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Fighting for Control

Political Displacement in Atlanta's Gentrifying Neighborhoods

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The loss of political influence is an important adverse consequence of gentrification for long-time residents. This study examines why neighborhood organizations in three gentrifying neighborhoods in Atlanta, Georgia, chose to address this potential problem, while organizations in another gentrifying community did not. Organizations of long-time residents, whether formed before gentrification or in response to it, were more likely to address political displacement. Neighborhood organizations with strong track records of providing benefits for neighbors and that adopted accepted organizational forms were more likely to mobilize effectively to protect the political participation of long-time residents. Interorganizational conflict minimized groups' ability to address political changes.

Keywords: *gentrification; neighborhood; community mobilization; neighborhood organizations*

> We don't want to lose power. It took so long to get power, to get control, to get where we are—as a race as well as in the neighborhood.
>
> Juanita Williams, 2003

Thus did an African-American long-time resident and community activist in Atlanta express concern that new residents in her neighborhood may take political control of the neighborhood organization and the neighborhood as a whole. Her fears are shared not only by other activists in her civic association, but also by activists in neighborhood associations in many gentrifying neighborhoods. Hailed by many urban leaders as the antidote to suburban sprawl and a boon to property tax rolls, gentrification has also been criticized for decreases in the affordable housing stock and displacement of current residents from their homes (Smith 1996; Spain and Laska 1984). Less often explored are the political ramifications of this process. Political control, in terms of leadership of neighborhood associations, in gentrifying

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communities often shifts from long-time residents to new residents, a process referred to here as *political displacement* (Chernoff 1980; Fraser 2004; Levy and Cybriwsky 1980). In some cases, organizations of long-time residents mobilize to resist loss of community power, while others do not. This article examines the conditions under which neighborhood organizations respond to the threat of political displacement and the forms that these responses take.

I draw from the social movement literature to explain neighborhood mobilization in response to political displacement. The presence of an organization of long-time residents, interorganizational dynamics, and organizational legitimacy are the key factors in explaining disparate outcomes in these communities. First, when long-time residents organize to pursue their own interests, whether in response to gentrification or prior to it, they are more likely to identify the potential for political displacement. Second, neighborhood organizations develop either cooperative or conflictual relationships with other groups in the community. In this study, neighborhood organizations that formed in direct opposition to each other were more likely to mobilize in an antagonistic manner and to remain mobilized over an extended period of time. Third, organizational legitimacy shapes mobilization efforts. Support of the neighborhood organization by neighborhood residents, based largely on organizational transparency, is key, as is support from allies outside the neighborhood, dependent chiefly upon accepted organizational structure and activities (McCarthy and Zald 1977; Rupp and Taylor 1987).

Gentrification and Political Displacement

Much of the literature on the adverse consequences of gentrification focuses on physical displacement: the movement of long-time residents from their communities because of increased housing costs or loss of units to renovation (DeGiovanni 1984; Freeman and Braconi 2004). This is an important consequence but not the only outcome of concern. Chernoff (1980, 204) described the process of *social displacement*, defining it as "the replacement of one group by another, in some relatively bounded geographic area, in terms of prestige and power." This useful concept has received little conceptual development to date. The term needs refinement because *social* can refer to a number of different processes, including culture clashes between new and long-time residents or changes in lifestyle and habits of neighborhood residents. I take a step in this direction by focusing on political displacement, addressing the issues of political influence and power at the neighborhood level.

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Long-time neighborhood residents are active in their neighborhoods through local churches, block clubs, civic organizations, and other social and fraternal organizations. Political displacement occurs when they become outvoted or outnumbered by new residents within their organizations or through the creation of organizations dominated by new residents (Auger 1979; Betancur 2002; Cordova 1991; Fraser 2004; Levy and Cybriwsky 1980). These residents lose leadership positions and feel excluded from organizing and speaking for the community. Moreover, their interests are no longer considered as key issues for neighborhood organizations. In these ways, long-time residents lose political influence in the neighborhood.

Political displacement is significant both to individuals residing in changing neighborhoods and to the larger community. Residents who come to feel politically marginalized may become less involved in the neighborhood and may even leave it rather than remain in a place where they no longer belong (Fraser 2004; Levy and Cybriwsky 1980). The process of political displacement can change not only the political control of the neighborhood, but can have a larger impact, even on the political and electoral composition of the city or region (Betancur 2002; Wilson, Wouters, and Grammenos 2004). It is important to understand the process of political displacement, and when the process is recognized and fought against, because those most likely to be harmed by gentrification are those most vulnerable and marginalized in our society: the poor and people of color (Slater, Curran, and Lees 2004; Wyly and Hammel 2004).

I focus on participation and influence in neighborhood organizations, rather than participation in electoral politics on a larger scale, for several reasons. First, these organizations, the most local of political bodies, are more sensitive to changes in the immediate environment than many other political organizations such as school boards or county commissions (Thomas 1986). Second, neighborhood organizations in most communities are designed to be true grassroots democracies (Bennett 1997; Logan and Rabrenovic 1990). Although rules for membership and leadership vary across communities, most organizations strive for representativeness of residents and seek to provide an open door for those who want to participate (Thomas 1986). Thus changes in the control and inclusivity of neighborhood organizations are noteworthy. Finally, neighborhood organizations are appropriate sites for examining the process of political displacement because such associations, especially in Atlanta, are important to the broader political environment. Candidates for city council, county commissioner, and other elected offices often cut their political teeth on neighborhood politics (see also Bennett 1997).

