Gentrification and Education:
Modern Day Segregation in Strawberry Mansion

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Abstract

Segregation and racism have systematically existed in the United States for hundreds of years. Today, though there have been strides taken in alleviating these inequalities, they manifest themselves in new ways. In Strawberry Mansion, Philadelphia, African Americans are undergoing modern day segregation that arrived in unexpected ways. Through the introduction of charter schools and increased interest in educational advancement from outsiders, Strawberry Mansion is experiencing gentrification. While rent prices are increasing and leaving the impoverished at risk of becoming homeless, school attendance is dropping and local public schools are in threat of being shut down. This thesis works to reveal the underlying factors at play that had led to the harsh displacement of families, and neglect of children’s ability to access education.

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Introduction

With a longstanding interest in education, upon moving to Pennsylvania to attend school at Haverford College, I began learning about the local education systems. I quickly noticed a substantial disparity. Most educational success exists in the suburbs of Philadelphia, while urban schools have declining resources and quality of education. One area in Philadelphia has more noticeable education disparity than others. That is Strawberry mansion: a neighborhood encompassing just four blocks of North West Philadelphia, but home to one of the most dangerous schools in the nation. During the summers of 2017 and ‘18, I lived in the city for summer work so have had the opportunity to meet locals and learn about life in Strawberry Mansion. Though the far-reaching extent of poverty and crime is overwhelming, what has
surprised me the most is the state of decline of urban public schools. Middle schools and high schools that I have worked within the city are consistently underfunded and highly guarded by security. Students are welcomed into the schools with metal detectors and security guards, and windows and doors are reinforced with metal bars resembling a prison.

Through attention to the changing education opportunities for low-income African Americans in Strawberry Mansion, multiple things became apparent. The first being the drastic number of abandoned properties throughout the Strawberry Mansion. The second being that residents seem to find the area unsafe given a lack of presence on the streets; even at noon on a beautiful day the streets are typically desolate. And lastly, the area is rapidly gentrifying. New for lease signs are popping up on street corners that used to house vacant properties. As the number of revitalized houses in the area increased, the number of students in the local schools has decreased. Given the rate that Strawberry Mansion has begun to gentrify in the recent years along with the change in educational opportunities specifically a decrease in access to public schools with an introduction of charter schools, I decided that there must be some relationship between education and gentrification.

The dominant narrative on gentrification stresses the inequalities caused by high-income people pushing out lower income native residents from their homes. Because of this, gentrification usually has a negative connotation– implying that a ‘gentrifier’ is directly involved in the use of a financial advantage to strip existing residents of lower socioeconomic status of their rights to basic things such as their home, established relationships, a place of identity, and
in this paper’s case, education¹. This thesis studies the relationship between Gentrification and low-income African American’s access to Education in Strawberry Mansion, Philadelphia.

To study the relationship between low-income African American’s access to education, and gentrification, I research the evolution of educational opportunities at the high school level for low-income African American’s in Strawberry Mansion neighborhood. The two high schools studied being: Green Village High School, a public school established in 1964 and originally intending to serve 1,800 students², and the other being the Jefferson High School, a charter school opened in 2015. The research took place in the form of interviews conducted in Philadelphia and Strawberry Mansion between April of 2018, to November of 2018. This thesis ultimately argues that the introduction of charter schools in the early 2000s to Northern Philadelphia, has led to the ultimate demise of public education for low-income African Americans, as well as instigated the start of gentrification in the Strawberry Mansion neighborhood.

*Positionality:*

This research stems from my longstanding interest in education systems and the ability they hold to provide opportunity to underserved areas. Despite my thesis’s focus on Strawberry Mansion, I am not a resident of the area. I am a resident of Massachusetts attending school at Haverford College; I entered the field carrying my identity of a white female college student. With no previous experience in ethnographic work, I entered the field intending to be as open to

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learning as possible. While giving space for participant’s voices, I also will seek to involve supporting data and policy to address the issues at hand.

The extent of contention revolving around gentrification led to my original thesis question which was; how does gentrification impact local’s access to education in Strawberry Mansion. My research for this question began in the summer of 2018 in Strawberry Mansion. After a summer of interviews with residents, research that seemed to support a relationship between gentrification and quality of education for the local African American children. However, a roadblock in this study arose when a teacher from Green Village High School emailed me in the final days of August saying that there was a change in the city’s plan for the school. The school that was initially slated to be closed, the Green Village High School, was now staying open.

Given that the premise of my thesis was based on the fact that as gentrification occurred the local high school experienced a drop in student population, suggesting a negative impact of gentrification on education, and the high school was no longer closing, I had to re-evaluate my question of inquiry. I went back through my interviews and thought about the conversations I had with residents of Strawberry Mansion and realized that in addition to gentrification, there were other influencers on education in Strawberry Mansion that could be impacting student attendance of school that I had previously been blind to. Moreover, maybe it was not gentrification that was causing a change in public education, but changes in local education options that were promoting gentrification.

What I found through my thesis work was that Green Village High School was negatively impacted by national policies and new additions of schools. After the introduction of the No
Child Left Behind Act (NCLB), which lessened funding for underperforming public schools, charter schools began appearing as solutions to underfunded schools.

It appeared that through the NCLB Act, underperforming schools quickly began to lose funding. This meant a decrease in resources at schools in Strawberry Mansion that were in desperate need of resources for its’ high-risk environment. As school quality dropped, students became less incentivized to attend their local public schools and sought alternate routes whether it be dropping out entirely, or switching districts. Funds then shifted within the public school district, charter schools saw their opportunity to enhance the educational opportunities and started planting roots in the neighborhood. As charter schools opened their doors, they not only attracted top talent from the neighborhood but also appealed to parents from other neighborhoods who wanted to send their students to top performing schools. Those same parents would have never sent their children to the Strawberry Mansion public schools were now moving more locally to send their kids to reputable charter schools. Thus, suggesting that the No Child Left Behind act and an increased presence of charter schools shaped the gentrification of Strawberry Mansion neighborhood.

Methods:

The research for this study was conducted through what came to be 19 interviews, including scheduled and impromptu discussions I had with residents and ex-residents of Strawberry Mansion and North Philly. Interviews inquired about the impacts that residents have felt from gentrification in Strawberry Mansion as well as the changes in education they have noticed in the past decade. Following the interviews, I coded themes that emerged such as gentrification, racial tension, charter schools and private schools, and displacement. I then used
these themes and additional research to determine that changes to education options were seen before gentrification began to occur.

**Significance of this study:**

What is influencing higher-income families to move into a notoriously crime-ridden neighborhood? Why is public school enrollment dropping? This study intends to understand how the gentrification and changes to education in Strawberry Mansion are related. I will focus on and analyze how gentrification occurred as education opportunities began to change. Ultimately this paper will argue that the introduction of charter schools into North Philly led to the gentrification of Strawberry Mansion. My thesis will include interviews from residents, teachers, and administrators from the Green Village High School, as well as the newest charter school addition to the area, Jefferson High School.

This thesis consists of five short chapters as well as an introduction and conclusion. Chapter one will discuss the historical background of Strawberry Mansion and how the founding of its present-day demographic came about through substantial racial tension which is still felt today. Chapter two will discuss the introduction of charter schools to North Philly: what year they were introduced, why they initially arrived, and how they have been received. Chapter three will discuss gentrification in Strawberry Mansion through the impact felt by current residents. Chapter five will discuss the future consequences that gentrification and the closure of public high schools will have on the low-income African American population in Strawberry Mansion.
Chapter 1

Strawberry Mansion Historical background

The narrative of how Strawberry Mansion evolved to its current state is key to setting the stage for the gentrification happening in 2019. The historical narrative exposes how racism has permeated the founding of Strawberry Mansion and shaped power dynamics between African Americans and white residents for decades to come, all the way to impacting African American’s access to education in Strawberry Mansion today in 2019.

Philadelphia: 1750’s-1900’s

Productivity and accessibility played significant roles in the foundation of Philadelphia as a major city. Starting in the 1750’s Philadelphia began to emerge as a trading center and prominent city. Shipbuilding, blacksmith shops, distilleries, breweries, and carriage shops all grew as industries substantially during this time. Philadelphia also began to gain a reputation as America’s financial capital\(^3\). Many prominent banks were on today’s main road, Chestnut Street, in proximity to the trade. Because of limited transportation sources during this time, most residents, even the wealthy, lived within a few blocks of the Delaware River\(^4\). The employment opportunities in the growing industries attracted English, Irish, Scottish, and German immigrants, and a community formed, featuring houses for mill workers and factory owners, churches, schools, expanded mills, and improved roads\(^5\).

