklyn extended all the way to Brooklyn Heights. In southern and southwestern Brooklyn, which comprises of neighborhoods such as Bay Ridge, Bensonhurst, Sheepshead Bay, Gravesend, lower Flatbush, and Canarsie, neighborhood defense was at its most extreme. White Brooklynites increasingly became involved in projects that sought to reassert racial domination and spatial separation. Rieder (1985) in his ethnographic study about Canarsie discusses how racial attitudes and neighborhood defense kept the area majority white. This is notable for an area located right next to East New York, Brownsville, and East Flatbush. Even though Canarsie became majority Black in the 1990s, the rest of southern and southwestern Brooklyn (south and west of Canarsie) remained overwhelmingly white and this reveals the extent of neighborhood defense (U.S. Census Surveys of 2000 and 2010).

By 1980, most whites had abandoned Black Brooklyn (Fig. 5) and had either relocated to other parts of the borough (Fig. 4) or moved out of Brooklyn entirely (Fig. 10). The overwhelming majority of middle-class African Americans stayed in Black Brooklyn. This continued to be the case, even as their numbers and their incomes increased.

The Gentrification of Black Brooklyn

Black gentrification became an identifiable process in the 1970s as the African American middle class grew substantially (Landry 1987). Facing discrimination from financial institutions and real estate agencies and wanting to rebuild historic Black neighborhoods, middle-class African Americans moved in large numbers to low-income areas from the 1970s onward (Boyd 2008; Chronopoulos 2016, 2019; Pattillo 2007, 2013). These middle-class populations moved to various parts of Black Brooklyn (Fig. 12). For example, in the map that appears in Fig. 12, there are many small middle-class areas surrounded by low-income areas. There are also two larger middle-class areas. The first is Northwest Black Brooklyn (located in the far northwest of Fig. 12). The second and largest one is south; as Black Brooklyn grew southward, many middle-class households moved there. When it comes to people performing

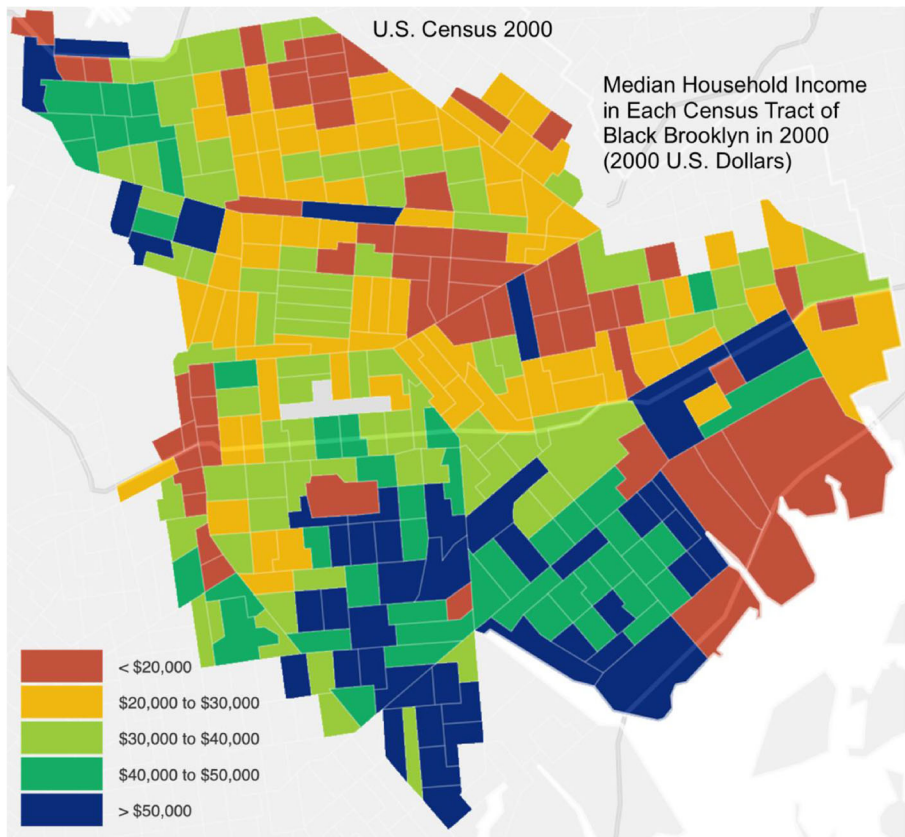


Fig. 12 Median household income in each census tract of Black Brooklyn in 2000. The monetary figures are those of 2000 and are not adjusted for inflation (\$1 in 2000 is approximately \$1.49 in 2020). Source: U.S. Census Bureau Survey of 2000