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The present study advances our understanding of the process of political displacement by examining the conditions under which neighborhood organizations address the potential shifts in political power. Previous studies provided compelling descriptions of challenges to gentrification and are suggestive about the circumstances under which mobilization is more likely to occur. Henig (1982) suggested that the nature of the grievance or threat facing the community influences residents' ability to mobilize. Cordova (1991) emphasized the importance of the urban political environment in facilitating or discouraging response to gentrification. Mele (1994) and Purcell (2001) indicated the crucial role played by organizational actors in understanding activism around gentrification. However, we have yet to understand why similarly affected communities respond to the threats posed by gentrification in different manners. Incorporating insights from the social movement literature will allow for more explicit specification of the conditions under which neighborhood organizations mobilize to address political displacement.

Community Mobilization

The literature on urban politics calls attention to national and local political structures as well as to economic and cultural changes to explain community power and influence (see, e.g., Castells 1983; Dahl 1961; Hunter 1953, 1980; Pickvance 2003). Social movement literature adds depth to explanations of urban politics by drawing attention to the actions of nonelites. This study expands the application of social movement theory into discussions of gentrification and neighborhood mobilization. The present work focuses on neighborhood associations, so the organizational branch of the social movement literature (often referred to as resource mobilization theory) contributes to explanations of why some community organizations focus on political displacement, while others do not (McAdam 1982; McCarthy and Zald 1977; Morris 1984). To explain mobilization and other movement outcomes, I highlight the interactions between movement organizations and the role of political support or organizational legitimacy as key mechanisms affecting mobilization (Staggenborg 1991; Tarrow 1998; Zald and Useem 1987).

Interorganizational dynamics shape opportunities for and outcomes of mobilization. Organizational relationships matter, whether organizations are part of the same movement or an opposing movement. Competition for scarce resources, such as members, external funding, and legitimacy, enhances the likelihood that organizations will develop antagonistic relationships (Haines

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1984; Lo 1982; Zald and Useem 1987). Interorganizational dynamics are important at the neighborhood level, as organizations compete for the same political and material resources. Gentrifiers are more likely to mobilize than long-time residents in the neighborhoods they move into and may take over indigenous organizations (Chernoff 1980; London and Palen 1984). Political activism of new residents can result in either co-optation of existing organizations or the creation of an active countermovement organization, which impacts opportunities for mobilization of both groups of residents.

Organizational legitimacy is an important factor in mobilization, albeit somewhat difficult to operationalize (McCarthy and Zald 1977; Rupp and Taylor 1987). Organizations seen as useful and appropriate representatives of the community have internal legitimacy (McCarthy and Zald 1977). Internal legitimacy may be based on the number of participants, reputations of participants and leaders, and past actions of the organization (McCarthy and Zald 1977; Rupp and Taylor 1987). External legitimacy refers to support of the organization from outside the community, by nonbeneficiaries. Such support is most often garnered by either *numbers* or *means*, by having a mass base or a proven record of getting benefits to its adherents (Rupp and Taylor 1987). Organizations adopting an accepted structure or organizational form may be more likely to receive external support and legitimacy (Fraser, Kick, and Williams 2002; Haines 1984).

Social movement organization characteristics contribute to our understanding of the differing responses to gentrification in urban neighborhoods. Comparing responses allows me to identify the conditions under which residents respond to the threatened political marginalization of long-time residents and why these efforts differ between neighborhoods.

Neighborhoods and Methods

Atlanta is an ideal site to study responses to the political consequences of gentrification. The legitimation of neighborhood organizations in city politics and the influence of African-Americans in city politics make a study of political change in Atlanta's neighborhoods compelling. We know much about the formal and informal governing structures in Atlanta (Hunter 1953, 1980; Keating 2001; Stone 1976, 1989) but less about grassroots political influence in this key city of the New South.

Neighborhoods became legitimate political entities as a result of an innovation of the Atlanta City Charter of 1974, the Neighborhood Planning Unit (NPU) system (Bayor 1996; Keating 2001; Stone 1989). The city formalized

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boundaries for each neighborhood, ensured each neighborhood had a name, and clustered them into geographically contiguous bodies to form NPUs. This has served to make neighborhoods concrete and important to residents. Residents serve as members and officers of the 24 NPUs, and they meet monthly to discuss planning issues such as zoning changes, variances, and liquor licenses. Neither the planning and zoning department, nor city council, are bound by NPU recommendations, but they are considered part of the decision-making process (Stone 1989; Keating 2001).

Respondents repeatedly invoked the importance of their neighborhood voice in the NPU system as one of the key roles of their neighborhood associations. The establishment of the NPU system and residents' embrace of it make neighborhoods real, tangible political units.

Atlanta has a sizeable Black middle class and has been led by Black elected officials since 1973. In several gentrifying Atlanta neighborhoods, working-class Black residents mobilized to gain or maintain control of the political apparatus within their neighborhoods. With the exception of a few marginalized elected leaders, the Black political elite did not support these residents in their efforts. Black residents' political isolation in a city known for the influence of its Black community forces one to question assumptions about racial solidarity between elites and other residents (Reed 1987). This finding also encourages a closer examination of the actions and resources of new and long-time residents to understand the outcomes of political contests.