\(^4\) ibid
In the 19th century, entrepreneurs and investments began to shift Philadelphia’s economy from trade and finance to manufacturing. Manufacturing establishments increased, and the city developed new and more efficient methods of transportation which changed the cityscape. Most employment opportunities shifted west from the Delaware River towards Broad Street. More massive factory and mill sizes led to a greater distance between work and residence. The increase in distance between work and home was further reinforced by the increasing modes of transportation such as the streetcar. Immigration and ethnicity also shaped life at this time. English immigrants settled in Kensington in the nineteenth century causing it to lead to its nickname of “Little England.” German immigrants found work in mills of Germantown. The Irish, who made up half of Philadelphia’s nineteenth-century foreign-born population, dominated the Northern Liberties, and Fishtown, and found work in a variety of trades, including textiles.

Wealthy industry workers utilized new technologies such as the horse-drawn streetcar, to live in the suburbs of North Philadelphia. As people migrated from local city boroughs in hopes of occupying a greener neighborhood in the city, Strawberry Mansion began to evolve into a favorite city oasis for the white Jewish community. “Between 1850 and 1860, in the northwest Philadelphia district, the proportion of households in the middle class increased from 13 percent to 27 percent, while the proportion of unskilled households decreased from 38 percent to 25 percent,” showing that during the 1850s the area began to evolve into a more affluent established neighborhood. The name of Strawberry Mansion comes from a beautiful estate in the area with the nickname- Strawberry Mansion. Strawberry Mansion, was previously known as the Huntsman House. It housed a restaurant known for serving some of Philadelphia’s most

\[\text{ibid}\]

\[\text{ibid}\]

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\[\text{ibid}\]
exquisite meals. Strawberry Mansion was home to a number of the city’s wealthiest families in the 19th Century. In 1880, the average home price was higher than 85% of the houses in Philadelphia\textsuperscript{11}.

In 1913, a real estate broker placed an ad in the \textit{Philadelphia Jewish Herald} encouraging Jewish people to leave center city Jewish quarters and instead relocate to the urban oasis of Strawberry Mansion\textsuperscript{13}. Soon after this, Strawberry Mansion saw a drastic increase in its white Jewish population. At its height, about one-fifth of the white Jewish population in the city lived in the premise of four blocks\textsuperscript{14}. The sizable Jewish contingent came to Strawberry Mansion mainly from eastern Europe.

\textsuperscript{12} https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Historic_Strawberry_Mansion
\textsuperscript{14} ibid
On a summer day of 2018, I sat under the shade of trees in Rittenhouse square and talked with a woman named Margerie. Margerie, a now 80-something-year-old woman, and proud great-great-grandmother, described to me the strawberry mansion she grew up in in the 1940’s:

It was such a beautiful place to get to grow up in. The townhouses were perfect for families so there were kids in every house practically. There were synagogues on every corner and it made for a special connection within the community. We all went to services together and practiced our religion together, and then got to spend time together. It used to be a really uniform and caring community. All of my friends were like me. They were young and Jewish and had parents who had similar jobs. There weren’t many black people there until my family moved out in the late 50’s. It had the most beautiful sunsets and I would go on the streets with my friends and we would watch the sky turn pink as we played and ate candy from the corner store.

Strawberry Mansion main road

*Strawberry Mansion: 1900’s-2000’s*

Philadelphia’s industrial neighborhoods experienced a dramatic shift in the second half of the twentieth century when there was a migration of African Americans at the same time that many industries relocated. Most of the white middle class moved to the suburbs, jobs left the industrial cities, poverty increased, and abandoned factories posed fire risks and offered havens

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for drug users. Crime and violence increased\textsuperscript{16}. In Philadelphia’s industrial neighborhoods, working-class white residents with few resources fought against integration.

Accessibility played a significant role in the evolution of Strawberry Mansion. As public transportation increased with the opening of Broad Street Station\textsuperscript{17}, the wealthiest city commuters traveled to more lush suburbs, creating what is now the affluent Main Line. This was the start of high income, white families moving to the suburbs\textsuperscript{18}. Cars became more common, and more funding went into public infrastructure such as highways, all making the suburbs more accessible. This is the time that social and racial tensions, caused by the arrival of an increasing African American population, first began to mount in Philadelphia. Leah Boustan\textsuperscript{19} found that the increasing arrival of African Americans into cities like Philadelphia in the 1940s led to “white flight” to the suburbs. By the time white residents of Strawberry Mansion left, the African Americans and Latinos who made up the next generation of occupants often found homes dilapidated and lacking in basic amenities\textsuperscript{20}.

\textbf{White Flight and Racial Tension:}

As an increasing number of African Americans migrated to Philadelphia in the early 1900s, white flight increased, shaping the city’s evolution. From 1916 to 1918 housing construction slowed due to the wartime labor and supply shortages, resulting in little available new housing\textsuperscript{21}. Thus, the Great Migration of this time produced a great housing crisis as the city struggled to accommodate an influx of newcomers. The black migration in the early 1920s also led to the emergence of another housing crisis. A press report at the time reported the plight of

\textsuperscript{16} ibid  
\textsuperscript{17} ibid  
\textsuperscript{18} ibid  
\textsuperscript{19} ibid  
\textsuperscript{20} ibid  
\textsuperscript{21} ibid
16 people living in one room over a garage\textsuperscript{22}. After World War II ended, Philadelphia developed a housing shortage.

The housing crisis was not merely the result of a shortage of houses, but also an effect of white resistance to black resettlement during the Great Migration in neighborhoods. Press reports at the time write that white residents were determined to ensure that Black migrants lived only in areas that already had Black communities. Vacant houses in other areas were not for rent or sale to Black migrants. Many White realtors worked to limit African American’s ability to move into local neighborhoods. A White realtor, wrote in the \textit{Philly Tribune}, that realtors would “charge four or five hundred dollars more because ‘niggers’ ought to be made to pay for the privilege of living in a decent, respectable neighborhood.”\textsuperscript{23}

Furthermore, with the increasing migration of African Americans to Philadelphia came high tension in between the city’s predominantly white police force, and rapidly growing African-American population during the 1950s. Petty arrests, incidents of harassments, created strong tensions\textsuperscript{24}. Over the summer of 2019, when coming back from a day spent in Strawberry Mansion, I struck up a conversation with a kind looking older woman on the bus back to center city who was concerned that I was in Strawberry Mansion alone. It did not take long for the woman, named Miriam, to begin proudly describing her loyalty to the neighborhood through the years and she agreed to tell me about the changes she has seen in the past decades. Because of her old age and longtime residence in Strawberry Mansion, her insights are extremely valuable to the understanding of Strawberry Mansion today. Miriam described to me the following:

\textsuperscript{22} ibid
\textsuperscript{23} ibid
\textsuperscript{24} ibid
During the post-war period, the joining of minority populations, and mixed-classes created a tension. The police force is something that played into the tension greatly. I was a little girl at the time and vividly remember my mom telling my to be on my best behavior around white people and especially police officers. I was a mischievous girl and she was so scared I would do something smart and get myself into trouble. I was young at the time so didn’t realize, but my mom must have felt a lot of stress.

Strawberry Mansion has changed since then. After all of the riots and people moving out of the neighborhood it hasn’t been maintained.

What Miriam talked about highlights how racism felt intensely by the African American residents in the 1900’s. This is important because as gentrification begins to unfold in Strawberry Mansion today, residents are even more opposed to it because of how they feel they have been wronged by middle class white people in the past.

The history of the police presence in Strawberry Mansion is a long and contentious history for African Americans. Miriam’s description of how the ‘50s, and ‘60s, Strawberry Mansion African American population shows their frustration with the heavy-handedness of the police, which ultimately built up frustrations leading to riots. Simultaneously, the wealthier, often white, middle-class residents continued to move out to the suburbs in what became called white flight.

“In the late ’50s residents knew the community was coming to an end...the flight of white people from this community was overnight. They moved to Logan, Feltonville and Mt. Airy “25.

Then as told by current resident of Strawberry Mansion named Miriam, in 1964:

An arrest in Strawberry Mansion led to rumors that the arrest had gone bad, or that someone was injured or killed by the police. Everybody came from their house to protest. This turned real violent, and then people were robbing and starting fires, and fighting with police on the streets.

