Contending With Privileged Influx: Lessons from Boston’s Mission Hill

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ABSTRACT

Gentrification occurs in disinvested urban neighborhoods around the world. Individuals with incomes higher than the majority of the existing population rent or buy property, upgrade the buildings, and attract further investment. City governments may actively encourage gentrification because cities benefit from the increase in expendable income and enhanced tax base. Yet, there are critical negative impacts of gentrification: property values often increase, pricing existing residents out of their homes. While some types of change are necessary for a neighborhood’s perpetuation and development, gentrification is often more harmful than helpful to the existing local community.

What can neighborhood communities do to minimize the displacement of existing residents while encouraging change that improves quality of life in the neighborhood? This thesis examines strategies employed to such ends by actors in the Mission Hill neighborhood of Boston, where the expansion of nearby universities and hospitals coupled with increased real estate speculation threaten the endurance of a racially diverse, low to moderate-income community. Actors implement a variety of tactics to minimize displacement of existing residents in Mission Hill. Several community groups develop subsidized housing for low to moderate-income people, while another organization takes part in the licensing and permitting processes to challenge development by institutions and real estate speculators that is unwanted by the community. Other groups transcend the physical scale of the neighborhood in their methods by organizing tenants in multi-neighborhood districts so that tenants can negotiate effectively with landlords regarding rent increases and by promoting policies such as section 8 and rent control. Two additional citywide groups engage in initiatives aimed at helping low to moderate-income and minority youth pursue higher education so that they can compete in today’s global economy where education is increasingly important as a means to gaining upward economic mobility.

The case of Mission Hill suggests that community strategies that contend with gentrification on a local level can stall unwanted trends. Still, policies that compensate for the inability of the market to provide affordable housing are critical to ensuring the longevity of thriving, low to moderate-income urban communities. In addition, approaches that respond to demands of the global economy by emphasizing the value of education offer solutions that are important in terms of long-term, structural change.
I dedicate this thesis to Pat Flaherty for introducing me to Mission Hill and to the realm of neighborhood activism.
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INTRODUCTION

Urban space is continually contested, renegotiated and restructured. Places are built up, torn down, and replaced with the new spatial compositions. Historian Max Page borrows economist Joseph Schumpeter’s potent term “creative destruction” to emphasize the centrality and inevitability of this process in the development of cities:

The “creative destruction” oxymoron suggests the tensions at the heart of urban life: between stability and change; between the notion of “place” versus undifferentiated, developable “space”; between market forces and planning controls; between economic and cultural value, and between what is considered “natural” and “unnatural” in the growth of the city…Celebrated or condemned, encouraged and resisted, this process defines the experience of the city.”¹

Page’s words skillfully characterize the universal struggles over the use of urban areas.

The potential for change and rebuilding offers important hope for the future of many neighborhoods. People living in neighborhoods that are blighted and disinvested deserve revitalization of their home environs. There are many strategies employed by policymakers and community groups that bring needed development to distressed neighborhoods. But not all growth, whether driven by calculated government policies or by market forces, leads to quality of life improvements for all of a neighborhood’s population. When a neighborhood undergoes gentrification – that is, newcomers wealthier than most existing residents move into a neighborhood – heated debate surrounding neighborhood transformations is common.

Some residents, business owners, politicians, and scholars view this demographic shift in a decidedly favorable light. Businesses may receive increased patronage, new businesses may find the area a prime location for starting up, the upkeep of residential properties may improve, and the tax base in the neighborhood increases. Yet, another

discourse that has arisen in the past few decades in the literature and in the policymaking arena recognizes that property values may rise as a result of the new popularity of the neighborhood and that existing residents, overwhelmed by increases in rents and property taxes, may be forced to leave. The cohesion of the neighborhood may be disrupted, and the supposed revitalization of the neighborhood, then, may exclude those who lived in the neighborhood before this transformation.

How can and should neighborhood changes be controlled? What strategies can communities employ to minimize the negative impacts of gentrification on existing residents, while encouraging changes that improve quality of life in the neighborhood? I focus on these questions in this thesis.

*Site of Study*

I explore the case study neighborhood of Mission Hill, an enclave within the larger Roxbury neighborhood of Boston. Home to roughly 13,300 residents\(^2\), Mission Hill is located just a ten minute drive or trolley ride from downtown Boston. The expansion of neighboring universities and hospitals threatens the survival of Mission Hill’s racially diverse, low to moderate-income community. Increased enrollment at universities near Mission Hill puts existing residents in competition with large student populations for housing. Further, real estate speculators profit by buying cheap property in Mission Hill and targeting student renters.

Mission Hill is a rich site for exploration, as the neighborhood has numerous active neighborhood groups that are working to minimize displacement and loss of community as the neighborhood changes. I have had experience with current neighborhood issues in Mission Hill through three internships. In January of 2002, I

worked for the Jamaica Plain Neighborhood Development Corporation, a community
development corporation that develops housing in Mission Hill amongst other initiatives.
I held internships the summer of 2003 with the Parker Hill/Fenway Neighborhood
Service Center, which is a branch of the citywide anti-poverty organization Action for
Boston Community Development, and with City Councilor Michael Ross who represents
Mission Hill. I also draw heavily from personal interviews with neighborhood residents
in my research.

**Definition of Terms**

Before proceeding, it is important to clarify the language I use in the following
pages. First, the loaded term *gentrification* often appears in recent literature in reference
to the aforementioned type of neighborhood change. Since Ruth Glass coined it in 1964
in her observations of London, (Glass 1964, cited in Smith 1996: 33) the word
gentrification has been used both to promote the entry of wealthier people into
disinvested neighborhoods as a means of revitalization, and to criticize this process for
the displacement of existing residents it can cause. Some theorists include favorable or
unfavorable implications in their definitions of the word gentrification.

To circumvent both the negative and positive connotations of the term
gentrification, I avoid usage of this word. Instead, I employ the expression *privileged
influx* to discuss a purely demographic trend; privileged influx describes the entrance of
new, *privileged* population of residents into a neighborhood. The word privilege calls
attention to the greater variety of lifestyle choices available to newcomers relative to the
majority of existing residents. These choices reflect socio-economic class distinctions.
For most newcomers, the title of privilege refers to their higher incomes and greater
economic assets that allow them more freedom to make decisions regarding where they want to live and other matters as compared to most existing residents.

Yet, the definition of privilege in this context is more complicated. University students, incomers discussed heavily in this thesis, are also privileged because they have the opportunity to attend a higher education institution. While they may have small personal incomes and lack assets, the opportunity to a high-level education prepares students to have a life where they will have the freedom to make choices. Moreover, many of these students have developed consumption patterns that reflect the standards of their families of origins, and many are assisted financially by their families. The use of students as an example indicates the need to emphasize privilege as a function of an array of characteristics that gives the population more power and freedom than those who live in the area experiencing this change. Given American racism and related notions of class, for example, race is an additional characteristic of privilege. In many situations of privileged influx, newcomers are white, while existing residents are not. This privileged characteristic does not distinguish newcomers from existing residents in all cases of privileged influx, but it is important to note that a racial dimension is often present and coincides with differential consuming power and status.

The phrase privileged influx describes a demographic pattern, but it is, in fact, the implications of this phenomenon that are of interest for the scope of this thesis. When privileged influx takes place, there is an inevitable renegotiation of use of space. I use the word restructuring to speak of this process. There is not necessarily a place for terms such as renewal, revitalization, or renovation in the definition of restructuring; these words imply a favorable bias. Nor do I include displacement of existing residents, a
common negative impact that is included by some analysts in defining gentrification, in
my definition. My expression leaves opportunity for a variety of dynamics and
outcomes. Most importantly, the term restructuring permits the possibility that people
can shape the manifestation and consequences of privileged influx.

I use the word *community* in the question that guides this thesis. Community in
this context means a group that shares a basic conception of how its neighborhood should
function. This cohesion can result from commonalities amongst the group that inform
members’ values, but community can also exist among a diverse group of people who
agrees to respect differences and concurs on baseline principles for their locality. While
members must share a basic understanding, beyond this fundamental level of agreement
there can be dissention between people belonging to a community. Additionally, there is
a spatial component to the definition of community as it is used in this thesis. As I use
the scale of the Mission Hill neighborhood to ground my discussion surrounding
genrification, community is defined by residence within the neighborhood boundaries
commonly agreed upon by the community.

In my guiding question, I ask how communities can minimize displacement but
also promote *quality of life* improvements. There are countless characteristics of a
neighborhood that are related to quality of life. The maintenance of the built
environment, the cleanliness of the streets, the amount of green space and the upkeep of
this space, the rate of crime, the quality of neighborhood schools and the ease of
transportation systems are some examples. In general, qualities of a neighborhood that
affect resident’s enjoyment of living there are quality of life characteristics.
The crux of this thesis is an analysis of methods used to minimize the displacement of existing residents and loss of community that can accompany privileged influx. I use the word strategy to speak of an approach aimed at these ends. A variety of actors implement an array of strategies in Mission Hill. Strategies range from the development of subsidized housing to the act of lobbying elected officials to support Section 8 and rent control. The capacity of actors to successfully implement strategies depends on actors’ tools – that is, their resources, talents, and abilities. Actors possess distinct tools that they employ in their strategies.