managerial and professional specialty occupations, which pay the most, the percentages in Black Brooklyn increased substantially. In Northwest Black Brooklyn between 1980 and 2000, the percentages of these people doubled from 21.2 to 42.2%. In Black Brooklyn at large, they also increased and amounted to 27.4% of the working population by 2000 (Fig. 13). If one adds office and sales occupations, which are usually lower middle class, to the professionals and managers, by 2000, 69.2% of working people in West Black Brooklyn and 56% of working people in Black Brooklyn were lower middle class or above (U.S. Census Survey of 2000).

Although urban neighborhoods in the USA have been gentrifying since the 1960s, whites usually gentrified white or Latinx neighborhoods. Whites began to move in larger numbers to some Black neighborhoods in the 1990s, though this movement accelerated in the twenty-first century. In Northwest Black Brooklyn, whites became the numerical majority after 2013 (Figs. 1, 2, and 3). The numbers of whites also more than doubled in Black Brooklyn between 2000 and 2018 (Fig. 5). The area of Black Brooklyn where whites moved the most is North Black Brooklyn (the neighborhood of Crown Heights and north in Figs. 7 and 8). In that sense, the Black population of Black Brooklyn shifted south and east (Figs. 7 and 8).

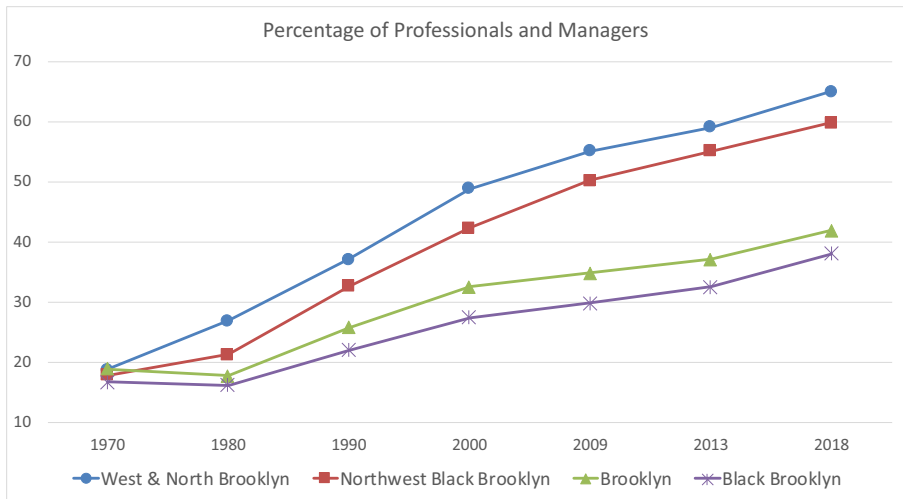


Fig. 13 Percentage of people performing managerial and professional specialty occupations. Source: Source: U.S. Census Surveys, 1970–2000, and Five-Year American Community Surveys, 2009–2018