25 ibid
The anger pent up by the African American population, was probably precipitated by their frustration with poverty, police brutality, racism, declining infrastructure, and perceived indifference— from policy makers on the dismal standards of life. Miriam also described the situation as:

> With the looting of white-owned businesses, many of those were Jewish folk’s, many people in the African American community thought those businesses were racist, many of the business owners were disrespectful toward African-Americans, and made inappropriate comments, just harassing us. So there was strong tensions there.

With palpable racial tension in full swing, the neighborhood saw the majority of its’ white population move. Riots caused by racial tension in the 1950s drove down urban employment, incomes, and housing values. The 1950s and 1960s brought an economic decline and urban decay. White Jewish immigrants, after building synagogues throughout Strawberry Mansion, started heading for the suburbs after mounting racial tensions. The remaining members of the Jewish community left the area in the mid-sixties after race riots took place near Broad and Columbia Avenue.

The emergence of black power following the riots in the ‘60s, as well as the emergence of a militant civil rights movement in Philadelphia seemed to be a response to people feeling like they lost control or say over their lives, over where they lived. This was the first time many of the new residents of Strawberry Mansion began to question the safety of their neighborhood, as well as their friends’ and family’s safety. Miriam’s description expresses a sense of danger, and

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27 ibid
feeling unsettled at the time, not being able to trust that city officials wouldn't harass her family just for their race. She said that she: “wondered if my sons would be harassed by the police, I didn’t trust the community”. It is experiences such as these that have shaped the sense of uncertainty of outsiders among the residents, as well as the way they liken their properties to their rights today.

*Strawberry Mansion: 2000’s*

Present day Strawberry Mansion is bound by four blocks in the Northwestern area of Philadelphia, Pennsylvania. As of 2010, Strawberry Mansion was 94.3% black or African American, 2.3% white or European American, 1.6% Hispanic, 0.8% Asian, and 1% all other. Though it is densely populated with 21,243 people per square mile compared to the city’s average of 11,606, it also has an unusually high amount of vacant properties, one of the highest in Philadelphia. Out of the city's 26,000 abandoned units, 1,845 of them are in the four bound blocks of Strawberry Mansion.

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28 ibid
A walk through the neighborhood reveals the sight of vacant lots and dilapidated houses that stand in the same place where the once-thriving and prosperous mini-metropolis sustained a large population just decades ago. Today, a large portion of Strawberry Mansion’s population lives below the poverty line. With 37.2% of the residents of Strawberry Mansion being listed as under the poverty line whereas only 25.7% of Philadelphia exists under the poverty line\textsuperscript{31}. Moreover, following white flight and sustained tensions with the police, it has become a neighborhood notorious for violence and crime. Modern Strawberry Mansion has acquired a reputation as one of the most dangerous areas of Philadelphia. The United States crime index in 2016 stood at 236.5, and the crime index of Strawberry Mansion was documented as being 469.6, nearly double that of the nation\textsuperscript{32}. Even in the middle of a sunny summer day, the neighborhood looks like a ghost town.

Walking the sidewalks of the neighborhood feels lonely, and the only sounds are those of an occasional car bass speaker booming as it cruises the streets. Despite it being nearly 3pm, I have only passed by about five people. All men, all black. Most of the town houses in the neighborhood are three stories, with two windows on each floor, siding that is falling off the house, boarded up first floor windows, and bars over the entrances. However, every block or so I come across a house with a fresh coat of paint, reflective windows, and a for lease sign.

\textsuperscript{31} ibid
\textsuperscript{32} ibid
In 2000, the neighborhood had the lowest average home price in the city. You could buy an entire townhouse for around $14,000 a decade ago according to a resident, Peter. Houses are dilapidated and riddled with plumbing and infrastructure problems. Strawberry Mansion crime rate is about 50 percent higher than the Philadelphia average, and it has seen ten homicides, 11 rapes, and 116 aggravated assaults in just the last six months. Much of the violent incidents are caused by territorial disputes as well as the sale of drugs. One of the residents, named Marcus, I spoke to on my numerous visits to the neighborhood talked to me outside of his slowly decaying townhome on an oppressively humid summer day.

Marcus is in his 20’s and sits on a cracked concrete stoop, alone. He wears a t-shirt with the face of a wolf on it. His shoes looked either like he is one of the most active people I have ever met, or they were well-worn hand-me-downs with his toes poking out of one of the sides. I talked to him about what he was doing for the summer and his plans included sitting outside and getting to watch TV with his sisters and cousins at night.

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33 ibid
Through the conversation he described his life as dull and where he lived to be depressing what seemed to be every other sentence. He was forced to choose between supporting his family and going to school, and in a time of intense struggle, he chose to support his family, feeling that the education he was receiving would not help him with his situation at the time.
Chapter 2

Charter Schools in North Philadelphia

Chapter overview:

In the late 1990’s charter schools first broke ground in North Philadelphia. Philadelphia has since reviewed dozens of applications for charters and seen a dramatic shift in educational opportunities available for students. Between 1998 and 2018 North Philadelphia opened eight charter schools. Charter schools are given more flexibility in curriculum curation than public schools so have specialized focus areas such as curriculums that focus on the sciences, or arts. This makes them very attractive to many parents who are invested in their children’s education. Charters are publicly funded by the government and also supported by outside donors. This means they are free to attend, the only difference in enrollment between charter schools and public schools is that charter schools typically have an entrance exam as well as a lottery. So although all students have the option of attending, ultimately not all students can enroll. Many students have moved away from attending public schools, traveling out of their neighborhoods for newer, often more well endowed, charter schools. This chapter seeks to look into what factors were involved in the introduction of charter schools, as well as how the introduction of charter schools changed the lives of the low-income African American residents of Strawberry Mansion residents.

34 Charter Schools in North Philly Founding Dates
Alliance for Progress Charter: Founded in 1998
KIPP Philadelphia Preparatory Academy: Founded in 2003
Youthbuild Charter School: Founded in 2002, program consolidated to a single school
Frederick Douglass Mastery School: Founded in 2015
Tech Freire Charter School: Founded in 2016
Mastery Prep Elementary Charter School: 2018
**Why Charter Schools Arrived in Philly:**

Privately run, publicly funded charter schools became key to the educational landscape in Philadelphia starting in the early 2000s. Charter schools are tuition-free and open to the majority of students- typically with the caveat of being run on a lottery and having to qualify based on an entrance exam to gain admission. So though hypothetically they are accessible to everyone, only some students will gain admission. Charter schools in Pennsylvania are typically more common in cities than in the suburbs and are a response to urban school failure.

The first charter schools were introduced in the late 1990s with Alliance for Progress Charter opening in 1998\(^\text{35}\). Since then a handful of charters have been opened with the most recent being the Mastery Prep Elementary, which opened in 2018. The number of charters in Philadelphia rose from a handful at first to eighty-four by the fall of 2016. They serve approximately 30 percent of the students in Philadelphia. Along with Detroit, Washington DC and New Orleans, Philadelphia had one of the highest proportions of students in charters in the country\(^\text{36}\).

Charters have played an important role in Philadelphia’s reform effort led by former Superintendent Arlene Ackerman, which was launched in 2010\(^\text{37}\). The reform, named the ‘Renaissance Schools Initiative’ worked to improve the outcomes for Philadelphia’s lowest-performing schools\(^\text{38}\). One aspect of this act was that ‘seven traditional public schools in the city with especially poor outcomes were turned over to charter providers\(^\text{39}\).’ Included in this was the Mastery Charter School in North Philadelphia. As the 2016 school year began, more than half of

\(^{35}\) ibid  
\(^{36}\) ibid  
\(^{37}\) ibid  
\(^{38}\) ibid  
\(^{39}\) ibid
all of Pennsylvania’s charters were in Philadelphia, while only five charter schools were in suburban school districts in the four Pennsylvania counties surrounding it

Residents have noticed the change in the neighborhood. Resident Jimmy, who went to Green Village High School over a decade ago, spoke about the changes that he has noticed involving the introduction of charter schools:

I’ve lived in these streets since I was a kid. My parents moved here a before I was born and it’s always been my home. We might never had money but we had each other and a place to live together. I went to Green Village before anyone knew about it. It was rough on days and may not have been the best school, but it was a community. And I got to make friends there and they were the people I saw in the streets and in the school. After the new schools started arriving in Philly the neighborhood started changing. Some of the younger kids stopped going to the local schools. My cousin’s son went to one of them(charter schools) instead of the neighborhood school. His mom says that he’s getting good education but he doesn’t know the neighbors that well now- he’s not a part of it. This is not just him I know that other kids are doing the same thing and our community is gunna suffer from it.