Lastly, the language I use to discuss socio-economic characteristics begs definition. I describe the population that risks displacement due to privileged influx as low to moderate-income. Anyone who risks displacement because they do not have ample means to compete in Mission Hill’s housing market can be considered low to moderate-income by a loose, qualitative definition. While difficult to quantify precisely, the phrase low to moderate-income roughly refers to those with incomes that do not exceed 120 percent of the city median. I find my estimated quantitative definition partially from the federal Department of Housing and Urban Development, which defines low-income as 80 percent or less of the metropolitan area median income. I include moderate-income people in my discussion as well, as it is evident from speaking with neighborhood residents that people with incomes that are equal to or a bit above the city median often experience displacement due to rising real estate values that accompany privileged influx.

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Method of Analysis

Strategies employed by various actors in Mission Hill to control privileged influx for the benefit of the existing community are quite varied in approach. Several community groups develop subsidized housing for low to moderate-income people, while another group takes part in the licensing and permitting processes to stop development by institutions and external real estate speculators that is unwanted by the community. Other groups transcend the physical scale of the neighborhood by organizing tenants in multi-neighborhood districts so that they can negotiate with landlords regarding rent increases. Additionally, these groups promote policies such as Section 8 and rent control. Two further citywide groups engage in initiatives aimed at helping low to moderate-income and minority youth pursue higher education so that they can gain upward economic mobility.

My analysis of strategies employed to shape neighborhood changes considers a number of factors. What tools do community groups utilize? Tools have specific applications; an actor can use a given tool to be effective in specific arenas and through specific methods. In this way, the actor’s tools direct the actor towards a type of strategy. Still, actors have agency over which of their tools they use. Actors can uncover new, useful tools, and find innovative ways to utilize tools with a bit of creative consideration.

As is evident, there is a link between what one conceives as the causes of neighborhood changes and the tactics one employs to control these changes. Who causes privileged influx and the displacement of existing residents that may accompany? Are the privileged populations who choose to move into primarily low to moderate-income urban neighborhoods accountable, or does responsibility lie with the real estate
speculators who provide housing for them? In neighborhoods like Mission Hill that are near elite institutions, do these institutions attract privileged in-movers, hence producing privileged influx? Is the government, through policies that encourage gentrification, ultimately responsible? Or does the global economy create the income divisions that make many of Mission Hill’s residents unable to compete for housing with privileged populations? Undoubtedly, there are multiple forces that produce gentrification; none of these factors can bring about gentrification alone. Still, actors aiming to minimize negative effects of privileged influx on existing residents emphasize divergent causes of privileged influx in their strategies depending on the actors’ ideologies and on the avenues by which actors perceive their tools to be most potentially effective.

Actors must also make choices regarding the spatial scale and time frame in which they seek to be influential. Spatially, some strategies attempt to control privileged influx on the scale of the neighborhood, while others strive to bring about structural change on the citywide, statewide, or national level. In terms of time frame, some strategies have immediate effects, while others take longer to implement. Some strategies are effective only for a brief time period; others have longer-lasting influence. Actors’ choices of spatial scale and timeframe reflect not only their beliefs about what scales for action are most critical, but also their awareness of what scales of space and time they are most likely to be influential given the strengths and limits of their tools.

The case of Mission Hill suggests that community strategies that contend with changes on a neighborhood level can stall unwanted trends, and hence are important in an immediate spatial scale and time frame. Still, government policies engage on broader scales of space and time by compensating for the inability of the market to provide
affordable housing. Approaches that respond to demands of the global economy by emphasizing the value of education offer even more broadly-reaching solutions. Because government policies and globally-aware strategies are more extensive in their influence, they are critical in successfully minimizing displacement. However, these types of strategies are often not immediately achievable. A combination of approaches that challenge displacement on divergent scales of time and space, therefore, are vital in order to ensure the longevity of thriving, low to moderate-income urban communities.

Overview of Upcoming Chapters

In the following chapter, I introduce the multiple causes of privileged influx. I discuss different views expressed in the literature, drawing heavily on James Berry’s⁴ and Neil Smith’s works,⁵ and present the position that a variety of local actors and global economic forces come together to produce this phenomenon. I go on to discuss how theories of the causes of privileged influx can be framed on varying scales of space and time. Here, I again employ the work of Neil Smith⁶ as well as that of Erik Swyngedouw⁷ regarding notions of spatial scale. I root this discussion in the contention that actors respond to causes of privileged influx with their strategies, and that, therefore, an understanding of the causes of privileged influx is essential to further exploration of strategies.

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This framework serves as a foundation for the analysis of my case study. Chapter 2 introduces Mission Hill with an overview of the neighborhood’s history and a physical description of the neighborhood today. Chapter 3 then offers a summary of the actors and dynamics that produce privileged influx in Mission Hill. Following, in Chapters 4 and 5 I discuss some of the strategies employed by various actors in Mission Hill to combat the negative impacts of privileged influx on existing residents. Chapter 4 introduces two strategies in the neighborhood: the development of affordable housing for low-income people, and the intervention in the zoning, licensing and permitting processes. Chapter 5 investigates strategies that transcend the physical scale of the neighborhood by organizing tenants in a multi-neighborhood area, promoting policies such as section 8 and rent control, and helping youth to gain access to higher education opportunities.

Chapter 6 builds on the content of Chapters 3, 4 and 5 to evaluate the success of strategies employed in Mission Hill, in light of the notion of scales presented in Chapter 1. I finish in my conclusion by addressing how the specific experience of Mission Hill offers general lessons regarding the formulation of effective strategies at controlling privileged influx.
CHAPTER ONE: THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

A causal theory of privileged influx implies the paths in which players can take action to influence the restructuring process. Thus, strategies implemented in efforts to make restructuring more favorable to existing residents can be viewed as extensions of causal theories. An examination of the causes of privileged influx is, then, pertinent in order to thoroughly analyze strategies. In the first section of this chapter, I discuss different theories of the causes of privileged influx, drawing from the relevant literature and adding my own notions based on my research in Mission Hill. As the theorists employed in this section use the word gentrification, I revert to use of that term in reference to their work. The concept of privileged influx is similar to that of gentrification, so I find that theories concerning the causes of change described as gentrification can be regarded as theories of the causes of privileged influx.

Next, I present the notion of scales of space and time, and show how each causal model of privileged influx can be interpreted on a variety of scales of space and time. Finally, I use Swyngedouw’s work surrounding the role of scale in political movements to connect the discussion of causes and scales to the formation of strategies.

Theories of the Causes of Privileged Influx

Many theorists express the notion that gentrification is caused by the interplay of several factors. Still, these thinkers emphasize divergent dynamics in explaining the causes of gentrification, and here debate arises. There are two major schools of thought on gentrification: demand-side theories promoted most notably by scholar James Berry, and the supply-side theories championed by sociologist Neil Smith.
In his demand-side analysis of gentrification, Berry calls attention to the new desires of a young population of professionals that is not marrying and having children as soon in life as previous generations. This group’s lifestyle choices entail a demographic shift towards smaller households. Additionally, this population is more interested in city living as compared to their parents. While Berry finds that there is not a large migration of people living in the suburbs into cities, he argues that more people are deciding to stay in cities as compared to previous decades. According to Berry, students and young professionals who were previously likely to move out of the city after a brief stay are not allured by the suburbs in the way that the preceding generation was, and these young people are instead choosing to stay in urban neighborhoods.

Though cities are losing population, Berry argues that census data proves that they are gaining households. He attributes this swelling in the number of households to the growing presence of small households composed of young, single people and young couples. Due to the increase in households, Berry asserts, housing markets in cities are tightening. As a result of this tightening, young professionals find the real estate markets in elite city neighborhoods too pricey for their means. These people are attracted to lower-priced housing prices in low to moderate-income neighborhoods that experienced decline when they were abandoned by middle class whites in the post-World War II decades. Generational tastes have changed according to Berry, and these neighborhoods again become attractive for a young, professional population. In this way, Berry maintains, the phenomenon of gentrification is born.

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8 Berry, 71.
9 Ibid., 78.
10 Ibid., 71.
Not all cities or neighborhoods experience gentrification, however, and Berry attributes the divergent experiences of cities to their role in the global economy.\textsuperscript{11} The groups of cities that develop into financial managerial centers are the sites of gentrification. Berry explains this in the language of consumer preferences: part of the attraction of the city for young professionals is the existence of jobs. Therefore, only the cities that offer the managerial employment that this young population seeks experience gentrification. Further, these cities no longer offer the stable manufacturing jobs that use to support working-class families; manufacturing now takes place far from the managerial center, often in other countries. Hence, low to moderate-income people are increasingly employed in lower paying service sector jobs, exacerbating class inequalities. The large gap in earnings between those employed in managerial jobs and those in service jobs makes it impossible for the latter group to compete in the housing market.

While Berry attributes gentrification to the changing demands of privileged consumers, supply-side theorists such as Smith view people's demands as secondary to shifts in the location of real estate investment.\textsuperscript{12} Smith argues that movement of capital from the suburbs back into the city makes the city an attractive place to live for privileged populations. As the suburbs became popular with the white middle class, housing stock in urban neighborhoods was gradually less well maintained, and eventually much housing was abandoned, causing devaluation of real estate prices. Decades later, this housing stock was rediscovered by speculators who found that they could profit by buying low-priced housing stock, renovating the housing, and reselling at higher prices.