There are many reasons for the movement of whites to Black Brooklyn. Northwest Black Brooklyn was always a desirable area, a part of Brownstone Brooklyn, adjacent to downtown Brooklyn, and close to many subway lines. Downtown Brooklyn and its environs also became the focus of transnational investment with thousands of luxury condominiums being built in the area (Chronopoulos 2016). In a general sense, the movement of whites to parts of Black Brooklyn epitomizes the back-to-the-city movement (Hyra 2015), the dynamic nature of New York’s economy, the desire to live near “choice locations,” a perception that New York is safer and more orderly (Chronopoulos 2020), and an acceptance of racial diversity by younger whites. There is also a gentrification ripple effect that many young whites are experiencing in Brooklyn. As the rents of North Brooklyn (neighborhoods such as Williamsburg and Greenpoint) increased, many whites began to move to East Williamsburg and Bushwick. From there, some whites moved to the central and eastern parts of Bedford-Stuyvesant. Similarly, as West Brooklyn and Northwest Black Brooklyn became less affordable, many whites moved eastward into Bedford-Stuyvesant and Crown Heights (they also moved south into Sunset Park, though this article does not examine that area). When I conducted interviews in 2011, many whites viewed their residence in the central and eastern parts of Bedford-Stuyvesant as temporary and were planning to move somewhere more north or more west. They cited the lack of subway lines for their outlook, though they also desired the cultural infrastructure that other locations provided. It is doubtful that this is still the case as the number of whites keeps on increasing in North Black Brooklyn. White gentrifiers are not as interested in moving to the southern and eastern parts of Black Brooklyn, some of which are more suburban and in general far from the “choice neighborhoods” of Brooklyn or Manhattan.

When Jamel Shabazz was asking the question “what’s happened to the people” in the 2012 film *My Brooklyn*, he was referring to the racial changes that this article has examined in Black Brooklyn; these changes have to do with gentrification pressures, which no matter how they can be interpreted are undermining the likelihood of African

Americans living there. Low-income households are the ones suffering the most from gentrification. When we consider households earning less than \$25,000 per year (adjusted for inflation to constant 2015 figures), their percentages have declined in all the areas explored in this article (Fig. 14). The worst decline is in Northwest Black Brooklyn where the percentage of these households has declined from 46.4 in 1980 to 22.8% in 2018. In Black Brooklyn, the decline is not as extreme; in 1980, 39.3% of households made less than \$25,000 each year while in 2018 this figure had declined to 30.2%. There are two reasons for this: first, many areas of Black Brooklyn are still not experiencing extreme gentrification pressures and second, the city government rebuilt portions of New York including Black Brooklyn after 1985 and constructed subsidized housing for low- and moderate-income people (Chronopoulos 2017). Even then, the numbers of Black people in Northwest and North Black Brooklyn are precipitously declining.

Racial Segregation in Brooklyn

The white population of Brooklyn declined between 1940 and 2000 (Fig. 10). The most substantial decline was from 1950 to 1980. The Black population increased steadily from 1940 to 2000. In 2000, the numbers of whites were almost equal to the numbers of Blacks, though in the years that followed, the numbers of whites increased and the number of Blacks declined. These trends in the numbers of whites and Blacks in Brooklyn also occurred in Black Brooklyn (Fig. 5), though the numbers of Blacks and whites did not reach parity in 2000 (the last time that such parity existed in Black Brooklyn was in the 1960s).

While percentages and actual numbers are not measures of racial segregation, the trends are important when it comes to gentrification. In Brooklyn areas where gentrification has a longer time span and is more intense, the number of whites stabilized and

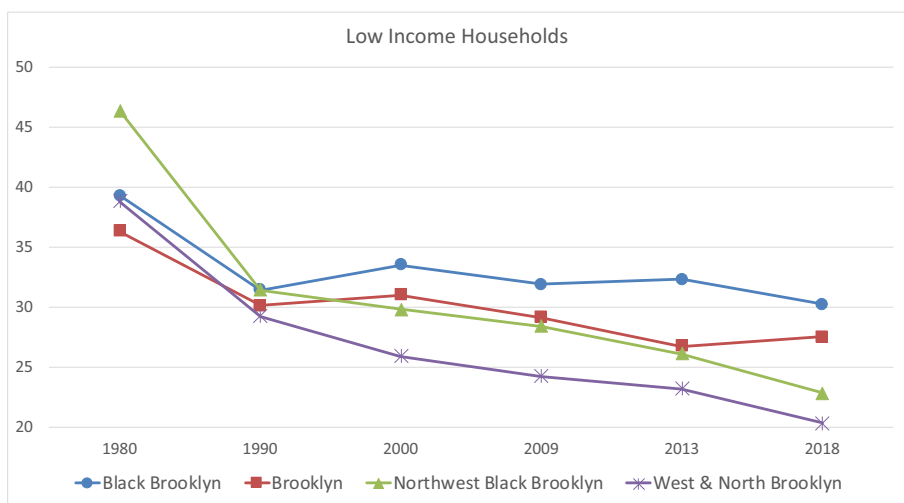


Fig. 14 Percentage of households earning \$25,000 per year or less (adjusted to 2015 U.S. dollars). Source: U.S. Census Surveys, 1980–2000, and Five-Year American Community Surveys, 2009–2018