Many proponents argue that the monopoly held by public schools is bad for students. Charter schools alleviate this issue among others by infusing market dynamics into the education system and promoting more innovative and responsive schools. Jimmy’s view, however, voices concerns regarding how the introduction of charter schools influences local school attendance in Strawberry Mansion, as well as what he describes as a change in community, also seen as a sign of gentrification. However, proponents of charter schools usually argue that what Jimmy is experiencing, with the charter schools providing options for parents and shifting decision making out of the hands of government officials, as being positive. I think this may be an oversight as it

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40 https://philadelphiaencyclopedia.org/archive/education-and-opportunity-2/
41 ibid
devalues the quality of life in neighborhoods who depend on having a strong sense of community to function, and neglects the fact that as more affluent families move in, low-income families are more likely to be displaced and left without a place to live.

*Theory of Choice:*

The theory of choice and competition is central to the charter school movement\textsuperscript{43}. In the case of Strawberry Mansion, adding options is doing more than creating choices. It is creating division within the community and promoting gentrification. Neighbors whose kids historically would have gone to local public school offerings may now opt to send their children to charter schools out of fear that the public schools are closing. The increased choice also leads to higher-income families moving in, and creating increased living expenses. Meaning a high change of displacing the impoverished population, as well as a lessened sense of community as families move in and out of the neighborhood.

In theory, charter schools are accountable to the district they are in. However, Pennsylvania’s charter school law includes limited mechanisms for oversight and accountability. This means that charter schools can more easily guarantee a source of funding despite school performance, and have less risk of being shut down in the long run. Moreover, charters are exempt from government regulations. This is key to their role in Strawberry Mansion because where public schools have obligations to meet performance standards and have funding dependent on that, the leniency that charter schools have means that they can be more resilient than public schools. They can design specialized curriculums and class structures free of typical

\textsuperscript{43} ibid
government regulation and don’t have to worry about student performance entirely dictating their funding. The flexible and unique programming that ensues is appealing to many, and therefore draws a high number of applicants. But, because charters function on a lottery, they cannot accept everyone. Thus, as gentrification occurs, low-income African American residents are being forced out of school.

How Charters Are Funded:

Funding for charter schools in Pennsylvania comes through public funding from students’ original districts. The amount is determined by a formula that distinguished regular education from special education students. This is a troublesome formula for Philadelphia because of an already existing low per-pupil spending. Furthermore, many low-income neighborhoods have little financial support from the state and many unique demands from at-risk students who need special attention or support. For each student, the Philadelphia school district had to send around 70 percent of the year’s per-pupil cost from the district to the receiving charter. This plan is designed to give the sending district some money for fixed expenses while directing the bulk of each student’s funding to the school he or she would attend. However, this formula further disadvantages the most vulnerable population.

As of 2018, the School District of Philadelphia received nine applications for charter schools that would create more than 7,000 new charter seats. 2018’s charter applications feature familiar names, including Mastery, the city’s largest charter network. Missions around many of the new charter schools revolve around developing accomplished students, but many of

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44 English Language Learners. NEA. http://www.nea.org/home/32346.htm
45 ibid
46 ibid
them are deficient in creating a sense of community. For example, the mission of Mastery charters is to make sure that “all students learn the academic and personal skills they need to be truly prepared for postsecondary success and able to pursue their dreams.” Though this is the right intention behind any educational institution, Strawberry Mansion residents find the act of charter schools replacing public schools to dismantle the existing sense of neighborhood community. Nina, a young mother in the neighborhood, spoke about how the charter schools were located outside of Strawberry Mansion, and made it difficult for her daughter to make friends.

I put Faith into one of the new schools, Frederick Douglas Mastery Charter. My mom thought it would be good for her. Now she’s like good in class and everything, but she’s missin’ out on what her friends do. She could be hanging out with then sometimes but she doesn’t and I don’t know what that’s gonna do to her in a few years.

Nina’s circumstance demonstrates how the addition of charter schools may ultimately uplift the educational opportunities available for the average citizen, however it has negative repercussions on the most at-risk students.

By 2012, the shift of students and funds to charters led Philadelphia to the closure of dozens of schools, usually those with declining student populations located in high-poverty areas. Areas like Strawberry Mansion. Two parents I sat down and spoke to in Strawberry Mansion spoke about how they saw this change impact their children’s access to education.

The city’s moving our kids from schools they’re trying to close like Green Village to those with different missions. My boys don't need a special science program they need special attention and the schools they’re being sent to don't cut it. They’re taking them from a program that had what my boys needed and had the

\[47\] ibid
socializing my boys loved. Now they’re further away from me and feel like they’re missing out on what
their old friends are doing.

The voices of these Strawberry Mansion parents shows how the addition of charter
schools changes low income African American’s access education. As a result of the new
addition, children are having to travel further distances to schools to receive education and are
thus undermining the sense of community that used to exist. Though some low-income parents
are lucky and are able to enroll their kids in charters, other children are not as lucky. The most
at-risk students are not just losing a sense of community, but their access to education. And,
ultimately, as gentrification continues in Strawberry Mansion they will lose their homes.
Chapter 3

Gentrification

Chapter Overview:

Situated between West Philadelphia, and Fairmount Park, Strawberry Mansion is quickly rising as a gold mine for developers. In the 1940 census, Strawberry Mansion was 100 percent white\textsuperscript{48}. However, by the 1980s, the majority was low income African American. In less than a century, Strawberry Mansion shifted from being one of Philadelphia’s wealthiest neighborhoods to one of its poorest. It is now seeing a resurgence of wealth and white people. Between 2010 and 2016, median home prices in the 19121 zip code, which includes Strawberry Mansion and

\textsuperscript{48} ibid
Brewerytown increased more than any area in Philadelphia. This chapter seeks to define gentrification and help us understand it concerning how Strawberry Mansion is evolving today.

**Defining Gentrification:**

In the past decade, Strawberry Mansion has begun to experience the urban phenomenon of gentrification. Gentrification is understood as: the movement of mainly middle-class, often white Americans back into cities, usually choosing areas with low living costs, typically populated with minority residents, and in Strawberry Mansion’s case, low-income African Americans. Ruth Glass first introduced the term gentrification in London in the 1960s as a process where “many working-class quarters of London have been invaded by middle classes upper and lower.” Typically, as middle class families come and reside in a primarily working class town, the working class households are eventually displaced. It is for this lack of regard for the low-income and minority population that gentrification instigates a division of class division.

Gentrification has undergone a vital transition from focusing on the upheaval of the neighborhoods that were not given a lot of attention and care to a focus on the society and the effects it has on those displaced and those who remain living there. The experience of gentrification is unique. Proponents of gentrification may awe at the face value of it- the new local shops and the redeveloped housing. Underneath all of the aesthetics though, the negatives of gentrification become a neglected issue, and the low income and minority residents are forgotten. ‘Gentrification’ no longer defines just the urban landscape. The definition has come to attach itself to the connotation of minorities being displaced and disadvantaged. Before the term

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49 ibid
50 History and Explanation of Gentrification- Gentrification. Google Sites, sites.google.com/site/gg2wdermotmichell/history-and-explanation
Gentrification was coined, the phenomenon was thought of as the fluctuation of residents in a neighborhood. However, gentrification no longer is narrowly defined by changes in the housing market. Now, the definition of gentrification also accounts for the restructuring of social class that comes with economic changes. We must take note of how the long time, often overlooked, minority residents of Strawberry Mansion are experiencing gentrification in the neighborhood they call home.

Gentrification does more than create class divide. Rowland Atkinson, a professor at the University of Sheffield, defined gentrification as being “the rehabilitation of working-class and derelict housing and the consequent transformation of an area into a middle-class neighborhood.” In the article Does Gentrification Help or Harm Urban Neighborhoods?, Atkinson describes the controversial outcomes of gentrification. He says that gentrification can be subjective depending on people’s perspective, interests and what affects them. Some people may see that the increases in house prices are beneficial for home sellers but not home buyers. In the case of Strawberry Mansion, where resident Peter, had discussed houses being around $14,000 a decade ago when he first moved in, now has housing prices upwards of $160,000.