\textsuperscript{11} Ibid., 94-96.
\textsuperscript{12} Smith, \textit{The New Urban Frontier}, 51-74.
For Smith, the preferences of privileged groups are secondary to regional market forces. Yet, he also finds that there are other factors working on a global level that cause gentrification, and here he intersects with Berry. Smith, too, argues that the concentration of financial corporations within a group of powerful cities that occurs with economic globalization causes gentrification due to managerial job availability in these cities.

Smith and Berry do not concur on the time frames implied by their similar global analyses. Berry does not predict gentrification to persist. For Berry, gentrification is the product of consumer demands that constantly shift. Smith, however, views the current manifestation of gentrification to be characteristic of patterns present throughout history in which the privileged seize space from the less privileged when such is convenient for the former. For him, the global causes of gentrification will only intensify with the continuation of capitalism. Hence, according to Smith, gentrification is certainly not a transient phenomenon.

Berry’s analysis suggests that no action aside from immediate work to ease the urgent needs of displaced residents is necessary in response to gentrification. He finds that, with time, the phenomenon will cease, and hence efforts to minimize displacement are not needed. Paradoxically, Smith also concludes with few explicit recommendations for minimizing the negative impacts of gentrification on existing residents. He offers little hope for the endurance of low to moderate-income communities in his conclusion that gentrification will inevitably continue to displace populations and rip apart communities.

13 Ibid., 75-91
There are further causes of privileged influx not addressed within the demand-side and supply-side schools of thought. First, in the case of Mission Hill and many other neighborhoods, elite institutions play a role in causing privileged influx. Students are attracted to university neighborhoods, and professional employees of hospitals, universities, museums, or other cultural centers are drawn to areas near their places of work. Institutions as causes are intimately related to demand-side causes: institutions supply the reason why privileged groups seek residence in given neighborhoods. Elite institutions can also trigger supply-side dynamics that cause privileged influx. Real estate speculators may choose to invest in neighborhoods near elite institutions because they think that they can most readily attract privileged populations to these neighborhoods. It is, nonetheless, helpful to recognize institutions as distinct causes of privileged influx because actors devise separate strategies as responses to institutions.

Additionally, the role of the government in bringing about privileged influx cannot be ignored. Local governments have an interest in attracting wealthier people to their jurisdictions. These people enhance the tax base, allowing the area to provide increased and improved services. Wealthier people also bring increased expendable income to their neighborhood, which can stimulate commercial growth. Further, a new philosophy emphasizing the need to foster neighborhoods that are mixed over class and race lines has gained popularity in local and federal government in the United States over the past decade. Influential academics such as sociologists Douglas Massey and Nancy Denton claim that the concentration of racial minorities and the poor in ghetto neighborhoods perpetuates poverty amongst these groups.\(^{14}\) Theorists of this school of

thought promote privileged influx as a manner of creating mixed-income neighborhoods. The federal Department of Housing and Urban Development has adopted this philosophy. In 1992, the HOPE VI program was initiated to supply grants to local housing authorities for rehabilitation, new construction, demolition of public housing, as well as supportive services for residents. Hope VI guidelines for the use of funds stipulate that “lessening concentrations of poverty by placing public housing in nonpoverty neighborhoods and promoting mixed-income communities” must be a priority.15 Numerous public housing projects that previously served low-income people exclusively have been replaced by mixed-income developments nationwide as a result of this program.16 The local government can also encourage privileged influx by supporting real estate speculation or the expansion of institutions that attract privileged groups.

There is no singular cause of privileged influx. All of the factors discussed here play a role. It is logical that neither demand-side nor supply-side forces can function independently; rather, these complimentary forces must be seen to work in tandem. Privileged people cannot buy real estate that is not available. Yet, the market will move to where this population shows interest. The location of institutions dictates both where privileged people will prefer to live and where real estate speculators will invest. Furthermore, the government may encourage privileged influx through policies in efforts to revitalize destitute neighborhoods.

**Scales of Space and Time**

Not only is privileged influx produced by multiple causes, these causes can be perceived on varying spatial scales and time frames. For scholar Erik Swyngedouw,

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conceptualizing a given urban process entails the recognition of multiple physical scales. He maintains that “starting any geographical analysis from a given geographical scale (local, regional, national) is deeply antagonistic to apprehending the world in a dynamic, process-based manner.”

The general notion of spatial scales can be conceived quite literally. Neil Smith outlines scales ranging from the scope of the body to that of the global. Intermediary scales include the home, the community, the urban, the region, and the nation. The causes of privileged influx can be understood on a variety of physical scales, and Smith’s accessible conception of physical scales can be used to analyze the implicit scale of a given theory. For example, viewing specific real estate investors who work in a given neighborhood as the cause of privileged influx evokes a supply-side model that is rooted in the spatial scale of the neighborhood. Smith, on the other hand, conceives of supply-side causes of privileged influx as common in neighborhoods internationally.

Causes of privileged influx can also be framed on varying scales of time. Smith’s summary of the series of spatial scales can be emulated to examine scales of time. Starting from the immediate and transient, and extending to the continual, there are scales of the minute, the hour, the day, the year, the decade, the generation, and beyond. A given cause of privileged influx can be understood in different scales of time. Using supply-side causes of privileged influx again as a contextual example, is real estate speculation that causes privileged influx a transient phenomenon that will naturally stop within a few years, or is it a reoccurring issue that neighborhoods will contend with for

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17 Swyngedouw, 169.
generations to come? Actors must address this and other questions of scale in their formulation of strategies.

Application of the Theory to the Analysis of Strategies

Privileged influx in a neighborhood can cause displacement of existing low to moderate-income residents. When privileged influx is extensive and uncontrolled, this consequence is common. The same forces that cause privileged influx, then, cause displacement. Therefore, actors respond to the causes of privileged influx in formulating strategies to reduce displacement.

Actors respond to different causes of privileged influx in their strategies. This produces an array of types of strategies. In addition, actors react to distinct conceptions of the scales of these causes. For example, there are a series of spatial scales on which actors can respond to supply-side causes. Community groups can attempt to halt real estate speculators on a case-by-case basis in a neighborhood in efforts to curb privileged influx within the physical boundaries of the neighborhood. Alternatively, the community can lobby elected officials for policies that target real estate speculation as a citywide, statewide, or national cause of gentrification.

Actors also must make choices about the urgency of the situation in the neighborhood. Through this lens, the divergent time frames that one can interpret a given cause of privileged influx become clear. Actors that perceive real estate speculation to be a temporary problem target specific real estate speculators immediately, whereas actors who recognize the continuous nature of real estate speculation may focus on passing legislation that curbs speculation for longer time periods. Stopping specific real estate speculators may be more immediately feasible than getting a law passed that would
restrain speculation, and some actors emphasize the need for quick action. Still, a law would have more lasting control over speculation, so other actors spend energy lobbying government officials.

A diversity of strategies responding to different causes and scales of those causes manifests for two major reasons. Actors have different beliefs regarding what causes privileged influx. Depending on their experiences and perspectives, actors come to distinct conclusions as to what factors are most important in producing privileged influx and displacement. Actors also have different sets of tools. Tools allow actors to be effective in challenging specific causes of privileged influx and in acting on specific scales of time and space, and so an actor’s tools direct the actor’s approach.

Though Swyngedouw emphasizes the need to recognize that processes can be framed on a variety of scales, he does not suggest that actors seeking to bring about change should attempt to encompass infinite scales in their strategies. On the contrary, he recognizes that the scale in which contestation takes place is disempowering and empowering for distinct groups. Through this lens, Swyngedouw illuminates the centrality of scalar awareness for political movements. The understanding that processes can be understood on a variety of scales allows actors to select the scale in which they will be most effective. As Swyngedouw puts it: “The politics of scale are surely messy, but ought to take centre-stage in any successful emancipatory political strategy.”

Swyngedouw offers valuable advice for actors working to make restructuring more favorable for existing residents in neighborhoods such as Mission Hill. Actors must select the scales of space and time in which they seek to be influential based on the modes of efficacy their tools allow.

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19 Swyngedouw, 176.
CHAPTER TWO: INTRODUCTION TO MISSION HILL

To understand the motivations behind community activism in Mission Hill today, an historical overview of the neighborhood is crucial. The first section of this chapter gives a brief history of the neighborhood from its founding in 1630 to the present. This section charts the development of nearby universities and hospitals, important players in the story of privileged influx in Mission Hill today. Most notably, the historical account illuminates the types of problems that the community seeks to avoid in the future, namely disinvestment, high crime rates, and lack of government intervention that is in keeping with community desires. It may be helpful to refer to Figures 1 and 2 for guidance regarding the physical street layout of the neighborhood in reading this section. The second section of this chapter, however, provides a comprehensive physical description of the neighborhood today. This section provides spatial orientation and an overview of the current built environment that is revealing of the changes the neighborhood is currently experiencing.

History of Mission Hill

Mission Hill, formerly known as Parker Hill, was one section of the town of Roxbury, founded in 1630.\footnote{Boston Landmark Commission, *Parker Hill – Mission Hill Project Completion Report* (Boston: Boston Redevelopment Authority, 1985). All information in this section is taken from this source unless otherwise noted.} Though a mill was established at Roxbury Crossing shortly after the town’s establishment, the area remained largely agricultural through the eighteenth century. Only a small number of farm homes were built in Parker Hill’s valleys until heavy industry moved into Roxbury two centuries later. Around this time, roads were built encircling Parker Hill, and factories and breweries were established on these roads. Regular coach and rail access from Boston to Roxbury were instated in the
1830s, which furthered the growth of the town. Massive construction in the 1840s through 1860s filled Parker Hill with Italianate style mansions and more modest homes, as well as puddingstone workers rowhouses on the low parts of the front of the hill and along Tremont Street. Many breweries were constructed and established during this period on the back of the hill along Heath Street.