Atlanta is rife with neighborhoods experiencing gentrification, yet for this study, I restrict attention to four neighborhoods within the city limits that share some political characteristics (such as city council district) but differ on several others, including demographic profiles of residents and their experiences of and responses to gentrification. Tables 1 and 2 provide a brief demographic comparison of the four communities: Lakeside, Belleview, Tyler Hill, and High Point.[1]

Three of these neighborhoods experienced gentrification as both a process of class and race change, transitioning from predominantly working-class African-American communities to predominantly middle-class White neighborhoods. Of these, two also experienced dramatic racial transformation in the 1960s, as White flight rapidly changed High Point and Belleview from White neighborhoods to Black ones. Lakeside is one of the oldest African-American neighborhoods in Atlanta and had experienced little racial change in over 100 years, prior to gentrification. The fourth neighborhood, Tyler Hill, gentrified from a White working-class neighborhood to a White middle-class neighborhood. Tyler Hill remained an enclave of lower-income Whites even during White flight from the city of Atlanta. All

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Table 1
Characteristics of Study Neighborhoods, 1980

	Lakeside	Belleview	Tyler Hill	High Point
Area (sq. miles)	0.57	1.32	0.15	1.41
Population	2,751	7,784	1,156	7,628
White	8.6%	1.3%	81.9%	16.3%
Black	90.9%	98.5%	17.9%	83.3%
Median household income[a] (US$)	32,012	14,804	26,659	24,965
Median home value (US$)	29,892	41,976	22,260	46,216
City median	44%	62%	33%	68%
Owner-occupied units	37.6%	58%	29.4%	66.7%
Renter-occupied units	62.3%	42%	70.6%	33.2%

Source: U.S. Census Bureau.
a. All figures reported in constant 2000 dollars.

Table 2
Characteristics of Study Neighborhoods, 2000

	Lakeside	Belleview	Tyler Hill	High Point
Population	2,080	6,028	1,070	6,057
White	14.9%	14.5%	77.1%	17.4%
Change in White population, 1980–2000	+31.4%	+776%	–12.9%[a]	–15%
Change in Black population, 1980–2000	–33.1%	–35.4%	–9.7%	–23.8%
Median household income[b] (US$)	31,169	31,497	32,987	35,600
Change in median household income, 1980–2000	–2.6%	+112.8%	+23.7%	+42.6%
Median home value (US$)	97,316	103,182	129,385	95,033
City median	94	79	99	73
Change in median home value, 1980–2000[c]	+105.6%	+145.8%	+481%	+51.37%
Owner-occupied units	41.7%	60.2%	30.2%	61.2%
Change in owner-occupied units, 1980–2000	+9%	–4%	+51.2%	–8.8%
Change in renter-occupied units, 1980–2000	–14.8%	–12.2%	+45.7%[a]	+16.2%

Source: U.S. Census Bureau.
a. The conversion of a factory into loft space has increased the percentage of the population that is African-American, rents, and is at or below the poverty line.
b. All figures reported in constant 2000 dollars.
c. Change in median home value for the city of Atlanta, 1980–2000, was 93.7%.

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four neighborhoods experienced economic decline in the 1970s and 1980s. Each community saw deteriorating housing stock and declining quality of city services. Tyler Hill began gentrifying in the 1980s and is now almost fully gentrified. The other three neighborhoods began gentrifying in the 1990s, and the process is ongoing.

I interviewed 39 neighborhood activists from the four neighborhoods between 2001 and 2003.[2] Respondents included long-time and new residents, merchants, a community police officer, and a pastor of a local church. I also interviewed two former Atlanta City Planning Bureau officials and the head of a citywide nonprofit organization. I identified potential respondents through their positions of leadership in neighborhood organizations, newspaper articles discussing community figures, and referrals from other respondents. I created a purposive rather than representative sample of neighborhood activists in local organizations.[3] Interviews were conducted in respondents' homes and businesses, local coffee shops, pizza parlors, and parks. Interviews ranged from 20 minutes to two hours and included questions about respondents' histories in their neighborhoods, the history and current activities of their neighborhood organizations, the effects of gentrification on their neighborhoods, and responses of neighborhood organizations to gentrification. I supplemented interview data with nonparticipant observation at neighborhood meetings.

To uncover responses to political displacement, I conducted what Weiss (1994) called *issue-focused analysis* within each neighborhood case, then engaged in cross-case analysis. I used Strauss and Corbin's (1998) three-stage process for content analysis of interviews: open coding to allow for emergent themes; axial coding, in which I compared and explored codes within and across respondents and neighborhood cases; and selective coding, in which I used specific patterns within core categories, such as political displacement, to tell "stories" with the data. This iterative process revealed political displacement as a vital theme among long-time residents.

Findings

Political displacement emerged as an important issue in three of the four neighborhoods in this study—Lakeside, Belleview, and Tyler Hill—as indicated in Table 3. Lakeside's civic association addressed political displacement through strategies that prioritized participation of long-time residents. Belleview's long-time resident activists clashed repeatedly with new resident activists for control over proposed changes in the community. In Tyler Hill,

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Table 3
Study Neighborhoods and Organizations

	Lakeside	Belleview	Tyler Hill	High Point
Presence of long-time resident organization	Yes (LCA)	Yes (BRB)	Yes (THNA)	No
Other neighborhood organization(s) and constituency	BNA (new)		TCP (long-time); THR (new)	HPON (new, primarily)
Interorganizational conflict	No	Yes	Yes	No
Internal legitimacy of key organizations	LCA, yes	BNA, yes; BRB, no	THNA, yes; TCP, yes; THR, no	HPON, yes
External legitimacy of key organizations	LCA, yes	BNA, yes; BRB, no	THNA, yes; TCP, no; THR, no	HPON, yes
Address political displacement	Yes	Yes	Yes	No

Note: BNA = Belleview Neighbors Association; BRB = Black Residents of Belleview; HPON = High Point Organized Neighbors; LCA = Lakeside Civic Association; TCP = The Community Place; THNA = Tyler Hill Neighbors Association; THR = Tyler Hill Renaissance.

three organizations competed for resources, and one, the Tyler Hill Neighbors Association (THNA), identified political co-optation as a danger posed by both gentrification and their efforts to create affordable housing in the neighborhood. In contrast, political displacement has not been a central issue for High Points' neighborhood organizations. This organization is dominated by new residents but has at least token representation of long-time residents as well, and long-time residents there have not mobilized on their own behalf. In the following sections, I discuss the experience of each neighborhood in greater detail, highlighting the mechanisms of organizational constituency, legitimacy, and interaction to explain the different responses to political displacement.