Walking around the neighborhood, I observed a neighborhood in flux. Older houses and vacant properties that have existed in decay for decades now look like money signs to developers and investors. There will be individuals who benefit from the rising housing costs-the middle-class residents, while others are affected negatively by it- the low-income African American residents.

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51 ibid
52 ibid
Typical Causes of Gentrification:

In Strawberry Mansion, many of the newly constructed houses are newer and larger for less than what you can find in Center City; high-income households with the means to are more likely to choose neighborhoods with newer housing\textsuperscript{54}. Moreover, now since the neighborhood has additional amenities like new schools and revitalized parks, higher income people are more likely to make the move. In the case of Strawberry Mansion, developers are re-building residential at the same time that Philadelphia has been getting national attention as an affordable and cool place to live. Recent articles in the New York Times and Wall Street Journal have compared Philly to a cheaper New York\textsuperscript{55}. Such publicity encourages people to move to Philly to acquire the affordable newly built developments.

According to Jeffery Lin of the Federal Reserve Bank of Philadelphia, “we can understand changes in neighborhood status via changes in one or more of the four factors amenities, productivity, access, and prices\textsuperscript{56}.” History has shown us that neighborhoods decline and rebound more frequently than is generally believed. Over decades as trends and styles evolve, technology changes, and businesses change key characteristics of neighborhoods are impacted which begins to lead to a socioeconomic structural change of our cities. Strawberry Mansion has seen changes in all four of these factors in the past century. Specifically being education, prices being the increasing real estate value, and access being new funding directed to public transportation in the area.

\textsuperscript{54} ibid
First, to define the term more explicitly, an amenity is a feature of a neighborhood that a resident would be willing to pay more for the opportunity to have. Amenities could be classified as a good school, a water view, or new restaurants. All of these would increase the amenity value of a neighborhood. Strawberry Mansion’s first amenity was the addition of charter schools which attracted a higher income interest. Following the introduction of charter schools to the neighborhood, Strawberry Mansion saw new amenities being added, such as the Discovery Center. This is a ‘new environmental education center operated by the Pennsylvania chapter of the National Audubon Society and Philadelphia Outward Bound School.’ The $18 million facility is going to overlook a reservoir in East Fairmount Park which was previously drained and fenced off in the 1970s. The 37-acre East Park Reservoir used to be a lush backyard for residents of Strawberry Mansion. After the city closed it off decades ago, it became a destination for migratory birds. Now, the state’s Audubon branch, based in Montgomery County has fundraised to reopen the urban sanctuary. This amenity is slated to attract a new crowd to Strawberry Mansion, who will imagine the neighborhood as one that is nestled in the city but offers the recluse of a suburban oasis. I think it is essential to consider that a factor such as the introduction of new schools led to new amenities, new development, and ultimately the initial gentrification of Strawberry Mansion. Meaning, the introduction of charter schools initiated the process of gentrification.

57 ibid
59 ibid
Mixed Views of Gentrification in Strawberry Mansion:

Adverse effects of Gentrification are usually noted through disruption to longtime residents, education changes, and displacement. In 2003 Strawberry Mansion first saw signs of gentrification after recent changes in its education system with new charter schools being introduced\(^6\). Resident Alissa talked about the changes that she began to see in the early 2000s that have only compounded since.

I’ve owned this home for over 41 years. I noticed how much it’s worth going up in the past years though. I bought it for like $15,000 or something like that like in the 80’s. Now it’s worth over $50,000. I can’t say I’m complaining because I’ve made money but like the other people out here aren’t in the same boat. They don’t all own their houses, so if rent goes up they’re struggling. I’ve seen some good friends leave because it’s gotten to be too much money for them.

Similarly to Alissa, many of her neighbors are seeing property value increase. Property increase both increases rent for low income residents and ups taxes. Both of these factors hurt the low-income African American residents of Strawberry Mansion. It means that these people will have to relocate to a new home which will both be challenging to find something so affordable, as well as pose a struggle in up and ending their social lives and attachment to what they are used to calling their home.

The conversation on gentrification involves displacement and homelessness because the people who are most impacted are those that are not able to afford the increasing costs of living in gentrifying neighborhoods. Atkinson notes in his work that though there are positive outcomes of gentrification including decreased crime, improved local retail and amenities, the negative

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\(^6\) [http://kippphiladelphia.org/about/our-story/](http://kippphiladelphia.org/about/our-story/)
usually outweigh the positives. For example, as discussed by Alissa, there are people who are displaced and who can no longer pay their rent, some even becoming homeless from this. Moreover, for those that do manage to stay in the neighborhood and are able to pay increasing costs, there is concern over how the neighborhood community will change. Resident, Sean, talked to me about how much he loves the traditions in the neighborhood.

Yeah, we meet up on the streets to chill. You know? We get home from work and put those speakers up here in that truck. We see how our days was and all that. We don’t know how this change is going to change our plans. If white folk are moving in they may not like these things we do.

Sean continued to discuss the ramifications of gentrification on different generations.

Some folks just don’t care about these changes, you have the seniors who are saying at us all they always knew this change was coming and they don’t know what to think. They’re old and don’t want to move. You have the young folk, which doesn’t have the skills to communicate these struggles. So this is just making a bigger struggle for us. Mostly I think people just doesn’t know what’s going on. We haven’t been educated on this. Many of the homes we live in are passed down to us from families. When they die, most of us won’t know what to do.

After the introduction of charter schools in the early 2000s, Strawberry Mansion has seen an upswing in house sales and new businesses. Residents have noted that as of 2005, the southern and western boundaries of Strawberry Mansion began to show signs of gentrification. Artist lofts and new apartment complexes have popped up in derelict factories and abandoned properties. Between 2012 and 2017, no Philadelphia neighborhood showed stronger sales growth than Strawberry Mansion. In 2017, more than 540 properties were sold in Strawberry Mansion's neighborhood, up from 217 five years earlier61. As housing prices rise and higher income families

move in, new businesses and amenities are popping up to cater to the new residents. The NSP - Neighborhood Stabilization Program is managed by the Redevelopment Authority of Philadelphia. The Program has received $16.8 million from federal support - the Department of Housing and Urban Development. Additional initiatives have been taken by Philadelphia such as the 2015 restoration of the East Park Reservoir.\textsuperscript{62} Initiatives such as this have been undertaken with the hopes of bringing youths to the park to participate in community-run programs.

Resident, Ali, described the change as:

\begin{quote}
important because of renewed interest. The new park and amenities will change what current residents are participating in. It will also change the way other Philadelphia people view Strawberry Mansion. Maybe more people will give it a chance.
\end{quote}

Residents now wonder if it is possible for Strawberry Mansion to integrate the changes in a way that’s beneficial and sustainable for low-income African American residents. Brianna, a white-collar middle class woman, thinks the changes have the potential to be positive. She thinks that if new residents move in and are desensitized to the pain that overwhelmed the neighborhood historically, more value may be added to the neighborhood. Regardless, it is apparent from the perspective of Strawberry Mansion neighborhood, that gentrification is underway, and that charter schools were one of the first factors to instigate the neighborhood changes. Now that the process of gentrification affecting low-income African Americans is evident, we may wonder how this will impact them? And, what will the impact be on their ability to access education?

\textsuperscript{62} ibid
Chapter 4

Education

![Facade of Green Village High School in Strawberry Mansion](image)

Facade of the Green Village High School in Strawberry Mansion, Google Images.

**Chapter Overview:**

Which came first? Charter schools or gentrification? I propose that the introduction of charter schools was what sparked gentrification in Strawberry Mansion. But, before the introduction of charter schools came the No Child Left Behind Act. Though charter schools typically enhance the quality of education for towns and cities, the resulting impact of uncertainty in the public school- Green Village’s future, is a cause of concern for its students.

It is evident through the eyes of Strawberry Mansion residents that gentrification is underway. Changes to the landscape, demographics, and cost of living are easily noted, but what will happen to the education system that currently serves the low-income African American population in Strawberry Mansion. In this chapter, we will learn about the relationship between education and gentrification and how the No Child Left Behind Act played a role in shaping education for students in Strawberry Mansion.
Footage of a student pat-down in Green Village High

**Green Village High School:**

Recently, the effects of gentrification have been noticed by Strawberry Mansion residents. Though aspects such as the sense of community, cost of living, and displacement are evident, a less discussed impact of gentrification is; how gentrification has changed the local high school. The relationship between education for minority populations in Strawberry Mansion and gentrification is clear. An increase in charter schools following in the No Child Left Behind Act in 2001, has led to the decline of the public schools in the neighborhood. In 1981, Philadelphia had 225,000 students enrolled in 273 public schools, all run by the Philadelphia School District. Now, it has 205,000 spread across 307 schools, 220 run by the district and 87 publicly funded but privately managed by charters.