Roxbury’s population growth led its citizens to accept the status of city in 1846, and shortly after, in 1867 Roxbury was annexed by Boston. The growing population of Parker Hill desired a church in the neighborhood, and construction of Mission Church began shortly after this date and was completed in 1878. The church attracted a large Irish immigrant population to the neighborhood, followed by smaller numbers of other European immigrant groups in the last decades of the nineteenth century. Tremont Street and Huntington Avenue were increasingly built up with town houses and bowed-front brick buildings to accommodate the influx of newcomers. From the 1890s through the early years of the twentieth century, the top of the hill, which had previously not been developed, also saw construction of triple-deckers.

The first institution of higher education to establish in the neighborhood was Harvard Medical School, which moved to its current location on Longwood Avenue in 1906. Harvard would later bring its Dental School and School of Public Health to the Longwood Avenue area, and Harvard’s establishment of its health-related schools attracted many hospitals to the area in the following decades.21 Today the vicinity is known as the Longwood Medical Area for its high concentration of hospitals.

Shortly after Harvard Medical School’s initiation, Wentworth Institute of Technology opened its doors on Huntington Avenue in 1911. The school originally served just over 700 students, all commuters.\textsuperscript{22} Northeastern University followed in 1938, also initially serving a few hundred commuting students.\textsuperscript{23} These institutions would both expand over the following decades, though the expansion of Northeastern to a school of over 20,000\textsuperscript{24} today far dwarfs the growth of Wentworth, which currently serves about 3,000 students.\textsuperscript{25}

After rapid growth in the latter part of the nineteenth century and early twentieth century, Mission Hill went through fewer changes in the early twentieth century and through the both world wars. Home to a stable group of Irish, German, and other European immigrant families, as well as a smattering of blacks on the back of the hill, Mission Church was the center of community life during this period. In addition to serving as a meeting point for the community through its masses, the church ran a school which most of the neighborhood children attended, which bonded families in the area. The school has had a further long-term impact on the neighborhood: in the 1920s, when the Mission High School’s successful athletic teams became well-known in the city, the neighborhood became known as Mission Hill.

In 1940, Mission Main, a federal public housing project, was built behind Mission Church. In a process that foreshadowed the federal government’s urban renewal initiatives common nationally in the following decades, existing clapboard houses on

\textsuperscript{25} Wentworth Institute of Technology.
several neighboring streets were razed and replaced with 38 three-story brick buildings.\textsuperscript{26} The development was demolished and replaced by a new public housing development of the same name in the 1990s (see Figures 9 and 10; further discussion of Mission Main follows in Chapter 3).

Mission Main served those who could not afford to leave the city for the suburbs. As was the national trend, many white families who had the financial means to do so left Mission Hill for areas outside the city in the 1950s-1970s. Catherine Gallagher, who currently lives in Mission Hill home in which she was born in 1928, recalls neighbors advising her family during these decades that black people were moving in and that, therefore, they should leave the neighborhood while they could still get a good price on their house.\textsuperscript{27} Gallagher is one of a group of long-term residents who stayed put because they loved their neighborhood and did not find the race of the newcomers problematic. Still, many white families left the neighborhood to be replaced in part by black and Hispanic families.

Harvard University and the hospitals in the Longwood Medical Area had expanded throughout the post-war period. In the early 1960s, Harvard began buying and demolishing houses in order to make space for an Affiliated Hospital Complex in the area of Francis, Fenwood, St. Alban's, and Kempton Streets, as well as along nearby parts of Huntington Avenue.\textsuperscript{28} Residents of this area, with the help of Harvard students who opposed their university’s plans on moral grounds, organized to negotiate with Harvard regarding the plan, which would have displaced hundreds of residents. As a result of

\textsuperscript{27} Catherine Gallagher, interview by author, Boston, 4 October 2003.
\textsuperscript{28} Boston 200 Neighborhood History Series, \textit{Mission Hill} (Boston: The Corporation, 1976).
these negotiations, Harvard agreed to retain some of the existing housing stock and to build new housing for residents who would lose their homes. In the mid-1970s, Mission Park, a 775-unit development composed of a high-rise tower, three mid-rise towers, and 147 townhouses, was constructed (see Figure 5). Mission Park was owned and managed by Harvard until Harvard sold it to the tenant organization Roxbury Tenants of Harvard in 1998.\textsuperscript{29}

The white flight of the middle decades of the twentieth century changed the quality and the reputation of the neighborhood. By the 1970s and 1980s, many houses were abandoned. Patricia Flaherty, a resident of Mission Hill for the past twenty-five years and an active community leader, recalls that when she first moved into the neighborhood, the historically commercial areas of Tremont Street and Huntington Avenue held a few bars and liquor stores, but no restaurants or other shops. Maryanne O’Keefe, a neighborhood resident since she was a first-grader in 1948, remembers feeling unsafe for the first time in Mission Hill in the 1980s.\textsuperscript{30} Muggings were relatively common, she recollects, and many families who had stayed in the neighborhood until the 1980s decided to leave during that decade because of the high incidence of crime. The Mission Main housing complex became infamous during this period for its high crime rates.\textsuperscript{31}

The hard times in the neighborhood inspired community members to organize to improve quality of life in the neighborhood. Groups such as The Back of the Hill

\textsuperscript{30} Maryanne O’Keefe, interview by author, Boston, 4 October 2003.
Community Development Corporation, an agent that will be discussed in Chapter 4, were born out of neighborhood residents’ frustration with the lack of city government accountability to the community. The neighborhood did indeed change again in the 1990s when students and some young professionals began to move into Mission Hill. While this new population made the neighborhood safer and stimulated commercial growth in Mission Hill, it created a new set of dilemmas for the neighborhood.

_A Brief Walk Through Mission Hill Today_

Mission Hill’s active center, Brigham Circle, is the meeting point of the neighborhood’s two major arteries. Huntington Avenue, shown in Figures 3, where a trolley divides two lanes of traffic in either direction, provides a ten-minute ride from downtown Boston into Mission Hill and then passes on to the nearby town of Brookline. Many elite academic and cultural institutions line this thoroughway in the blocks from downtown into Brigham Circle. Most notably, Northeastern University’s large campus is anchored on Huntington Avenue, as are several smaller educational institutions, including Massachusetts College of Art, Wentworth Institute of Technology, Harvard School of Public Health, and Boston’s renowned Museum of Fine Arts.

While the commanding buildings of these institutions dominate Huntington Avenue from downtown nearly to Brigham Circle, in the few blocks before Brigham Circle the scale becomes more intimate. Restaurants and retail shops are housed in the ground floors of three-story Queen Anne’s style brick and stone rowhouses with residential usage on the upper floors. The Longwood Medical Area, a concentration of renowned hospitals that attract an international clientele, borders Brigham Circle and the entrance of one hospital, Brigham and Women’s, opens into Brigham Circle. Diagonally
across from the hospital is a new, three-story mixed-use development. The development, whose brick façade peaks out from behind the tree and commercial row of shops in Figure 3, currently holds a Stop and Shop, a Walgreen’s, a bank, and a few offices.

Continuing along Huntington Avenue, the characteristic vernacular of two and three-story rowhouses persists, with mixed commercial and residential buildings turning exclusively to residential apartment buildings a few blocks from Brigham Circle (see Figure 4). These residential apartments continue on Huntington Avenue to where the Jamaicaway, a major city throughway, divides Mission Hill from Brookline. The residential buildings in the blocks before Brookline are littered with graffiti. Bars protect most of the first floor windows of these apartments. The exceptions to the scale of the Huntington streetscape are the towers of Roxbury Tenants of Harvard’s Mission Park pictured in Figure 5.

Tremont Street is narrower, with a single lane of traffic in each direction. Traveling from Brigham Circle down the pedestrian-popular Tremont into Mission Hill, one again encounters chiefly three-story buildings. These buildings are more varied in their materials, composed of clapboard, wood shingle, brick, and native puddingstone. Some are again in the Queen Anne’s style, while many exhibit the bowed fronts typical of many of Boston’s neighborhoods. In the blocks nearest to Brigham Circle, these buildings hold a variety of businesses on their ground floors, ranging from the slightly pricey restaurant and bar Solstice Café, to chains such as Subway and Dunkin’ Donuts. Further down the street, one finds the doughnuts locals swear by at the popular neighborhood meeting-spot Mike’s Donuts, depicted in Figure 6. The same block holds several other businesses and social service agencies including a Head Start pre-school
and Sociedad Latina, a non-profit organization explored further in Chapter 5. Across the street, the majestic, ornate stone church that gives the neighborhood half its name, Mission Church stands proudly. The Mission Main housing development, reconstructed in the 1990s, is located off Tremont Street behind the church (see Figures 9 and 10; Mission Main is discussed further in the next chapter). The 535 units\(^{32}\) housed in vinyl sided townhouses compose a quiet, residential enclave interspersed with parking, green spaces, and a playground. In the blocks of Tremont Street following Mission Church, a few vacant lots and vacant buildings are present, sprinkled between apartment buildings. A Check Casher and an inexpensive diner are the final commercial establishments of Tremont Street before the intersection of Columbus Avenue and Tremont Street, known as Roxbury Crossing, which marks the end of Mission Hill and the entrance to Lower Roxbury.