Responding to Political Displacement

The three neighborhoods in which residents mobilized against the threat of political displacement all have lively organizational populations. The organizations differ, however, in terms of their foundings, strategies, and reception by various audiences. These factors not only help explain mobilization around political displacement, but also make clear why mobilization efforts differ in each community.

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Lakeside. Lakeside is 0.57 square miles and houses approximately 2,400 people, most in modest wood frame houses dating from the 1870s to the 1960s. Lakeside contains a mix of long-time residents, new home buyers, nonprofit affordable housing developers, and for-profit luxury housing developers and is the least gentrified neighborhood in this study. As recently as 1990, Habitat for Humanity undertook a large project in the neighborhood, constructing 30 houses, and newspaper accounts of the neighborhood did not mention gentrification there until 1997 (Cauley 1997; Odum 1990).

Residents and community leaders, however, see gentrification occurring in Lakeside. Loft conversions and gated condominium complexes entered the neighborhood in 2001 and 2002. These projects were not priced for the low- to moderate-income residents of Lakeside. The percentage of the population that is White has increased 31%. Housing values increased 105% between 1980 and 2000. Despite its continued identity as a "struggling" neighborhood, with a significant low- to moderate-income population, Lakeside is experiencing gentrification.

Both residents and outside observers of this predominantly Black neighborhood describe Lakeside as highly organized, represented by both an active 50-year-old civic association and a community development corporation well regarded by the city government and local foundations. In 1952, a group of neighbors formed the Lakeside Civic Association (LCA) to address a range of community concerns, including voter registration, neighborhood cleanups, helping neighbors with problems, and sharing fellowship. The number of members varied over the years, but a core of activists remained involved during the course of the organization's history. Some of the founding members are still part of the organization and are honored at LCA events.

At present, approximately 30–40 people attend monthly meetings, and about 20 residents are active members, paying annual dues of US$5. LCA members engage in a variety of activities: neighborhood cleanups, public safety, yards of the month, community festivals, and drives for food and other necessities for community members. They also vote on development issues in the community that may then come before the NPU. These activities are common to many neighborhood organizations (Logan and Rabrenovic 1990).

Over the years, the LCA has proven to be effective in many of these endeavors, becoming an important local organization. A membership drive brochure (Lakeside Civic Association 1978–1979) boasted of the LCA's accomplishments:

> Got street lights . . . got the City to put a basketball court on an empty lot; developed a neighborhood plan which was adopted by the City and which will

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> keep our neighborhood residential and make further improvements possible . . . published a monthly newsletter, provided emergency help to many people.

Over time, the LCA was able to accomplish important goals for the community, leverage support from the city, and provide social activities and services for neighborhood residents.

In 1989, LCA leaders saw the need to develop a professional, nonprofit entity to pursue neighborhood revitalization more comprehensively. The Lakeside Community Development Corporation (LCDC) develops affordable housing and supports new and existing businesses in Lakeside. The LCDC has a strong reputation in the city and nationally, as reflected both by the diversity of its funding sources, which include the Ford Foundation, the Enterprise Foundation, and federal Community Development Block Grant funds, and by the positive attention it garners in the press (Knotts 2000). While the LCDC is an independent organization, its formal and informal ties to the LCA remain very strong, and they work together to address neighborhood needs. Though the LCDC is a crucial organization, I focus here on the LCA as the political voice of the neighborhood.

Neighborhood activists express concern about the potential loss of their political power and influence. Long-time activists fear losing control of the neighborhood and its organizations and seek to avoid the creation of competing organizations. An outgoing president of the neighborhood association discussed his concern about changing leadership the following way (Rodney Baker, long-time resident, interview by author, February 4, 2003):

> The main thing we're working on right now is with the newcomers. The LCA can continue to be a viable entity with their help, but more importantly, we can't let the newcomers disrupt the flow of the organization. We don't want the Lofts—all these loft projects in here now—they could get everyone from just one of those lofts to come and vote in the organization, and take it over. We can't let that happen. It would be ugly.

Furthermore, the head of the LCDC articulated the potential of neighborhood racial change to jeopardize the political dominance of Black residents (Cliff Miller, head of LCDC, interview by author, February 7, 2003):

> I see the dynamics of leadership being impacted. I think it will have a tremendous impact on leadership. I mean, we're seeing it now. The [Lakeside] Civic Association is in the process of electing new leaders, and it was an open-floor, volunteer request for officers. And we do have some non-African-Americans who are interested in holding offices in the organization, as leaders. And that would be the first if it happens.

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The officer elections of 2003 produced no racial change in the top offices of the LCA. LCA activists do not see this shift as imminent because they would prevent it. LCA leadership uses two main techniques to try to preserve the leadership of long-time residents: channeling organizational activity of new residents into specific avenues and nurturing leadership skills in long-time residents.