slightly increased from 1980 to 2000 and increased even more substantially after 2000 (Figs. 3 and 6). This has been the case in both majority white and majority Black areas. Moreover, in majority Black areas experiencing intense gentrification, the number of Blacks has declined. If we consider North Black Brooklyn, a similar trend has occurred. From 1980 to 2000, the number of whites slightly increased while the number of Blacks remained almost the same (U.S. Census Survey, 1980–2000). From 2000 to 2018, the number of whites increased substantially and the number of Blacks declined (U.S. Census Survey, 2000 and American Community Survey, 2009–2018). Some parts of North Black Brooklyn (such as Northwest Black Brooklyn) are experiencing intense gentrification pressures while most of North Black Brooklyn is experiencing more moderate gentrification pressures. Even then, the median household incomes of whites are significantly higher than those of Blacks and Latinxs (Fig. 15) and after all gentrification denotes the replacement or displacement of existing residents by more affluent newcomers.

As the number of whites has increased in parts of Black Brooklyn, the expectation is that racial segregation has declined. Looking at the dissimilarity index, which compares the spatial distribution of Blacks and whites without taking into consideration their numbers, we notice some declines since 1990 (Fig. 16). For example, in Northwest Black Brooklyn, the index has declined from 44.4 in 2000 to 35.1 in 2018. This means that 35.1% of the area's Black (or white) residents would have to move in order to achieve complete desegregation. The figures are higher elsewhere. For example, in West and North Brooklyn where there are very few African Americans residing, the dissimilarity index is 52.7. In Brooklyn as a whole, the dissimilarity index is 77.4.

If we take into consideration, the block groups rather than the census tracts of the areas, the declines are more modest. In Northwest Black Brooklyn, the dissimilarity index went from 50.5 in 2000 to 46.3 in 2018. The decline is bigger in North Black Brooklyn, from 70.9 in 2000 to 50.1 in 2018, but remains persistently high in West and North Brooklyn at 63.3 (Fig. 17).

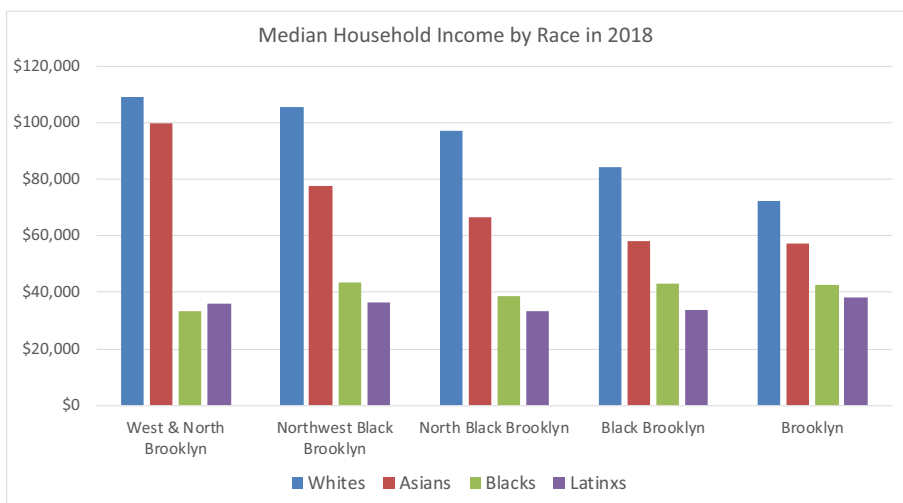


Fig. 15 Median household income based on the race and ethnicity of the householder(s) in 2018 (adjusted to 2015 U.S. dollars). Source: Five-Year American Community Survey, 2018