Taking a turn off Tremont Street to the right when facing Roxbury Crossing, one is greeted by the steeply inclined terrain from which the neighborhood earned the latter part of its name. The hill is a quiet residential area of Boston’s characteristic clapboard triple-deckers, a few larger estates in a similar style, as well as Italianate mansions and the occasional string of brick or puddingstone rowhouses. Figure 7 shows some of these characteristic homes. These homes vary greatly in upkeep. Some homes, mainly occupied by their owners, are newly painted with abundant plantings in the front lawns. Others appear not to have been painted in years, and some are marked by graffiti. There are a number of residential construction projects going on previously vacant lots along these streets.

\(^{32}\) Ibid.
Walking down the other side of the hill, or the “back” of the hill, as the area south of the Parker Hill playground and New England Baptist Hospital is referred to by residents, there are more clapboard triple-deckers. There is construction going on in various parts of this area as well, mainly executed by two non-profit community development corporations working in partnership. This venture, called Back of the Hill Community Housing Initiative, is discussed further in Chapter 4. Heath Street, with several vacant stone building that originally served as breweries, acts as a rough dividing line between the Mission Hill and Jamaica Plain neighborhoods.

A walk through Mission Hill reveals a neighborhood in transition. The commercial areas of Mission Hill are thriving in contrast to resident descriptions of the area in the 1980s. Increased real estate investment and development are evident from the high volumes of construction. The proximity of universities and hospitals in light of the story of the Roxbury Tenants of Harvard points out that institutional expansion has profound effects on Mission Hill. The role of institutions, real estate investors, and other players in causing privileged influx in Mission Hill is the subject of the next chapter.
CHAPTER THREE: SOURCES OF PRIVILEGED INFLUX

The causes of privileged influx in Mission Hill can be traced to five major groups of agents. First, hospitals and universities have interests in expanding physically. Mission Hill’s location adjacent to the Longwood Medical Center and to universities makes it an attractive site for these institutions to expand into, but many Mission Hill residents find that the institutions disrupt the existing community with their entry. Further, universities are increasing enrollment, and so students are moving into Mission Hill in mounting numbers. Both the institutions and the student populations, then, are actors in producing privileged influx.

The movement of students to the area motivates the next actor group: real estate interests. Real estate speculators buy cheap housing stock or develop vacant land and target students and other privileged groups as renters. Increased real estate speculation causes rents to rise, which places financial pressure on existing residents. But, real estate speculation, privileged demand, and the location of universities are all related to Boston’s role as a center of professional activity in the global economy. Professional employment in Boston attracts professional and student populations to live in the city, which makes the housing market throughout the city competitive. Finally, the Boston city government has, at times, played an active role in bringing about privileged influx. For example, in efforts to cultivate a mixed-income neighborhood thought to be beneficial for the existing low-income residents, the city replaced some subsidized units with market rate units in the rebuilding of the Mission Main housing development in the 1990s.
Institutions and the Implications of Their Expansion

The Longwood Medical Area has been steadily expanding since Harvard established its Medical School on Longwood Avenue in 1906. Initially, expansion posed few problems for Mission Hill and other neighboring communities, as space was plentiful. Now, residents find themselves in battles with Harvard and the hospitals to stop disruptive expansion into their neighborhood. While expansion is not currently causing massive privileged influx, expansion does nonetheless threaten existing communities. A salient illustration is the experience of the Roxbury Tenants of Harvard in the 1970s. Roxbury Tenants of Harvard was able to successfully navigate negotiations with Harvard so that tenants were not displaced. Still, a residential community of small-scale detached homes was demolished and replaced with denser high-rise towers to make space for Harvard’s expansion. The expansion of elite institutions can be conceived of as a form of encroachment comparable to privileged influx.

Universities nearby Mission Hill also pose potential future threats to the neighborhood through possible physical expansion. The more profound effect universities have on the neighborhood, however, is that universities attract the privileged populations that are newly finding residence in Mission Hill. While Wentworth Institute of Technology and Massachusetts College of Art border Mission Hill, these institutions are dwarfed in size by Northeastern University, the largest and most fundamental player in Mission Hill’s privileged influx. With 22,771 full-time and part-time students, Northeastern has been a fixture on Huntington Avenue since 1938. However, the university was primarily a commuter school until Northeastern began efforts to draw a

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33 Northeastern University, “Quick Facts.”
34 Northeastern University, “University History.”
more academically strong student population from a broader geographical area in the 1990s. Northeastern began building dorms to attract and accommodate this new population during the 1990s, and Christine Phelan of Northeastern University’s Public Relations department claims that these dorms have made Northeastern “a hotter school than we’ve been in the past.” Still, Phelan reports that only about half of students live on campus.

Are student preferences secondary to the influence of the universities as agents in bringing students to the city? Alternatively, are students showing interest in living in urban areas, specifically Boston, and universities are catering to the student populations’ desires? The next section addresses the role of student populations as agents of privileged influx.

**Students as Privileged Consumers**

As is evident from talking with residents in nearby areas, students from Northeastern and other nearby colleges and universities seek housing mainly in two neighborhoods: the Fenway and Mission Hill. Families in these neighborhoods must compete for rental housing with students who are willing to share bedrooms and convert living rooms into additional bedrooms, often exceeding the legal limit of unrelated occupants for given apartment types. Students may not have large incomes, but by splitting rents several ways, students can often afford higher rents than existing residents. Marta Rivera, a former Mission Hill resident born and raised in the neighborhood, reports that she and her daughter were forced to leave their two bedroom Mission Hill apartment for cheaper rents in the Dorchester neighborhood when her landlord found he could earn a larger profit from student groups. A group of Northeastern University women moved

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35 Christine Phelan, e-mail correspondence to author, 23 September 2003.
into her apartment upon her departure.³⁶ Rivera’s experience is typical by resident accounts.

Students often do not qualify as privileged on the basis of their income relative to the rest of the population. Students often, however, come from higher socio-economic class backgrounds. Moreover, students may be supported financially by their families, making students’ individual incomes less relevant. But, the main reason why students are privileged relative to the Mission Hill community is that they are preparing for a life of greater opportunities. The opportunity to pursue higher education will support students to pursue a range of careers that provide high salaries, which will further allow this population a wider array of lifestyle choices.

As of now, the privileged population moving into Mission Hill is composed mainly of students. Some professionals employed at the Longwood Medical Area hospitals have moved to Mission Hill in recent years, but this is not currently a large population. Still, sociologist Brain Godfrey has suggested that “urban pioneers” such as artists, gays and lesbians, or in the case of Mission Hill, students, often pave the way for a slightly older and wealthier population of professionals.³⁷ Godfrey’s model has important application in Mission Hill. The neighborhood is gaining a reputation for being safer than it had been in the past due to the increased student presence. With the hospitals so close by, it seems Mission Hill would be a prime candidate to experience the trend Godfrey describes.

Emphasis on student preferences is in keeping with Berry’s demand-side model, while a focus on the role of universities in actively recruiting students evokes a different

³⁶ Marta Rivera, interview with author, Boston, 6 October 2003.
model. It seems that the demands of student populations and the role of universities in supplying opportunities must be seen as two connected forces – neither can function as a cause for student presence in Mission Hill without being accompanied by the other. An analysis of the real estate players that create housing for students evokes a supply-side emphasis that adds further depth.

**Profiting from Privilege: The Role of Real Estate Interests**

Community members I interviewed agree that real estate speculators began to invest heavily in Mission Hill about four years ago, around the same time as student populations were growing at Northeastern and other universities. Property was cheap, yet the neighborhood’s prime location close to downtown and near universities and hospitals made it an attractive place for privileged people to live.

The process goes as follows: Decades after the white flight encouraged by real estate speculators following World War II left urban neighborhoods partially abandoned and brought a decline in real estate values, real estate investors return to invest in Mission Hill because of the low prices. They pay these low prices with the objective of reselling the housing at a higher price. When possible, they subdivide housing stock to maximize the number of units. On more than a few occasions, attic apartments, illegal by city law, are transformed into additional units. Housing is then put on the rental market generally without many costly improvements, as is evident when one walks through the neighborhood and assesses the poor exterior paint jobs of many homes owned by absentee landlords. In some cases, investors buy cheap vacant land and develop new housing stock with similar result.
Next, investors play an active role through advertising to assure that students
discover the availability of rental housing in the neighborhood. Though students may not
be wealthy, they are often willing to share bedrooms and forgo a living room in order to
allow for an additional bedroom. This way, high rents can be feasible for student
pocketbooks because the costs are split between multiple students. Landlords too often
encourage students to illegally occupy units with more residents than the legal limit.

Through these steps, real estate speculators join the neighboring elite institutions
as agents of privileged influx in Mission Hill. A supply-side analysis reveals that real
estate speculators produce privileged influx in Mission Hill by creating housing options
that are appealing for students and other privileged groups and by actively recruiting
these populations to live in the neighborhood. But the real estate speculation that occurs
in neighborhoods near downtown Boston does not transpire in all cities. Boston’s role in
the global economy makes it a site attractive for real estate investment and privileged
demand.