The LCA directs the participation of new residents at two levels: They encourage new residents who want to become politically active to do so through the LCA, rather than forming an organization of their own, and they guide their activities within the LCA. LCA members engage in extensive outreach efforts to all members of the community, distributing flyers about meetings and community events, maintaining a phone tree, and doing limited e-mailing. These efforts are geared toward increasing participation of long-time residents as well as new residents. Once new residents come to LCA meetings, they learn about the organization's history and discover how much the LCA accomplishes. Leaders explain that the LCA tries to channel the energy of new residents into committee work, rather than encouraging them to be officers. They recognize the need to constrain the leadership ambitions of new residents from watching political displacement occur in other neighborhoods in Atlanta. One long-time resident said that the board of directors discusses these issues (Juanita Williams, long-time resident, interview by author, February 8, 2003):

> There is talk about these sorts of issues at the [Lakeside] Civic Association. We've seen neighborhoods all around us go through these kinds of changes. Belleview, High Point—in fact, my mother used to be active in the civic league in High Point, and now it's all White. They've just taken a backseat, accepted it. We don't plan to take a backseat in Lakeside. . . . Now, the activities and events in the community, we include White neighbors, too. We're not trying to exclude anyone, but we're very careful about the positions they're given. We don't want to lose power.

The LCA also promotes the leadership development of long-time residents. The LCA and LCDC host annual workshops for potential officers and board members on successful community-building techniques from other neighborhoods in the United States. Both organizations provide ongoing mentoring and training for new and emerging leaders to increase participation in neighborhood development.

The LCA's organizational strength and legitimacy enables a proactive response to political displacement. The LCA has improved the neighborhood,

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earning the support and respect of many residents. External legitimacy, conceptualized as support from sources outside of Lakeside, arises from organizational activity within formalized channels of citizen participation and adherence to standard organizational structures. Organizations are more likely to be perceived as legitimate by external parties if they hold open meetings, maintain regular elections, and have a clear structure of leadership and committees (Fraser, Kick, and Williams 2002; Hackworth 2002). The LCA has a long, close relationship with various elements of the city governing structure, from decades of working to better the community. Furthermore, the close relationship between the LCA and LCDC enhances its reputation. Thus the LCA has strong legitimacy both within the neighborhood and with outside allies.

In sum, the LCA has minimized political displacement so far, preventing the creation of an alternative neighborhood organization or the stirring of conflict within the preexisting LCA. The long-standing positive reputation of the LCA, its internal and external legitimacy, and the absence of competing organizations all contribute to the LCA's effectiveness.

Belleview. The situation in Belleview is quite different from that in Lakeside. Belleview's image has changed significantly in less than a decade, mirroring demographic shifts in the neighborhood. The White population in Belleview increased 776%, and home values increased 145%, between 1980 and 2000. Even more striking is the residents' assessment of the extent of gentrification. Both long-time and new residents estimate that new residents make up between 20% and 60% of the neighborhood.

Belleview is a large neighborhood and had a vacancy rate of 14% in 1990, before gentrification began in earnest. This area could physically accommodate an influx of new residents more easily than could smaller neighborhoods such as Lakeside or Tyler Hill. Although physical displacement through the loss of housing units is not a primary concern in Belleview, the history of rapid racial change in the neighborhood increased concern about the social and political consequences of gentrification.

Prior to the 1990s, although long-time residents in Belleview had no formal organization, activists controlled activity in their NPU, maintained close relationships with city council representatives, and were the only political voice in the neighborhood. A new resident reflected on the power of Black long-time residents in the neighborhood (Steve Rich, new resident, interview by author, September 1, 2002):

> They used class and race to . . . solidify their power base, and again to keep control of their position. And their position also allowed them to garner

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> favors and do all sorts of things. . . . You're talking late 1960s, '70s, '80s—you're talking about Blacks.

By the end of the 1990s, this informal political hegemony ended after a series of successful challenges by new residents through their organization, the Belleview Neighbors Association (BNA). To meet these challenges, long-time residents mobilized in a formal organization, the Black Residents of Belleview (BRB), but were unable to maintain dominance in the neighborhood.

For seven years, long-time residents and new residents engaged each other in a series of bitter conflicts over political influence. Through separate organizations, they challenged each other about new neighborhood amenities such as a neighborhood library, a grocery store, and streetscaping in the neighborhood business district. They also sparred over valid means to control crime in the neighborhood, over appropriate neighborhood leadership, and even over the process of gentrification itself. Conflict reached its zenith between 1998 and 2000, and community members still feel the effects of the antipathy between these factions of neighborhood residents.

A long-time resident and activist expressed her concern about political displacement and described the impasse in the neighborhood in the following way (Terry Brooks, long-time resident, interview by author, September 4, 2002):

> And the people who remain, they feel alienated because here all these new people coming in and their voices are heard. They speak a different language than us. And I'm afraid to get up and say what I think for fear that I may not be understood. So therefore I don't have a voice anymore. . . . Both groups are standing on their own ground. . . . We've got to stand and hold our interests, but we will never come together because we don't agree with you and we know you don't agree with us.

As in Lakeside, long-time resident activists feared not only displacement by new residents, but the racial character of political displacement. A Black long-time resident expressed her frustration in the following way (Joyce Griffiths, head of Belleview Business Association, interview by author, September 24, 2002):

> It's not only that there are more Whites here, but they're trying to take over and make decisions for the community. The current [business district] task force has two representatives from each organization, and I suggested they add a couple of older residents, to more represent the neighborhood. And the Whites, BNA, said "we are the neighborhood." Like they are all that matters!

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On each contentious issue, the BRB and its formerly influential members lost ground to the BNA. For example, long-time residents supported a strip mall–style library, while new residents advocated for a standalone library, which is what was constructed. More germane to the question of political displacement, new residents soundly defeated all BRB candidates for NPU leadership positions in a heated 1999 election.

Antagonism between the two primary organizations in Belleview bolstered the legitimacy of the BNA, the new residents' organization, at the expense of the legitimacy of the long-time residents' organization, the BRB. The BRB has no noteworthy support from new residents, or Whites more generally, in Belleview. While some Black residents see the BRB as representing their interests, many do not. BNA draws support primarily from White residents, but not exclusively. BNA is the only neighborhood organization in Belleview recognized by the city of Atlanta. New residents serve as officers and exert informal control over the NPU.