At Green Village’s peak, all five floors of the school were bustling; now, just sections of three floors are used. When the entire student body gathers in the auditorium they take up only a small portion of it. Every student at Green Village is classified by definition as poor. Most are

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63 [https://www.google.com/search?q=strawberry+mansion+high+school&source=lnms&tbm=isch&sa=X&ved=0ahUKEwiH15aC897hAhVtx1kKHeOACEQ_AUIESgE&biw=1156&bih=646#imgrc=OXDKYJ-X9eaYYM](https://www.google.com/search?q=strawberry+mansion+high+school&source=lnms&tbm=isch&sa=X&ved=0ahUKEwiH15aC897hAhVtx1kKHeOACEQ_AUIESgE&biw=1156&bih=646#imgrc=OXDKYJ-X9eaYYM)

64 ibid

65 ibid
black. Two in five require special-education services. Some have been accepted to charters, just to be kicked out, others have been in juvenile systems, and many do not have parents to help them with any of this. They are the city’s most vulnerable population, and they depend on the support provided by Green Village to feel any hope for the future. The Green Village High School can be understood as a microcosm of Strawberry Mansion, where violence and drugs have plagued the neighborhood for decades. For six years in the early 2000s, Strawberry Mansion High School was on all lists that ranked the most dangerous schools in the US. By 2013, the school was outfitted with nearly 100 security cameras lining the hallways, metal detectors at every entrance and mandates for students empty their pockets before going into classrooms.

Under the direction of former principal Linda Cliatt-Wayman, the Green Village High School added sports, culinary arts, building maintenance, and an honors program to the school. The school came off the federal "persistently dangerous" list for schools with a high rate of serious incidents and saw test scores, graduation rate, and college-bound rate inch up. But, even with strong leadership and some progress, it has still struggled since the early 2000s. It scored just a 5, 4, and 7 out of 100 in the three most recent years of the district's internal report card for schools, based on factors including test and attendance. Even worse, as other schools have made themselves available, Green Village’s enrollment plunged 40 percent in three years, and its last principal, Tony Oyola, was removed after complaints about his stewardship.

66 ibid
67 ibid
68 ibid

39
Retired high school educator from Green Village high, Amanda, discussed the importance of education for the low-income African American population in Strawberry Mansion. She described it as such:

The future of the neighborhood lies with the up and coming young generation. We hope that crime rates will begin decrease as community leaders work to positively influence the neighborhood’s youth. By having parents and educators involved in children’s lives we will be able to achieve this.

Essential to children’s development is the ability to complete primary education. In Strawberry Mansion that means having public schools so that all residents, especially the at-risk low-income African American residents, can benefit from. However, as charter schools have moved into the neighborhood, attracting outside attention from interested parents, the public schools have seen a decline in student enrollment.

After the No Child Left Behind Act began which mandated public schools to achieve a standard of test scores, Green Village High school, was put in a special district program called the turnaround network, to work to give it more support and, it had more resources per student than other schools in the district.\textsuperscript{69}

But those who are involved in the school say that designation meant little. A retired teacher, Amanda, says that:

The designation with the turnaround network gets the students that they put out of charters and other schools.

But, this population has so much else going on other than school, and we never got the resources for that type of student. The students who struggle the most, have the most going on outside of the classroom, and that’s not something that charter schools are going to fix. They need public schools that are in their community and cater to the special needs that they demand so desperately.

\textsuperscript{69} ibid
A Fight for Education:

With home prices rising in the neighborhood and new businesses and developments cropping up on the edges of Strawberry Mansion, it seems to many of the residents that the district is taking Green Village High away with the intentions of remaking the neighborhood attractive to newcomers and eventually cutting out the minority population. Resident, Demi, a college-aged woman said that she:

Is frustrated because I feel like a plan like this would only be considered in a neighborhood of poor black people. It doesn’t think about the needs of the real residents of Strawberry Mansion and puts people of color in last.

The turmoil surrounding the uncertainty around Green Village’s future has existed for years now. Resident, Sienna recounted a meeting she attended on March 28th, 2018.

A handful of community members attended the meeting at Green Village High School. It was facilitated by the Assistant Superintendent in charge of the district’s Turnaround Network. Most of the people at the meeting just found out about it through a notice posted on social media very recently—there wasn’t really a public notice about it. The district officials didn’t post about the decisions they’ve made. In the meeting he said that he didn’t have any idea how the students in the remaining grades would deal with decreases in student body and staff, and denied that the school is being closed. It (Green Village High) was supposed to be phased out since 2017, but they changed their mind I guess. In the meeting they announced that graduating classes at the high school will start again in 2023, and that starting in September 2019, neighborhood students could attend a new accelerated school in the building, but he gave no details about the program or who would oversee it. He also said an evening program for students and adults may be added later. Before this meeting, the information revolving around the future of the school wasn’t public really. We heard so many different things, we heard it would be closing by 2019, we heard it would be open but with different openings, we heard it would be opened with in house dorms, we heard so many different things people didn’t know what to think. I think that was intentional on the city’s part. I don’t think they want us to have a good sense of what they’re going cause then they can make changes and do
what they want without as much backlash from the residents. They don’t care what they do to the black poor students. They clearly aren’t thinking about what’s going to happen to them, it’s just an afterthought at most you know.

A similar situation occurred in 2009 in North Philadelphia with the old William Penn High School, which "temporarily" closed in 2009 with promises to re-open. Instead, it was demolished after being sold to Temple University. The lack of transparency on behalf of the city is unfair to Strawberry Mansion residents. As expressed by Sienna, neighborhood leaders seemed frustrated with the official’s dismissive attitude towards Strawberry Mansion residents, as well as the district’s lack of community outreach before making their decision. It hinders their ability to voice opinions on what they know would be best for the neighborhood children. The dubiousness in the process seems like a forced eviction for current students of the high school. Sienna was not the only resident who was frustrated with the process and felt neglected by the officials. Two men, both fathers of young children, sat down with me to talk about how they have felt disregarded by the government officials since the process of the phase-out began.

This whole time we’ve been given very limited information, and not fully told what would happen to our kids who were supposed to go to the school. We didn’t get a say about any of this and didn’t agree to anything the government is proposing- I don’t know if that’s alright but it feels wrong. In 2017 a ($145\textsuperscript{70}) million deal to contract with various vendors for alternative learning programs for our kids in locations was confirmed. Then, a few months later community members made officials hold a meeting at Green Village high, to confirm or deny rumors about the deal. But, officials wouldn’t answer any of the questions asked about the deal and if a new school would be replacing Green Village.

\textsuperscript{70} ibid
Officials have stated that their rationale in re-purposing the high school is that the school is under-enrolled they students are selecting other schools because of deficiencies at there. However, residents feel this is not an accurate representation. As expressed by Sienna, and other neighborhood parents, it is evident that they feel that the city has intentionally kept them in the dark and forced them to consider other options for school. After the introduction of charter schools in the early 2000s, the district has closed many of the public schools that feed into Green Village High, including nearby Walton Elementary, L.P. Hill and Strawberry Mansion Middle School71. By doing this, the city has forced the youngest residents of Strawberry Mansion to seek education in other areas of North Philly, mostly with charter schools. This ultimately decreases the likelihood that they will attend the public Green Village High, and suggests that the closing of previous public schools in Strawberry Mansion was an intentional act and that the district created the conditions which have led to the present under-enrollment at Green Village.