Localized Manifestations of Global Forces

The case of Mission Hill clearly illustrates the effects of the global economic
patterns that both Berry and Smith address. Factories and breweries that supplied jobs to
Mission Hill’s population in previous generations no longer operate in the neighborhood.
Employment available to people without higher education or special employable skills is
limited mainly to low-paying jobs in the service sector.

At the same time, professional activity is becoming more concentrated and
centralized. Boston is a center for global professional activity in a variety of domains.
The Longwood Medical Area, a group of hospitals that attract an international clientele,
is a central site in the field of medicine. Because Boston is a global center, privileged populations are attracted to Boston for its employment opportunities. This privileged demand makes the real estate market in the entire city more competitive. Real estate speculation also heightens in global centers like Boston. Cities throughout the nation experienced decline in real estate values as a result of the post-World War II white flight. But, real estate speculation is more prevalent in Boston as compared to cities that are not global centers of professional activity.

Universities can benefit from being located in cities that are global centers. Professional institutions, whether informally or through direct partnerships with colleges and universities, offer opportunities for students to explore professional fields. Harvard Medical School’s proximity to an array of hospitals allows students a range of opportunities to develop professionally. Many students are attracted to Harvard and to other schools in Boston because of the extensive opportunities the city holds.

The popularity of Boston among privileged groups is good for the economic vitality of the city. Does this positive influence naturally translate to gains for the low to moderate-income people of Boston’s neighborhoods? Policymakers and low to moderate-income constituencies are not always in agreement regarding the influence of privileged influx in neighborhoods and what the city’s role should be in promoting or discouraging such change.

**The Controversial Role of the City: The Example of Mission Main**

The city of Boston must serve the needs of a diverse population. The city must provide necessary services and promote policies favorable to low to moderate-income populations. Additionally, the city must strive to maintain a strong tax base to supply
funds for various services. While directly related, these requirements are at times at odds with one another. Further, academics, policymakers, and low to moderate-income people do not always concur regarding what government policies are in the best interest of low to moderate-income populations. The city’s decisions regarding who now lives in the new Mission Main housing development reflect this conflict.

The residents of Mission Main came together in the early 1990s to formulate a plan for improvement of their dilapidated public housing development.\textsuperscript{38} Residents organized and began to work with the Boston Housing Authority and other city agencies on a redevelopment plan. In 1993, the Boston Housing Authority submitted an application for a grant from the Department of Housing and Urban Development to demolish the existing buildings and replace them with new units. The new housing would be townhouses more consistent with the surrounding neighborhood architectural vernacular (see Figures 9 and 10). Also, green spaces and additional parking would also be included.

Residents were excited about these vast changes, but there was another alteration that the Boston Housing Authority proposed without resident understanding or support: the new Mission Main development would include up to 17 percent market rate housing. Residents who were temporarily relocated to other public housing projects or to private housing using Section 8 subsidies during the construction period understood that all previous residents who wanted to return would be able to do so. But, when the project was completed in 2000 to 2001, there was a surplus of single bedroom apartments but not enough multi-bedroom apartments for previous family groups. Marta Rivera testifies that families in which a son or daughter of eighteen years or older had been living with his or

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\textsuperscript{38} Boston Housing Authority.
her parents were told that the son or daughter would have to move out of the development or get his or her own unit within the complex. Renting an additional unit inside or outside Mission Main would, of course, be quite costly relative to sharing. This requirement troubled many families.

The city had two reasons for transforming Mission Main from a housing project exclusively for low-income people to a mixed-income development. First, the city was influenced by the increasingly popular school of thought discussed in Chapter 1 that promotes mixed-income developments for the supposed positive impacts of socio-economic integration on low-income residents. Second, the city favored a mixed-income development for economic reasons. Including market-rate units makes the development easier for the city to fund and maintain. Additionally, the city assures that there will be a wealthier tax base in the neighborhood, as well as increased expendable income that could stimulate commercial growth.

The city undoubtedly produced a demographic transformation of Mission Hill in its choices surrounding Mission Main. Whether the city’s decision was a pragmatic judgment given economic realities or a blatant disregard of the needs of the low-income families, the city caused privileged influx. This example shows that the government can be a powerful agent of change in neighborhoods.

The government can be analyzed as an independent agent, as it is treated in this section. Yet, elected officials are accountable to their constituencies, and, therefore, they also function as tools of their constituencies. The next chapter discusses the role of community groups who often utilize government officials as tools in implementing strategies to minimize the negative impacts of restructuring on the existing community.

39 Rivera.
CHAPTER FOUR: OPPOSITION AT THE SCALE OF THE NEIGHBORHOOD

Residents are not wholly unified in their responses to recent neighborhood changes. Some residents welcome privileged influx for its refurbishment of the commercial heart of Mission Hill, and some homeowners are pleased with the rise in real estate prices. Some residents are distressed by the displacement of existing residents. There are a number of community groups that strive to minimize displacement during the restructuring process in Mission Hill. Community groups employ both strategies that are rooted in the neighborhood and strategies that engage in spatial scales larger than the neighborhood. This section investigates strategies within the physical level of the neighborhood.

Community strategies that act on the neighborhood level emphasize supply-side causes of privileged influx and react accordingly. I focus on two main types of community strategies. The first strategy is the development of subsidized housing for low-income people. This strategy responds to the increased real estate speculation that serves privileged groups by developing housing that will exclusively serve low-income populations. This strategy is employed by several different organizations, and I use the Back of the Hill Community Housing Initiative as an example. Next, I discuss the role of the Community Alliance of Mission Hill, a coalition of community members whom elected officials consult regarding zoning, licensing, and development issues in the neighborhood that come to city hearings. This group views neighboring elite institutions and real estate speculators as supply-side causes of privileged influx in Mission Hill, and responds by opposing expansion of institutions and development plans of real estate interests.
Developing Affordable Housing: The Example of the Back of the Hill Community Housing Initiative

The Back of the Hill Community Development Corporation (BOTH CDC) is an exemplary group engaged in developing housing for low-income people in Mission Hill. Founded in the 1960s out of fear that the city would develop the vacant lots in the back of Mission Hill with infill housing without involving the community in the decision-making process, the group is composed of Mission Hill residents who volunteer their time working on projects aimed at making the neighborhood more livable. Originally, privileged influx was not an anxiety for the BOTH CDC, as this process was not occurring in the neighborhood. Instead, the group was interested in improving quality of life in the neighborhood. Today, the BOTH CDC retains its older goals and is also concerned with preserving the low to moderate-income community that is threatened by privileged influx.40 Catherine Gallagher explains that the goal of the Back of the Hill Community Housing Initiative is to make Mission Hill affordable for “the people who should be living here.” For Gallagher, the people who “should” be in Mission Hill are working class people with low to moderate incomes – the population that she has seen living in the neighborhood all of her life.

Since the BOTH CDC is staffed only by volunteers, the group has recently joined forces with the larger Jamaica Plain Neighborhood Development Corporation (JPNDC) to accomplish some of its ambitions. The JPNDC is a non-profit community development corporation with a staff of thirty-seven based in the bordering Jamaica Plain neighborhood. It engages in real estate development, economic development, and community organizing principally in Jamaica Plain.

40 Gallagher.
Together, the groups have undertaken a large project developing affordable housing named the Back of the Hill Community Housing Initiative, which is funded by various city department sources and by private donors.\textsuperscript{41} Housing accommodates low-income people in a variety of income brackets. Phase 1 of the project, completed in 2001, consists of 22 units of housing for first-time homebuyers with incomes of 55 to 80 percent of the area median. These units are housed in one and two-family detached clapboard houses constructed in previously vacant scattered sites that the community development corporation collaborative purchased from the city and various private owners. The third phase of the initiative is similar. Composed of twenty-four homes for first-time homebuyers with incomes of about 60 to 80 percent of the area median, Phase 3 is currently under construction, scheduled to finish early next year. To keep housing from reverting to market-rate whenever owners want to sell, there are resale restrictions that homeowners agree to upon purchase. If homeowners sell within thirty years, plus an additional twenty-five years at the city’s discretion, the city has the right to purchase the property at a value the city calculates.\textsuperscript{42} If the city does not buy the property, homeowners must sell at a reduced rate to people at the same income level or below.

The second phase is a 34-unit rental cooperative on Heath Street. Named the Catherine H. Gallagher Cooperative in recognition of the namesake’s dedication to the neighborhood, the cooperative just opened to residents in October 2003 (see Figure 8). The cooperative mainly targets a lower income bracket. 16 units are set aside for people with less than 60 percent of the area median income, 5 units are for people with less than 50 percent of the median income, and 4 units are for people with below 30 percent of the median income.

\textsuperscript{41} Patricia Flaherty, interview by author, Boston, MA, 5 October 2003. All information in this section was provided by Flaherty unless otherwise noted.  
\textsuperscript{42} Henry Joseph, e-mail communication to author, 9 December 2003.
median income. Of the latter group, 8 units are reserved for homeless people on the city’s priority list. The cooperative is limited-equity, which means that the tenants, as members of the Coop Corporation, have some control over the building as they would if they were owners after they have lived in the coop for four years and partaken in training. Financial ownership, however, remains with the tax syndicator and the community development corporation collaborative for at least fifteen years, at which point ownership will probably revert to the tenants as a collective. Yet, the community development corporations maintain a land lease on the site for 99 years, the legal limit, to ensure long-term affordability.