Two factors minimize the acceptance of the BRB by Blacks and Whites in Belleview and limit the acceptance of the organization by the city as well. First is the secrecy and exclusiveness of the organization. Meeting attendance is by invitation only, and several members were "uninvited" after taking stances contrary to those of BRB leadership on controversial issues. BRB lacks transparency in every aspect of the organization, including membership, meetings, agendas, and decision-making structures. Outsiders do not trust the organization because of these organizational characteristics, which make it difficult for the city bureaucracy to officially support the BRB.

A second factor detracting from the legitimacy of the BRB is its reputation among those outside the organization as "unproductive." The sole openly touted accomplishment of the BRB was a well-attended property tax workshop for elderly citizens in 2001. An activist in the BNA critiqued the organization, and its sister merchant organization in the Belleview business district, in the following way (Will Matthews, head of BNA, interview by author, July 15, 2002):

> They never have elections; they never had meetings where they announce people can attend. Yeah, it's not like a productive organization. . . . I don't even think they sit around and talk about stuff, and they sure don't have anything, you know, to show.

This resident admits his bias toward BRB, but the secrecy of the organization prevents a clear assessment of its accomplishments, aside from the

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significant task of providing a sense of belonging and participation to Black long-time residents. For the purposes of this study, however, the perception of BRB as unproductive by new residents, the BNA, and some long-time residents affects the organization's legitimacy.

The lack of obvious productivity as well as the perceived illegitimate organizational style of the BRB are problematic for the organization because they are not in keeping with the dominant paradigm of what neighborhood organizations should look like and what activities they should engage in (Hackworth 2002). The BRB's structure may, alternatively, be seen as a logical outgrowth of the perceived political persecution of Black long-time residents in Belleview.

Through the BNA, new residents mobilized in large numbers, gained political skills and experience, and created a stable neighborhood organization. The BNA follows a successful model of the neighborhood organization, with regular elections, a committee structure, and open meetings. The BNA has prevailed in a series of conflicts over neighborhood development and, as a consequence, has gained the support of many residents and many city officials. After years of intermittent conflict and constant competition, new residents gained political control of the neighborhood.

Tyler Hill. Tyler Hill is a quaint neighborhood with small bungalows and shotgun houses, many painted pastel colors and accented with flower gardens in their small front yards. A commercial block is in one corner of the neighborhood, boasting a restaurant, a convenience store, and an eclectic art gallery. The median income and median home values are increasing, up 23% and 481%, respectively, between 1980 and 2000. Community residents estimate that between 70% and 90% of the current neighborhood residents moved to Tyler Hill after 1980, when gentrification began. The community has changed significantly in 20 years, especially dramatic in a community considered insular and unchanging for the previous 150 years. While the new residents are very happy with their small town in the midst of the city, long-time residents express frustration, disappointment, and resignation that their neighborhood has changed beyond recognition.

In 1980, Tyler Hill residents created a neighborhood association of long-time residents, the THNA, and an association of newcomers, Tyler Hill Renaissance (THR), in addition to an existing social service–focused organization, the Community Place (TCP). The three competed against each other to become the sole representative of neighborhood interests. The interactions between these three organizations impacted each of their activities, their reception by the city and the public, and the face of the neighborhood.

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TCP provided GED classes for local youth, referred residents to jobs and job training, held arts and crafts workshops, and trained and employed residents in crafts such as furniture refinishing and commercial pottery (Gibbons 1981). TCP had a professional staff, the size of which varied in relation to the available funds, employing a maximum of nine people in 1980. The organization closed in 1990 upon the death of its founder.

THR was an organization of new residents and investors, formed in 1980, and "concerned with keeping the historic integrity of the buildings" (Saporta 1982, E8). An investor who purchased more than 20 properties in Tyler Hill founded the organization, and a mix of investors and new residents led the group (Cutler 1981; Saporta 1982). No quantitative data are available on the members of THR, but the new residents were mostly young, White professionals and more affluent than the long-time residents, as demonstrated by their ability to purchase and rehabilitate houses in Tyler Hill. THR engaged in activities common to neighborhood organizations in gentrifying communities: Members produced neighborhood banners, engaged in neighborhood cleanups, and promoted development and redevelopment (Cutler 1981; Saporta 1982). THR considered the other organizations the "opposition," and this sentiment was mutual (Cutler 1981). THR became dormant by the late 1980s.

The THNA was formed in April 1980 "in response to the potential displacement threatened by a group of speculators who invested in the neighborhood" (THNA, "For Your Information," news release, December 18, 1980). Membership in THNA was open to any neighborhood resident who paid US$1.00 annual dues. THNA was proud of its membership base, boasting more than 100 members within six months of the founding of the organization, impressive in a neighborhood with a population of approximately 1,000 (THNA, "For Your Information," news release, December 18, 1980). The THNA created the Tyler Housing Co-op to provide affordable housing for Tyler Hill residents. The cooperative form of affordable housing development was quite innovative, and at the time of its founding, the Tyler Housing Co-op was the largest scattered site co-op in the country. The THNA stopped meeting by the mid-1980s, and the co-op was formally dissolved by the city council in 1988 (Wells 1988).