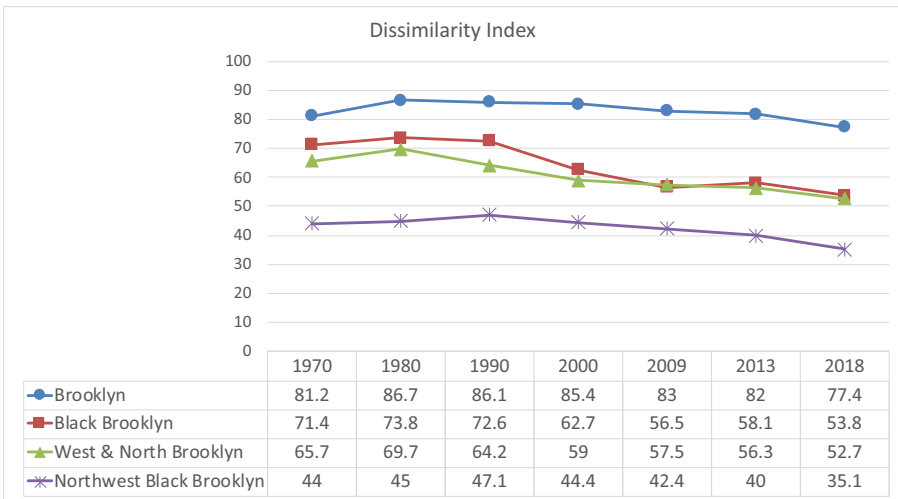


Fig. 16 Dissimilarity index at the census tract level, 1970–2018. Source: U.S. Census Surveys, 1970–2000, and Five-Year American Community Surveys, 2009–2018

The isolation index of Blacks in relation to whites in census tracts has also declined, mainly because the number of whites has increased and the number of Blacks has declined. Between 2000 and 2018, the isolation index declined from 93.5 to 87.3 in Black Brooklyn, from 87.7 to 79.5 in Brooklyn, from 49.6 to 39.5 in West and North Brooklyn, and from 85.1 to 56.9 in Northwest Black Brooklyn (Fig. 18). Obviously, the figures of Brooklyn and Black Brooklyn are still very high. The biggest decline occurred in Northwest Black Brooklyn because many whites moved to the area. Blacks in this area are still experiencing isolation, though to a much lesser degree than 18 years ago.

When we consider the isolation index of Blacks in relation to whites in the block groups of each area, the changes are more tamed. In Black Brooklyn, the isolation

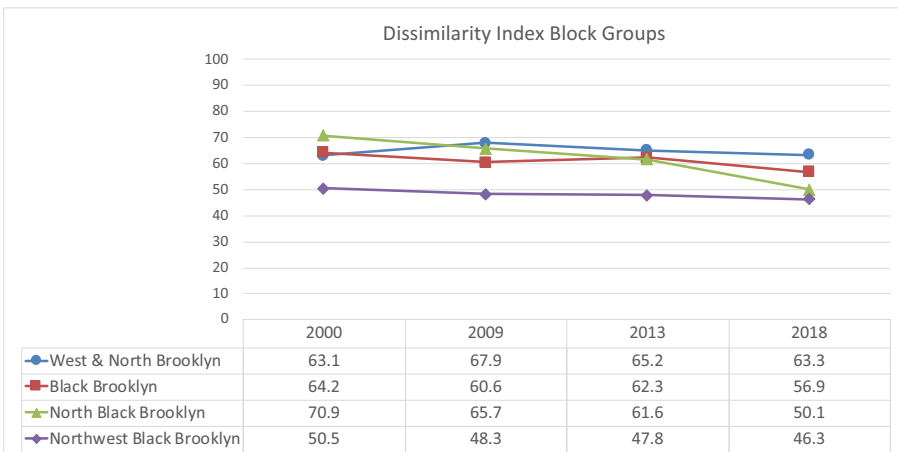


Fig. 17 Dissimilarity index at the block group level, 2000–2018. Source: U.S. Census Survey, 2000, and Five-Year American Community Surveys, 2009–2018