Disregard of Low Income African Americans:

Over the past two decades, the school-choice movement has upended educational landscapes across Philadelphia. Scores of charter schools have broken ground in Philadelphia. This has resulted in neighborhood high schools struggling, leaving the most vulnerable students without options. Many of the upper and middle class families who move into gentrifying areas are highly involved with their children’s education72. Moreover, in Strawberry Mansion many gentrifiers choose not to send their children to local schools, which impacts the population of the local schools. This impact causes school populations to drop further and further from what it is supposed to be at capacity. Their drive to seek out the best education opportunities comes at a

72 ibid
cost to low-income African American families. These families are typically displaced before getting to take advantage of the improving quality of education available. If they are not displaced by the gentrification occurring, they face struggles with enrolling their children in charter schools. This struggle for low-income African Americans manifests itself in two ways. One being that since the new families do not send their kids to the public schools, the public schools see a drop in population and are at higher risk of closing. The second is that these families will instead send their children to local charter schools. Since charter schools are run on a lottery basis, the increased competition and number of students in the lottery will put the low-income African American children at a disadvantage. Because many of the low-income African American children struggle with resources or have no direction from parents, they lack as many resources to prepare for such entrance exams. As a result, the more affluent children have a better chance of doing well on the exams and gaining admission to the charter schools. When the at-risk population does not get admission, they will be left with schools that are on the verge of closing. Rina, a mother of a young third grader, discussed with me how her access to education has changed.

A few years ago, our public elementary school closed. They said all sorts of things would be options for us folks now. But now it’s been like over five years and I don’t see these options. I’ve had such a bad time getting my girl to school. I have to send her to a charter school that’s a long drive away. I used to have to have my ma’ take a bus with her to the school, and when my ma’ died I had to stop working some hours so I could take her myself. Now I’m making less and don’t have as much to spend so I don’t know how much longer I can live here. Sometimes I think about where I could move to after this and I get mad. Why’s this issue with the school. Yeah I don’t get it. I don’t get why these people needed to close the public school in the first place no.

Research has found that people who are migrating into gentrified neighborhoods are primarily white, professionals and single parents, and it is the lower to working class, the elderly,
and unemployed that are being displaced. In Strawberry Mansion it is not just the unemployed that are being displaced. It is also the minority population, as a large white population moves in the African American population is beginning to decline. Rina’s sentiment shows how displacement is a considerable concern in Strawberry Mansion right now. Since it is already a low-income area, it is arduous for residents to have to consider re-settling and even finding an area with comparable living costs. This poses serious concern of leaving people homeless.

School Choice and Gentrification in Strawberry Mansion; A Housing Price Spike When Students Are Given the Ability to Switch Schools:

In 2002 the No Child Left Behind Act was enacted. It is one of the most far-reaching federally mandated educational reforms in history. It requires states to administer standardized tests to students and then identifies schools that fail to meet state-established standards on the test. Schools that fail to meet the standards are monitored after that to see whether they achieve progress towards the state goal the subsequent year. For schools that receive Title 1 funds, a significant sanction associated with failure to achieve state scores for two years in a row is that

\[ \text{ibid} \]
\[ \text{ibid} \]
students attending these low-performing schools must be provided the opportunity to attend a non-failing school. This means that as schools that are under performing are identified, charter schools are more likely to step in to provide a second option for students attending the failing school.

An aspect of the No Child Left Behind Act is that the test score requirements may affect the residential location decisions of families. It creates the incentive for families, usually higher income, with strong preferences for school choice or school quality, to move into zones of failing schools in order to improve their likelihood of being admitted into high-performing charters. This is the very same phenomenon seen in Strawberry Mansion. Researchers Ferreyra and Nechyba provide theoretical evidence consistent with this. They used structural equilibrium models to evaluate how the introduction of private school and charter school vouchers, with a low-performing school district target, induces relatively high-income households to move into low-performing districts in order to take advantage of lower housing values and the ability to use school vouchers. This same phenomenon can be seen by the addition of the new high performing charter school in Strawberry Mansion, Jefferson High. With the addition of a new charter school which is nationally recognized for academic excellence, higher income families are now moving into the neighborhood. A resident of Strawberry Mansion, Jake, a 47-year-old African American man described seeing the changes:

A couple of years ago developers came into the hood and worked on some of them houses. They did them up and what not and now they nicer. Now they on the market for way more than any other place on the block. I just seen a new family move in early this year. They keep to themselves so I don't know much about them but I seen them going to the Jefferson High and I think to myself is that why they here now, you know? Cause it used to be white folk never would’ve moved here.

75 ibid
What Jake describes is a great example of how when higher-income households purchase homes in the “nicest” neighborhoods within low-performing districts, driving up property values and inducing neighborhood gentrification. A faculty member of Green Village high said, “what is remarkable about this time is that schooling and housing are independent from each other in a way that hasn’t been the case before. For supporters of choice, the separation of available school options from segregated housing systems is a key feature. Obviously I’m more concerned about whether those newcomers will help or harm their community”. This shows how even non-residents of Strawberry Mansion are taking notice of the change.

When school choices are limited, poor communities with more white people are the ones more likely to gentrify. When there are more school-choice options, though, it’s the neighborhoods with more people of color that are most likely to gentrify. A predominantly non-white neighborhood’s chance of gentrification more than doubles, jumping from 18 percent to 40 percent when magnet and charter schools are available. The finding that wealthier families are more open to entering racially segregated neighborhoods if they can avoid the local schools is not surprising to me. New residents who move into the highest-quality neighborhoods of failing schools are significantly more likely to attend a non-assigned school, an effect that is lacking for original residents. The combination of new charter school options offered in Strawberry Mansion and new housing has created the foundation for the gentrification of the neighborhood. One school administrator interviewed said that, “white, wealthy families are moving in without sending their kids to the neighborhood schools.” He said that he believed the,

76 ibid
77 ibid
“ability to opt out of the neighborhood schools increases the likelihood that us black and Hispanic residents will see more wealthy residents.”

A team who researched this including Stephen Billings, Eric Brunner, and Stephen Ross, found that the policy led to increases in housing prices and meant homes were bought by higher-income families, compared to nearby areas where schools were not deemed failing. Thus, supporting the idea that school choice caused by failing schools is leading to gentrification as is happening in Strawberry Mansion. Some residents even discuss how policy and the intentional closing of schools is part of a change demographics in current minority neighborhoods. A resident of North Philadelphia and an advocator for longtime residents, Katherine, said:

We believe that the closings of the schools are just a part of the bigger picture of what’s happening here in the city and among cities around the country that have high populations of people of color where neighborhoods are rapidly gentrifying.

Though in the case of Strawberry Mansion’s gentrification. Understanding how school choice policies affect residential location decisions and neighborhood composition has become increasingly important as states and cities across the country continue to experiment with school choice. Hastings, Kane, and Staiger\(^78\) have conducted studies showing that low-income families place less weight on academics when selecting schools and exert less pressure on low-performing schools to improve performance, while Jacob Lefgren\(^79\) finds that low-income and minority parents are less likely to actively select a teacher. It further suggested\(^80\) that higher-income families are more likely to strategically move into the attendance zones of failing schools.


\(^79\) ibid

\(^80\) ibid
in order to gain access to better school choice options. They found that after a school receives a failing designation, residential property values and new home buyer income increase in the highest-quality neighborhoods within attendance zones of failing schools in comparison to portions of the neighborhood just outside the attendance zone. This is important because it indicates that the probability of attending a non assigned traditional school or magnet school increases in these high-quality neighborhoods. Schools like Green Village have been neglected, underfunded, and penalized by local, state and federal officials for years, and the well-resourced families that can figure out how to work the system do so, leaving Green Village and schools like it with the most fragile students. Meaning the high risk, low-income African American students are segregated from the rest of the population.

This is supported by local observations of resident, Dan, of Strawberry Mansion, who said:

As we’ve gotten these new schools, our poor community is seeing some changes. Developers are buying these abandoned lots down this street. They buy them right up and within a few months there’s a brand new house and a new family ready. Most of them families I see moving in have been white.

Dan tells me this as we sit on a wooden picnic bench in an overgrown plot next to his residence. The summer sun has never felt more oppressing than now and I wonder how he’s managing to wear a hoodie in what feels like 100 degree weather. Dan’s lived in Strawberry Mansion since he was a kid in the 50’s and has been there through moments of change.