At the height of neighborhood activism around gentrification, the new residents' organization, THR, had very little political influence in Tyler Hill or the city. However, political displacement still emerged as an issue in Tyler Hill, as long-time residents, through the THNA, emphasized the importance of indigenous leadership and took pains to prevent outsiders from making decisions for the organization. THNA leaders emphasized the

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importance of autonomy and self-determination in newsletters, as seen in the following when explaining the role of professionals who were assisting the THNA and the co-op (Tyler Hill Neighborhood Association 1981):

> The Co-op . . . need(s) a great deal of help from lawyers, real estate people, bankers and government representatives. Many of these people are giving a lot of their time to help us. This sometimes makes it seem like they are running the show and not us. But they don't do anything without first asking the Board of Directors which is made of community people.

In this way, the co-op and the THNA tried to avoid what a former staff member referred to as a "history of paternalism" in Tyler Hill.

The push for indigenous leadership was not simply rhetoric, however. Although the THNA was pressured by funders to hire professional management for the co-op and was mandated to put nonresidents on the board of the co-op, they resisted this outside intrusion where possible. The THNA's wariness about outsider involvement in the organization shaped organizational practices and eventually raised warning flags about the lack of organizational transparency. THNA meetings were not open to all interested parties, and they removed press observers from meetings (Cutler 1981).

Organizational isolationism, adopted in the interest of ensuring that power remained with community people, became a liability for the co-op. Infighting between the three Tyler Hill organizations intensified throughout the 1980s. External support for the THNA and the co-op waned as well as the drive for autonomy was seen as threatening to professionalism. Organizational structures and behaviors that are unacceptable in a small-scale neighborhood association like the BRB were even less palatable in a funded agency working on community development (Sirianni and Friedland 2001). Ironically, the city's commitment to assisting the most indigenous organization resulted in funding the least experienced organization, the one without capacity to handle the effort, and the organization so committed to grassroots control that it failed to acquire the experience to effectively maintain the co-op.

Tyler Hill is now almost entirely gentrified. The neighborhood now has one organization representing the residents, the Tyler Hill Residents Association. The organization meets regularly, has a host of committees, and operates on a modest budget. It is dominated by new residents. Old-timers rarely attend meetings and are hesitant to speak in front of the group when they do. Both new residents and old-timers attribute this nonparticipation to fear of being ridiculed for their communication style. Both groups also acknowledge that no organization explicitly looks after the interests of

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the old-timers and that those old-timers still in the community are likely to move before long. They will leave, residents suggest, both because they are being forced out economically and because the community is no longer hospitable to them and no longer accepts the lifestyles and habits that they developed collectively in a century of living and working in Tyler Hill.

Although neighborhood organizations in Lakeside, Belleview, and Tyler Hill have dramatic differences, all three communities witnessed significant mobilization around political displacement. The efforts appear more effective in Lakeside, attributable in large part to the organizational characteristics of the LCA and its ability to limit the formation of competing organizations. The competition between the BRB and the BNA and between TCP, the THNA, and THR kept all organizations in both neighborhoods mobilized and battling for political influence. However, the constant competition and unusual organizational structures of the BRB and the THNA did not protect long-time residents from losing political power in the neighborhood. How do these neighborhoods and organizations differ from the community in which political displacement did not emerge as a crucial issue?

Nonresponse to Political Displacement

To explain a lack of community mobilization in response to political displacement, I turn again to organizational characteristics as crucial factors. In contrast to Lakeside, Belleview, and Tyler Hill, political displacement has not emerged as an important issue in High Point. New residents dominate in positions of leadership in High Point, as is the case in many gentrifying neighborhoods. However, the neighborhood organizations have not focused on this issue.

High Point. High Point is a trendy neighborhood distinguished by its business district of quirky boutiques, restaurants, bars, and hair salons. High Point's history is rather like Belleview's. High Point was a middle-class White community that experienced White flight in the late 1960s, a more moderate decline in the 1970s and 1980s, and gentrification in the 1990s (Cauley 1997). By the beginning of the twenty-first century, many homes were renovated, new construction in the area was rampant, and the business district, the heart of the community, attracted visitors from across the Atlanta region.

High Point Organized Neighbors (HPON) was formed in 1980 by a small group of residents and merchants to address public safety and public service issues. Although small, HPON was able to bring about significant improvements to the neighborhood, gaining the respect and support of

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many residents. HPON experienced a tremendous growth spurt in the 1990s, with attendance at meetings increasing from 15 to 25 in the early 1990s to 60 to 100 people by 1997. HPON saw increased membership, funds from dues, and increased volunteer energy to undertake more projects. New members, almost all White, had more education, professional jobs, higher incomes, and higher expectations of community services. As a founder of HPON indicated (Walter Melton, former head of HPON, interview by author, July 23, 2002),

> We've seen a lot of folks that move into houses that have been very nicely redone, and of course, those people's expectations of what the neighborhood can deliver too are greater. Well, my house is nice, why can't everybody on the street have a nice house? Whereas if you're struggling to get your house nice, you're more tolerant of those who don't have nice things. . . . And it's not as much of a "get the inspectors in here."

The influx of new members did not splinter the organization or incite countermobilization by long-time residents. Long-time residents have not formed their own organization, either prior to gentrification or in response to gentrification. HPON's organizational strategies and legitimacy explain the lack of mobilization by long-time residents.

The early gentrifiers who founded HPON had an explicit goal of maintaining racially balanced leadership. One of HPON's founders explained this goal (Walter Melton, interview, 2002):

> This is unlike some other organizations [who say], "We're going to be above this, we're not going to care about color." And yet the whole city is about color. . . . The organization has made a conscious effort over the majority of its history to have a mixture of races, and not necessarily economic, but races as officers and leadership positions. Our first president was Black, and that has mostly stood us in good stead.