The Back of the Hill Community Housing Initiative responds to the failure of the current market to supply housing in Mission Hill that is affordable for low to moderate-income people. The group strives to supply increased opportunities for people with low to moderate incomes to rent or buy in the back of Mission Hill. Since for-profit real estate interests are not providing ample opportunities, the non-profit community development corporations step in as developers.

In order to fulfill this function, the community development corporations utilize city money as a tool. Because the Back of the Hill Community Housing Initiative is partially funded by city taxes, the strategy redistributes money from higher income brackets to low-income people. Those with higher incomes and assets, of course, contribute more taxes. This money is then used to subsidize housing for the low-income residents of the Back of the Hill Community Housing Initiative.

In terms of time frame, The Back of the Hill Community Housing Initiative involved years of community outreach, negotiation of funding sources, and collaboration
with architects and contractors before people could move in to new housing. But, the community development corporations have employed a creative approach to make the long years of planning pay off. The innovative use of resale restrictions and a land lease guarantees that the new housing will continue to serve low-income people for decades to come. However, the success of this strategy is limited spatially: the units developed provide housing for many people, but they cannot accommodate the entire population of low to moderate-income people who need housing in Mission Hill. All of the many households on the waiting list for housing are out of luck. Furthermore, developing housing as a strategy is necessarily limited in effectiveness, as there is not always room to build more housing stock. Vacant lots in Mission Hill are being bought up and developed by for-profit and non-profit developers, and there will soon be no space for new construction.

Ironically, the Back of the Hill Community Housing Initiative inadvertently produces privileged influx in the back of Mission Hill. The newly developed homes are aesthetically appealing and integrate pleasingly with the surrounding built environment. Property values in the vicinity have risen as a result, stimulating a hike in rents. The Community Alliance of Mission Hill, discussed in the following section, offers a partial response to issues of rent gauging by absentee landlords.

**Voice of the Community? The Community Alliance of Mission Hill**

Founded in 1995, the self-described mission of the Community Alliance of Mission Hill is to “give a voice to the residents of Mission Hill and to present a positive image of our neighborhood.”43 The group holds monthly public forums surrounding...

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quality of life issues, and represents the neighborhood on zoning, licensing and
development issues. Kimn Muralidharan, a current board member of CAMH, explains
that the group’s main work is to monitor proposed changes in the neighborhood and to
take a stance that represents most residents’ interests as measured through surveys and
votes.\footnote{Kimn Muralidharan, interview by author, Boston, 5 October 2003.}

According to Muralidharan, the group is playing a part in minimizing the
negative impacts of privileged influx on existing residents. She reports that the group
generally opposes expansion of the neighboring hospitals. Developments proposed by
real estate speculators external to the neighborhood also do not get much support from
CAMH, she says. Through these modes, Muralidharan feels the group plays a part in
minimizing displacement of existing residents.

CAMH’s choice of strategies reflects recognition of supply-side causes of
privileged influx. CAMH targets real estate speculators and absentee landlords who
invest in the neighborhood and attract privileged populations. To challenge real estate
interests, CAMH works defensively, opposing development proposals that the groups’
members find unfavorable to the community. The group also attributes privileged influx
partially to the expansion of neighboring institutions. By stopping institutional
expansion, CAMH hopes to curb privileged groups’ demand to live in Mission Hill and
to slow real estate speculation that brings these groups to the neighborhood.

In regards to spatial scale, CAMH is undoubtedly effective only on the
neighborhood level. The positions that the group takes are limited to development and
quality of life issues within the neighborhood; Muralidharan reports that the group does
not take positions on broader political issues. Further, CAMH’s strategies act in an
immediate time frame. The group tries to stop unwanted, potential development that real estate speculators and institutions propose to carry out shortly. CAMH has the potential to halt development quickly, but there is no long-term assurance that CAMH’s gains will endure. Each victory applies only to a specific development proposal at a specific time. If the developing actor shifts plans to a different site, or attempts a similar plan months or years down the road, CAMH must again organize a strong reaction to the proposed development in order to stop the new efforts. The group must battle persistently in order to have more than a trivial influence on changes in the neighborhood.

As a tool in these struggles, CAMH utilizes the power of community organization and mobilization. When people come together to present a unified voice, they can be more influential in many spheres. Specifically, CAMH makes use of the influence community organizations can have during the process in which zoning, licensing, and development decisions are made in City Hall. Community members are given space to express their views on these matters. When a community can present a unified position, the community may not always get its way, but government officials will generally be obliged to listen. Local elected officials, namely City Councilors, State Representatives, and State Senators, become further tools, as they will often support community stances. Through these modes, CAMH achieves some authority over neighborhood changes.

For some neighborhood residents, however, CAMH is not representative of Mission Hill’s residents. Residents who asked to remain anonymous report that the group is dominated by newcomers to the neighborhood who are homeowners interested in protecting their property values. According to these anonymous residents, the group does not consistently fight for the interests of the low to moderate-income population in
Mission Hill. Muralidharan contends that CAMH would like to attract more renters and lower income residents of Mission Hill as well as student residents. Yet, other residents feel that the mandatory dues required in order to belong to CAMH and to vote alienate low to moderate-income people.

Regardless, CAMH is limited in terms of the scales of space and time that it is effective. Citywide groups discussed in the next chapter endeavor to be effectual at controlling privileged influx on broader spatial scales and time frames.
CHAPTER FIVE: STRATEGIES AT THE CITY LEVEL AND BEYOND

The strategies discussed in the previous section challenge privilege influx on the scale of the neighborhood. Other strategies work on larger spatial scales. Privileged influx occurs in neighborhoods throughout Boston, as well as throughout the nation and internationally, so it makes sense for communities to join forces to contend with privileged influx on a broader scale. City Life/Vida Urbana is a non-profit organization that organizes tenants to enable them to negotiate with landlords regarding rents. Most interesting for the discussion of spatial scales is City Life’s implementation of an “Anti-Displacement Zone” where tenants are mobilized throughout a multi-neighborhood district in the city. Still, groups like City Life advocate for policies such as maintenance of the Section 8 program and rent control as means to ensure affordable housing options for existing residents in neighborhoods throughout the city. Two other citywide non-profit groups, Sociedad Latina and Action for Boston Community Development, engage in initiatives aimed at helping low to moderate-income and minority youth pursue higher education so that they can compete in today’s global economy where education is an increasingly important means to gaining upward economic mobility.

City Life’s Collective Bargaining Tactics

City Life/Vida Urbana is a grass-roots organization based in Jamaica Plain that does work on a variety of social justice issues, with a focus on housing. A large part of City Life’s work involves helping tenants to organize. City Life tenant organizers seek out tenants in target buildings and proactively initiate organizing efforts. They provide

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information to tenants about their legal rights, and advise tenant associations about how to effectively carry out negotiations with landlords.\textsuperscript{46} Once tenants are effectively organized, City Life helps them to carry out group negotiations with landlords regarding rental rates, a method called collective bargaining.

City Life’s strategy of collective bargaining responds to supply-side causes of privileged influx. Tenants demand that landlords, rather than evict existing tenants in order to profit from wealthier tenants who will pay higher rents, accommodate existing tenants with rents that they can afford. Similarly to CAMH, City Life’s tactic of collective bargaining uses the tool of organization to these ends. When tenants come together, they have more strength in negotiations with landlords to meet their demands than they would if they acted individually.

City Life has helped tenants negotiate legally binding contracts of up to eight years in which rental increases are limited to amounts tenants feel they can afford.\textsuperscript{47} Still, successfully maintaining and extending contracts necessitates that tenants stay solidly organized. Landlords who may be responsive at one point can change their decisions, even in the face of a strong tenant group. Short-term agreements between tenants and landlords leave tenants in a volatile situation.

Collective bargaining in a given building is effective only on the physical scale of the building. But, City Life has used collective bargaining efforts in specific developments as building blocks of an initiative that works on a greater spatial scale. The group has defined an Anti-Displacement Zone in parts of Jamaica Plain and Roxbury

\textsuperscript{46} Mark Pedulla, e-mail correspondence to author, 23 September 2003.
\textsuperscript{47} City Life/Vida Urbana.
where City Life is heavily organizing tenants in the area into a dominating force.\textsuperscript{48} Journalist Jeremy Schwab quotes Mark Pedulla, a tenant organizer for City Life, who explains the project as follows:

We are trying to get a little bit ahead of the line of gentrification and get as many buildings under contract as possible. The goal is to make [the Anti-Displacement Zone] an area where tenants take back control of the housing. Hopefully investors will have to think twice about buying property and raising the rents in the zone.

Pedulla emphasizes the need for strategies that anticipate privileged influx and act to counteract the potential displacement before it occurs. Further, he shows how the power in numbers realized through collective bargaining can be taken to a greater level when different tenant associations come together to form a larger collective with a unified voice. Rather than attempt to individually organize every building in the zone, City Life and tenant organizations force landlords and investors recognize that entire parts of neighborhoods will not passively accept rent increases that have the potential to harm the existing community by displacing people. By declaring an Anti-Displacement Zone, City Life helps preserve affordable housing for low to moderate-income people over the scale of entire neighborhoods and beyond.