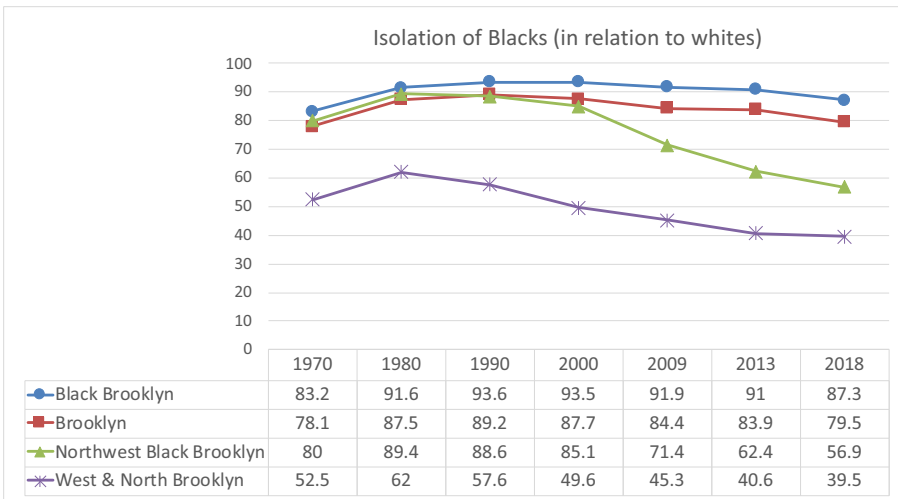


Fig. 18 Isolation index of Blacks (in relation to whites) at the census tract level, 1970–2018. Source: U.S. Census Surveys, 1970–2000, and Five-Year American Community Surveys, 2009–2018

index declined from 92 in 2000 to 85.7 in 2018, meaning that Blacks who live there are still isolated from whites (Fig. 19). In North Black Brooklyn, Black isolation declined from 94.3 in 2000 to 79 in 2018. In West and North Brooklyn, the decline was more modest from 55 in 2000 to 50.8 in 2018. This is actually a high figure given that the number of Blacks living in West and North Brooklyn is very small (Fig. 6). Again, the biggest decline in the isolation index of Blacks in relation to whites is in Northwest Black Brooklyn where it went from 86.2 in 2000 to 63.2 in 2018. Given that the number of whites is now higher than the number of Blacks in this area, the 63.2 isolation figure for Blacks is high.

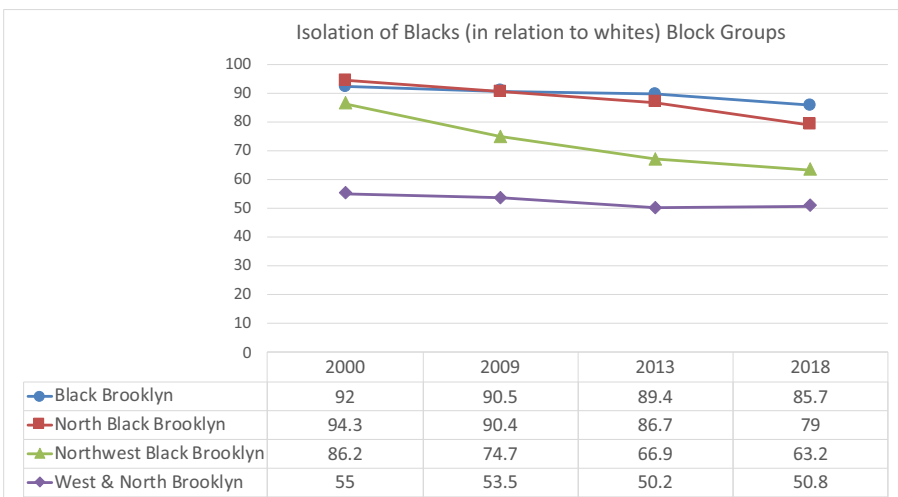


Fig. 19 Isolation index at the block group level of Blacks in relation to whites, 2000–2018. Source: U.S. Census Survey, 2000, and Five-Year American Community Surveys, 2009–2018