This decision arose not out of a desire to create an integrated organization for the greater social good, but out of a sense that this balance would enable the organization to appeal to a larger number of residents and would also be helpful when approaching the city for support. The same activist described a coalition effort to engineer a cooperative buyout of the local hardware store (Walter Melton, interview, 2002):

> We have a partnership that we set up . . . and here again we made a conscious effort to be Black folks and White folks there. You do it for your own

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> political well-being because if you're applying for some sort of grant or something, you don't want someone downtown saying, "Well, are you an exclusive club?"

This practice is not aimed at preventing political displacement. It reflects the importance of race in Atlanta politics and prioritizes Black representation among the organizations' officers. However, the emphasis is not on the inclusion of *long-time* African-American residents. In recent years, the most visible Black organization leaders have been new residents. Thus the practice makes the organization more legitimate in the eyes of city officials and many neighborhood residents than the all-White organizations in other gentrifying neighborhoods but does little to protect the political involvement of long-time residents. It makes painting the organization as White or anti-Black practically impossible. The legitimacy of HPON is maintained, decreasing potential countermobilization in response to exclusionary practices.

Discussion

In three gentrifying neighborhoods in Atlanta, residents organized to prevent political displacement. In so doing, they expressed concern about the rising political influence and involvement of new residents and worry that long-time residents would lose both power and belonging in their neighborhoods. The finding that organizations in gentrifying neighborhoods respond differently to this perceived threat contributes to our understanding of both mobilization and the political consequences of gentrification.

The mobilization of neighborhood associations in this study can be explained primarily by the organizational environment in the neighborhood. Organizations of long-time residents, whether formed prior to gentrification or in response to it, were more likely to address political displacement and attempt to maintain political power in the community. The presence, or absence, of competing neighborhood organizations affected the manner in which organizations addressed concerns about political displacement. Organizational strategies, such as intentional racial inclusiveness or adopting accepted organizational forms and activities, increase the legitimacy of the organization, which impacts mobilization efforts.

My findings about the importance of internal and external legitimacy are in keeping with the social movement literature (McCarthy and Zald 1977; Rupp and Taylor 1987). Members, financial support, and good reputations are important resources for social movement organizations. The availability

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of these resources inside the neighborhood is key to explaining mobilization. However, the findings about external legitimacy also contribute to ongoing discussion in the scholarly literature about how organizational forms, characteristics, and strategies contribute to external legitimacy. The current neoliberal policy environment, placing responsibility for community revitalization on neighborhood-based organizations rather than local governments, favors specific organizational forms (Hackworth 2002; Minkoff 2002). Community development corporations and other neighborhood organizations with transparent decision-making structures, engaged in traditional community-building activities, are more likely to garner support from city entities, foundations, and other resource-distributing entities (Fraser, Kick, and Williams 2002; Hackworth 2002). Thus the structure and strategic choices of neighborhood-based organizations have a large impact on external legitimacy.

The social movement literature on opposing movements suggests that interactions between social movement organizations may heighten mobilization efforts by all parties (Fetner 2001; Meyer and Staggenborg 1996; Peleg 2000). This study sheds additional light on this process by suggesting that interorganizational conflict may also affect the legitimacy of organizations. In two neighborhoods, Tyler Hill and Belleview, competing organizations vied for members, resources, and legitimacy. The constant and vitriolic nature of the conflict in both neighborhoods led long-time resident organizations to make strategic choices that compromised their legitimacy with residents and with potential allies outside the neighborhood. Organizations of long-time residents in Belleview and Tyler Hill adopted defensive postures and secretive strategies that cost them significant support. Thus, although these organizations remained mobilized, the mobilization was not effective for the goals of the organizations.

Finally, this study suggests the importance of organizations in mobilizing. Rather than simply suggesting that preexisting organizations bolster the potential for mobilization, as is supported in the social movement literature, I suggest that it is not just when organizations form that is crucial, but what constituency they serve (McAdam 1982; McCarthy and Zald 1977; but see also Piven and Cloward 1977). Organizations of long-time residents formed in Tyler Hill and Belleview after gentrification began, while long-time residents organized 50 years before gentrification began in Lakeside, and in all three neighborhoods, there was an organized response to the threat of political displacement. HPON's strategic decision to maintain a racial balance in organizational leadership garnered so much legitimacy that long-time residents were not spurred to countermobilization, as they were in Belleview and

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Tyler Hill. HPON was thus left as the sole political voice in the neighborhood, with no strong vested interest in representing the interests of long-time residents or ensuring their continued political participation.

Maintaining the political investment of long-time residents in their community is important for keeping these residents in the neighborhood. The political inclusion of long-time residents also has implications for politics outside the neighborhood. There are preliminary signs that Atlanta may be seeing the beginning of an electoral shift away from the African-American political dominance it has experienced since the early 1970s, and this change has also made residents more aware of the importance of political representation at the neighborhood level. A Black long-time resident of Lakeside expressed concern about the potential loss of neighborhood power and why maintaining power is crucial for Blacks (Juanita Williams, interview, 2003):

> Blacks are still new to power. Some people say [in Atlanta] it's not new—you've had power for years. But what are years compared to decades? Centuries? Blacks haven't grown up knowing the rules of power, haven't had things passed down to them. . . . We've had to learn ourselves. We were so unempowered, now we have some power, some control. We don't want to lose it because of Whites moving in.

Thus, at both the personal and city levels, political displacement is an important outcome of gentrification and one that neighborhood organizations may be able to address and minimize.

Notes

1. The names of both neighborhoods and residents included in the study have been changed to protect the confidentiality of the respondents.

2. I interviewed 8 activists in both Tyler Hill and Lakeside, 10 in Belleview, and 13 in High Point.

3. Although I spent six months attempting to gain access to members of BRB, I was unable to conduct interviews with anyone from this group. I rely on interviews with other long-time residents not directly affiliated with BRB for information on the organization.

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