It was a lot different here when I was a kid you know” he pauses and surveys the space around us. He starts gesturing across the street to a townhouse. Its concrete structure is painted a lime green that has developed a thick layer of grime over it. The two windows on the second floor are both shattered and have plastic tarps billowing out from inside. I ask him when the last time people occupied the property and he tells me “today, right now”. I look at the house again and try to hide my shock but apparently unsuccessfully because he chuckles. “ A lot of these properties here you see them and think no one lives there. How could they? Well we do, most of us just don't have the cash to fix what’s falling around us. First
it’s our door knob, then it’s the lock, then the whole door’s falling off the hinge, then we don’t have a door. You get it, we just can’t keep up with it.” He paused and shook his head as I spoke for a few minutes asking him about what he thought about the trend of new charter schools he had mentioned earlier. “I don’t know much about them, my kids are gone now. But, it used to be there was just a couple of schools here you had your public school first through 12th grade and we all went to them. They were fine when my kids were there. They started getting bad like 10 or more years ago. I don’t know why. They lost funding I think, something wasn’t right” this trend then played into the emergence of charter schools because, “schools weren’t doing to good and then all the sudden new schools came up, and that’s when the neighborhood started changing. I think the biggest issue is that the people who live in these houses, some of them are living illegally, or in a casual way with no documentation, and when developers come because they see a new opportunity, they are going to be evicted. Then they’re going to have no place to live. No place at all. And then the city’s going to have an even bigger issue of homelessness.

The changes that Dan was perceptive of were those influenced by the changing demographics as families moved closer to schools they wanted their children to attend. Families that move into the highest-quality neighborhoods in attendance zones of failing schools are 66% more likely to send their child to a non-assigned school and 27% more likely to send their child to a new, non-assigned school81. As more families move into the gentrifying neighborhood, the population of Green Village High is going to continue to drop and ultimately shut down. The closing of the school will pose an issue for low-income African Americans in being able to find a school that they can enroll in and that fits the special needs their children may have. The gentrification also poses the risk of pushing these low income families into homelessness.

Adding to the nuanced challenges accompanying gentrification in this neighborhood, schools with higher percentages of low-income students face a range of challenges that wealthier

81 ibid
schools don’t. Schools with high percentages of students in poverty are likely to have less experienced teachers and a higher turnover rate of teachers. Before teaching can even begin in a neighborhood with as much turmoil as Strawberry Mansion, teachers must also cope with a range of issues relating to their students’ families’ low income, including lack of adequate clothing, food or housing. A teacher at Green Village High named Shelly, says that:

I’ve had students that come in to class with the same clothes for an entire week in a row. I had to offer students clothes because theirs start to smell so bad. And those are just smaller issues that I’ve seen. Small issues like that are indicators of bigger problems with the students like poverty and neglect or abuse. It’s so hard but also rewarding to work here because you see how many students are suffering but if you’re dedicated you work to make a difference. I have students come in and talk to me all the time about what they’re dealing with and it’s really horrific. Some students are living on their own and their parents are locked up. And others have been killed, or haven’t eaten in a day or more. It’s tragic what goes on, but I just feel blessed to be a part of the change and know that I work for a school that understands these kids needs and everything that they’re going through. If other schools could see what they struggle with I think they could be more helpful, but the issue is that a lot of the new charter schools coming in don’t cater to the specific type of poverty and devastation that exists here. If Green Village is phased out and shuts down, then the kids and type of kids that go here won’t be able to find a place to do and may end up dropping out all together and even worse they may end up on the streets. I don’t know what the solution is but I know that it isn’t to close Green Village and I hope everyone will come to realize that.

What Shelly says illuminates the danger that closing Green Village poses for the less than 200 students who attend the school now. Phasing out the school doesn’t provide a bright future for the low income African American residents of Strawberry Mansion. It poses the risk of leaving children, just barely underway with their lives, out on the street. It risks them not graduating from high school, let alone college, and it risks continuing the dangerous cycle of poverty and violence in this neighborhood. As has become clear through messages from
residents and educators alike, though the high school is small, it is a fundamental institution in the Strawberry Mansion neighborhood. If it is closed it places a great burden on an already struggling population, and sends a message to similar communities; that the government does not care enough about the low income and African American population.

I’m not saying that charter schools are bad, I in fact think they offer many innovative solutions and have tremendous potential. I am saying that the closing of Strawberry Mansion and neglect of an at risk population is negligent and needs to be considered more deeply. Whatever the future of the high school is needs to be determined equally by residents who know their needs, and officials who seek to implement new solutions. Closing the school would be done for the benefit of the city, not the low income African American population, and Philadelphia can and should do better.
Chapter 5

*Future Consequences and Conclusion*

**What do these changes mean for existing schools, students, and residents?**

It is clear that the introduction of charter schools following the No Child Left Behind Act, has instigated the process of gentrification in Strawberry Mansion. Integration of residents into Strawberry Mansion schools but not the neighborhood—do not come without other adverse consequences. Rent prices are rising, public schools are closing, the cost of living has begun to increase, the white population increased from nearly zero percent, to over 5 percent in just a few years\(^2\), and families are being displaced. The low-income African American population of Strawberry Mansion is being neglected. New families are moving in, displacing the poor and creating forced segregation. As this happens, low-income African American residents will begin to lose their political power. As wealthier families move in and want to have a say in their new neighborhood, they will be more likely to introduce changes that the long term residents would not have wanted. It is the shifting of Strawberry Mansion from what it used to be not just in terms of demographics, but also resident’s attachments to their home, their place, and what they are used to their lives looking like, that will be most disruptive.

Another downside of the educational change is that wealthy families who move on behalf of school-choice policies undermine the intent of some of the policies. The No Child Left Behind Act was designed to benefit current students of failing schools. But, families with the ability to leverage more resources have the ability to choose where they want to live and may move to

\(^2\) ibid
districts with new charter schools. This changes the outcome of the NCLB Act as the benefits of the program will begin to accrue to wealthier households. One substantial downside with this in Strawberry Mansion, is that it will continue a cycle of inequality and poverty. As wealthy families take advantage of school choice and begin to dominate the charter school lottery system, long term residents living at the poverty line will have limited choice in where to send their kids to school. This will result in their kids attending low performing, or in the case of Strawberry Mansion, failing schools. Thus, ultimately they will be more likely to drop out or choose not to pursue further education post-graduation.

One of the consequences of gentrification that hasn’t been discussed enough is that it leaves public schools behind as a critical mass of well-educated, well-off people move in. Gentrification usually brings some benefits with it to a neighborhood, such as more attention from the city, infrastructure changes, etc. But the influx of children from wealthier families does not look like it will make a positive difference in local schools. These beefed-up programs and charter schools that are replacing public schools are not always realistic. Especially for neighborhoods like Strawberry Mansion with most of the population on the poverty line. Any money put toward enticing middle-class parents is money that cannot be put toward students who might need those resources more.

Studies from cities with similar demographics to Philadelphia show how minority populations are left behind and continue to struggle. The New York Daily News reported that “more than 50 percent of the city’s white and Asian school kids in grades 3 through 8 passed this year’s state English tests. Fewer than 20 percent of the city’s black and Latino kids did.”83 It

83 https://www.nydailynews.com/opinion/editorial-mix-match-learn-article-1.2326533
should be the students who are struggling with performance who receive more resources, not the students who are already succeeding. As I have stated, I believe this change only serves to undermine low income African American’s ability to access education and is progressing towards the creation of a new form of segregation. When wealthy white citizens dominate the landscape and can freely choose their education system they are only furthering segregation within schools and the future opportunities of African Americans. The only suitable choice of education left for African Americans will be their public school that will soon be shut down because of the migration to charter schools, and if no solution is proposed, many of these African American students will end up suffering the worst consequences.

Longtime residents of Strawberry Mansion are not only wondering if their children will be able to stay in school but if their own families will be able to stay in the neighborhood much longer. As I talked to resident Lauren for the second time, we discussed her fears of being pushed out of the neighborhood.

My sons was in school here until they started the new project. My oldest couldn’t start high school last year because of the plan. He’s cool living here for the year until we figure out what to do. I don’t know where we’re sending him next if he doesn’t get into a charter. We could put him back in the high school now that they decided to open it up but we don’t trust the city no more. I don't want to put him through starting at a school that's gunna close. I don’t even know if we’ll be here next year. Since we never know. If my rent goes up or anything like that we’re gone.

While the future of the neighborhood will remain uncertain, it is evident that the Strawberry Mansion residents have been let down by the government. Not just the local government, but also the federal government who enacted such policies allowing for the slow decline of school’s in low income and minority neighborhoods. What’s the most shocking about this ethnography is
how accustomed to discrimination the residents of Strawberry Mansion are. They have been subject to discrimination and oppression since many of their families first moved to Philadelphia in the 60s and were greeted with riots and white flight. The residents of Strawberry Mansion have now come to accept that this is a common place in their lives because as much as they have struggled or stood up for themselves, the government has provided limited support. And this they think, is intentional.
Citations:


English Language Learners. NEA. http://www.nea.org/home/32346.htm