The changes in the interaction index of whites with Blacks are not promising. The interaction index takes into consideration both the spatial distribution of racial groups and their numbers, and low numbers indicate that only a small proportion of whites is living next to Blacks. In Black Brooklyn, the interaction index improved from 1970 to 2000 but declined from 2000 to 2018. Still, the figure of 59.5 is not as problematic as those of Brooklyn as well as West and North Brooklyn where the interaction index of whites with Blacks is minimal (Fig. 20). The trend in Northwest Black Brooklyn is actually the most challenging to the idea of racial desegregation, since it went from 70.4 in 2000 to 37.3 in 2018. Since the numbers of whites are currently slightly higher from those of Blacks, this declining proportion of whites living next to Blacks indicates that racial segregation is persisting and that white newcomers continue to move to white sections.

When we look at the white-Black interaction index in the block groups of each area, the figures are even lower (Fig. 21). In Northwest Black Brooklyn, it declined from 65.3 in 2000 to 31.9 in 2018. In West and North Brooklyn, the interaction index of whites with Blacks is extremely low while in Black Brooklyn, the interaction index is currently 54.3. This figure is not as troublesome by itself, except that the number of whites is still quite small in Black Brooklyn and if the area was residentially less segregated, the interaction index would be higher.

Overall, in areas encountering intense gentrification, the dissimilarity index has declined, though these declines are moderate, especially given how the number of whites has increased substantially and sections of these areas have been spatially remade. The isolation index of Blacks in relation to whites has declined in gentrifying areas, though it still remains high, especially after the large influx of whites. Finally, the declining figures of the interaction index of whites and Blacks make the impression that Brooklyn is desegregating questionable.



Fig. 20 Interaction index of whites with Blacks at the census tract level, 1970–2018. Source: U.S. Census Surveys, 1970–2000, and Five-Year American Community Surveys, 2009–2018

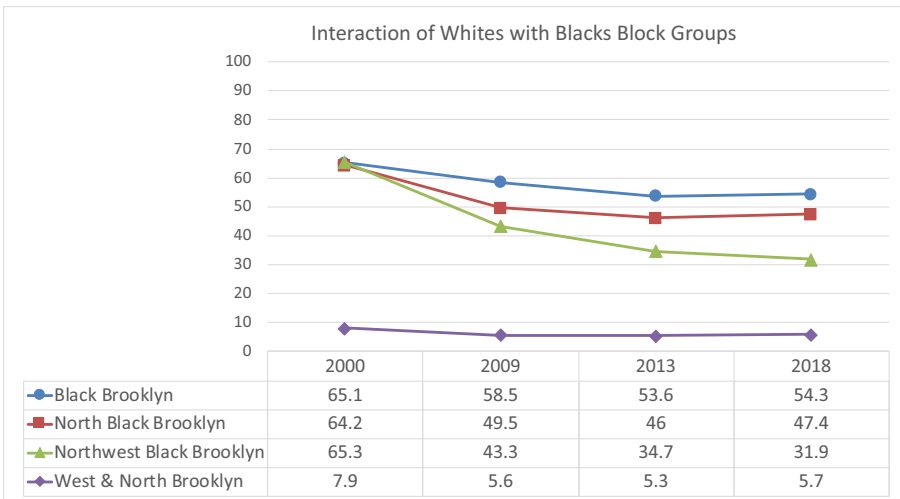


Fig. 21 Interaction index of whites with Blacks at the block group level, 2000–2018. Source: U.S. Census Survey, 2000, and Five-Year American Community Surveys, 2009–2018

Conclusion

In 2011, I spent 4 months conducting ethnographic research in Bedford Stuyvesant. In the beginning, this research was mostly about the relationship between broken windows policing and stop and frisk. Although I worked in various parts of Bed-Stuy, I regularly conducted participant-observation research in the area between Gates Avenue and DeKalb Avenue on Malcolm X Boulevard. Each evening I saw a large group of police officers walking from the police precinct on Ralph Avenue toward Malcolm X Boulevard. Eventually, these police officers would separate into small groups and stop, question, and frisk people in the street. Black residents of the area were upset about these police practices based on racial profiling and had their stories of injustice. However, so many of them also wanted to talk about the gentrification of the area by whites and the likelihood that so many African Americans would be displaced from the area. At the time, I thought that these concerns were exaggerated, because there were very few whites in the eastern parts of Bedford-Stuyvesant and their permanent existence there appeared tenuous (Ethnographic Research 2011).

It did not take long for me to realize that the numbers of white gentrifiers in North Black Brooklyn was actually going to increase and that the displacement or replacement of existing Black residents was already happening. Between 2000 and 2018, the entire borough of Brooklyn lost 60,878 Black residents. North Black Brooklyn lost 61,886 Black residents. Of course, this does not mean that the African Americans from North Black Brooklyn left the borough, but it would also be an exaggeration to claim that Black people are not being displaced or replaced from North Black Brooklyn. Between 2000 and 2018, 20% of people of African descent left North Black Brooklyn. One could argue that these changes are due to the rise in the numbers of Latinxs. However, in North Black Brooklyn, the number of Latinx residents from 2000 to 2018 increased by 11,928 individuals. The number of whites increased by 79,895. Moreover, the median household income of whites in 2018 was more than twice the income of

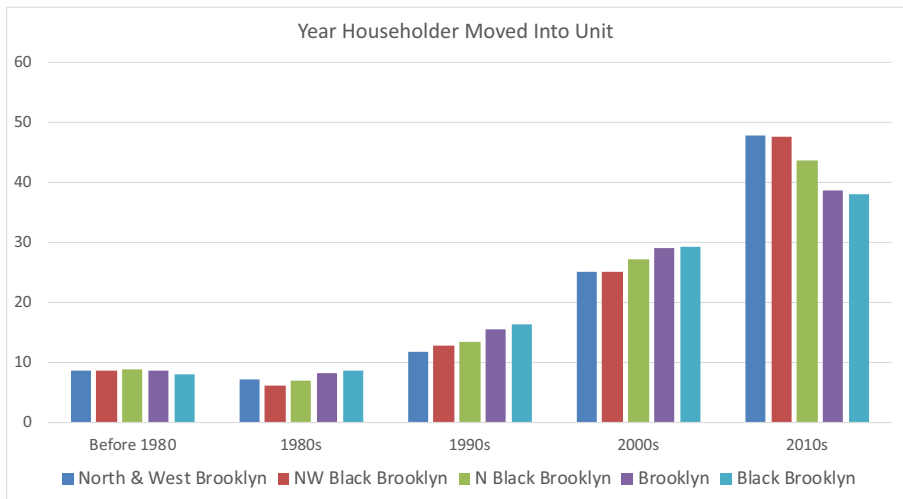


Fig. 22 Percentages of householders moving into housing units by decade (this figure includes newly built housing units). Source: Five-Year American Community Survey, 2017

Blacks or Latinxs (Fig. 15). The median household income of Asians was also high, though the number of Asians in this area is still very low.

When it comes to racial segregation, the expectation is that the large influx of whites has contributed to diversity. However, in Northwest Black Brooklyn, an area experiencing intense gentrification, and where the number of whites surpassed that of Blacks after 2013, the declines in segregation are not as remarkable and the interaction index of whites with Blacks is getting too low for an area where the numbers of whites and Blacks are not too apart from each other.

Segregation indices are relational and measures of Brooklyn in its entirety display the challenge of desegregation. Almost 90% of Black Brooklynites reside in Black Brooklyn (Fig. 11) and this has not changed for more than 50 years. Moreover, the dissimilarity index of Brooklyn is 77.4 (Fig. 16). This means that 77.4% of Blacks (or whites) would have to move in order to achieve complete desegregation. Large numbers of whites may be moving to Black neighborhoods, but this does not translate to racial desegregation.

One could also argue that racial segregation persists because of low housing turnover; however, this is not true. Since 2010, almost half of housing units in North and West Brooklyn and Northwest Black Brooklyn have changed tenancy. Moreover, approximately 40% of households in North Black Brooklyn, Black Brooklyn, and Brooklyn have changed tenancy during the same period (Fig. 22). Areas experiencing more intense gentrification have a higher housing turnover and this housing turnover has accelerated in the twenty-first century. Yet, the patterns of racial segregation are reproducing themselves. Almost 90% of Blacks still live in Black Brooklyn (Fig. 11).

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