\textit{Citywide Rent Regulation}\textsuperscript{1}

While collective bargaining can minimize displacement of working class tenants, City Life and other groups emphasize the need for a citywide policy that will protect all tenants by regulating rental rates. Rent control was banned by state referendum in Massachusetts in 1994 by a close vote of 51 percent against to 49 percent in favor.\textsuperscript{49} In


the last few years, Mayor Menino has renewed efforts to implement a version of rent control in Boston. In 2002, he presented legislation that called Rent Stabilization to the City Council. His proposal would have allowed tenants to repeal certain increases in rents to city board, though all housing of under two-units or under three-units if owner-occupied, as well as newly constructed housing, would be exempt from regulation. For the proposed legislation to become law, it would need to pass the Council and subsequently the Massachusetts State Legislature. Four City Councilors, including Councilor Michael Ross, who represents Mission Hill, supported Menino’s proposal, but the remaining majority of the thirteen-seat Council voted against it. Menino promised earlier this year to introduce a new, less rigid version of the proposal sometime after the November election. Meanwhile, the Boston Tenant Coalition, another tenant advocacy group, has drafted a proposal called “Community Stabilization: Tenant and Small Property Owners Protection Act” that the group is trying to find backing for in the City Council. The act would protect tenants in owner-occupied buildings of six units or more and in all buildings that have absentee landlords in three ways. First, it would limit the legal amount rents could be increased annually. The act also would dictate that landlords must have a legal cause for evicting a tenant, and it would instruct landlords to notify their tenants if they sell their property. Like Mayor Menino’s Rent Stabilization, new construction would be exempt from the Boston Tenant Coalition’s proposal.

Rent control addresses both demand-side and supply-side causes of privileged influx. The policy indirectly responds to demand-side causes by reducing the advantage

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of privileged people in the housing market. When rents are regulated, privileged populations may still seek housing in low to moderate-income urban neighborhoods. But, rents can only increase according to the legal guidelines, so the advantage that privileged people have in the housing market is minimized. Rent control also responds to a supply-side theory of privileged influx. Rent control discourages real estate speculation because the rents landlords can charge will be regulated, thus minimizing the profits speculators can make.

Rent control is a government policy. Thus, elected officials are the tools that residents of Mission Hill and other neighborhoods must utilize to make rent control a city law. While Mayor Menino can be viewed as an independent agent promoting regulation of rents as a solution to the affordable housing crisis in the city, his proposal is also a response to constituent demands. In this way, Menino is a tool of his constituency. Menino can put pressure on Boston’s City Councilors, the primary tools required to bring rent control to the city. Groups such as City Life and the Boston Tenant Coalition are also directly lobbying the Councilors heavily regarding rent control.

Yet, real estate interests also use elected officials as tools to keep the rental market unregulated. Landlords successfully led the 1994 campaign to ban rent control in Massachusetts, and real estate interests are involved in fighting proposed rent control legislation at the city level. They claim that rent regulation forces landlords to forgo needed renovations on properties because the rents they are taking in are not sufficient to make repairs profitable. To further advance their case, landlords evoke the opinion of economists such as Walter Block that rent control actually decreases the affordable
housing stock. Block contends that since landlords have less incentive to maintain properties, and developers have less incentive to build new units with rent control, more properties are abandoned and less new housing is constructed. Block further attacks rent control on the grounds that it is not a “target subsidy” – people with higher incomes who have the finances to pay for market rents can benefit, so it will not aid only the poor who need it. According to Block, those who will be hurt most by the policy are low to moderate-income people who will feel the pinch of the decreasing housing stock most acutely because of their limited ability to afford housing other than that which is rent controlled.

Proponents of rent control argue that rent regulation is vital to controlling displacement due to privileged influx because it is effective on broader spatial scales and time frames than strategies previously discussed. A city rent control policy would limit rental rates throughout the city. While some people with higher incomes might also live in rent-controlled apartments, legislation that regulates rents widely is the best means to serve the entire low to moderate-income population that risks displacement. Such a policy would not only protect low to moderate-income tenants throughout Mission Hill, but would reduce displacement due to privileged influx in other neighborhoods in Boston where this phenomenon occurs.

Rent control also has the potential to protect low to moderate-income people for an unlimited time period. As long as rents are regulated by law, displacement due to privileged influx will be minimized. Yet, opposition to rent control at the city and state level makes it difficult to bring back a rent control policy to Boston, let alone maintain

54 Ibid., 8.
such a law. A majority of City Councilors voted against Menino’s 2002 rent stabilization proposal; the feasibility of passing a similar policy through the same Council in the next years appears tenuous at best. Passage through the Massachusetts State Legislature would undoubtedly be difficult as well.55

**The Federal Policymaking Arena: The Section 8 Program**

In addition to lobbying for rent control, City Life and other groups are working to maintain Section 8 vouchers threatened by recent budget decisions in the United States Congress. Section 8 is a federal program of the Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD). The program supplies low-income people with vouchers that can be used to pay rent. HUD has determined that the maximum a family can afford to spend on housing as 30% of the family’s monthly income. For voucher-holders, HUD pays the difference of the market rent and 30% of the family’s income.56 The 2004 budget proposed by President Bush would have cut 185,000 existing section 8 vouchers, according to the National Alliance of HUD tenants.57 The group estimates that the bills passed by the House and the Senate cut 63,000 and 85,000 vouchers respectively. A vote on the final budget is imminent.

Section 8 vouchers react indirectly to a demand-side conception of privileged influx. Demand-side theorists emphasize how privileged classes can choose where they

55 State Senator Dianne Wilkerson, Mission Hill’s representative, brought an unsuccessful bill to the State Senate floor in 2001 that would have allowed cities and towns to pass local rent control legislation. The overwhelming opposition the bill received in the State Senate demonstrates the challenge rent control advocates would face in the State Congress even if rent control legislation was successfully navigated through the Boston City Council. For more information on Wilkerson’s proposal, see Ralph Ranalli, “A Move to Revive Rent Control: Soaring Prices are Called ‘Emergency’,” *Boston Globe*, 26 April 2001, sec. B, p.1.


want to live because they have more purchasing power than low to moderate-income people. The Section 8 program tackles this inequity in the housing market by subsidizing low-income people’s rents, thus enabling low-income people to compete for housing with people who are wealthier.

Elected officials are the tools by which Section 8 can be maintained and expanded. Federal budget decisions are made in Congress, with influence from the President. Still, local officials can be tools used to influence United States Congressmen and Congresswomen. The Boston City Council, led by Mission Hill’s representative, Councilor Michael Ross, passed a resolution requesting that Congress increase funds for the Section 8 program in the 2004 budget. The resolution was the City Councilors’ response to constituent concerns regarding the insufficient number of Section 8 vouchers in Boston. Boston’s City Council may be more influential than other constituents on the decision-making of Massachusetts’s delegation in Congress, and thus local officials are potentially useful tools in realms beyond city policymaking.

Section 8 supplies millions of households nationwide with rent assistance, making it a strategy that works on a physical scale far broader than other strategies discussed. While Section 8 helps a large number of people, it is critical to recognize that the program does not aid all of those in need. Waitlists for Section 8 are long in Boston and nationwide. Section 8 is playing a part in minimizing displacement and otherwise assisting low-income people with housing costs, but tremendous increases in funding would be necessary to accommodate all of the people on Section 8 waiting lists. As

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58 Lisa Forti, interview by author, Boston, MA, 6 October 2003.
Congress is taking steps to reduce the number of vouchers, a sizeable increase in Section 8 funding seems unlikely at this date.

Vouchers offer support to low-income people for as long as that support is needed, provided the family or individual is deemed eligible according to income requirements. In this way, vouchers can effectively minimize displacement of people due to privileged influx for long periods of time; even if rental rates rise, a voucher-holder will continue to pay 30% of his or her family income. Although there has historically been widespread support of the program in Congress, the potential cuts in funding for the program in next year’s budget indicate that the program may not always be strongly maintained.

The limitations of government policies indicate a need for structural change that would make policies unnecessary. This is the subject of the next section.

City Groups Respond To Global Demands

Two citywide social service organizations with offices in Mission Hill respond to the increasing privilege an education provides as a result of the changing global economy. These groups do not articulate their programs as strategies to minimize displacement in Mission Hill, nor do they frame their work in the language of global economic awareness. Still, the work of these groups surrounding education is responsive to the changing demands of the global economy that contributes to the displacement of low to moderate-income people in Mission Hill and other neighborhoods.

Sociedad Latina is a social service agency based in Mission Hill that provides services to Latinos of the greater Boston area. With the mission “to enhance the overall well-being of the Latino community,” Sociedad Latina provides a variety of services
including programs that foster cultural awareness and pride, programs aimed at developing leadership skills among Latino youth, and hunger and health related information. In terms of education, Sociedad Latina offers an after-school enrichment program in conjunction with the nearby Tobin Elementary School in which middle-school students are tutored by high-schoolers. Sociedad Latina also sponsors Latinos in Leadership and Change, which helps parents learn to advocate for the children in the Boston Public School system, and teaches parents about topics such as the SATs and college financial aid that prepare parents to support their children in pursuing higher education.

The anti-poverty non-profit organization Action for Boston Community Development (ABCD) overlaps in several service areas with Sociedad Latina. The Parker Hill/Fenway Neighborhood Service Center (PHF NSC), located on Parker Street in Mission Hill off Tremont Street near Roxbury Crossing, is Mission Hill’s local ABCD walk-in center. The center provides employment counseling and training for adults and youth, food and fuel assistance, free diapers and formula for needing parents, as well as activities for neighborhood senior citizens. The PHF NSC also offers an array of educational support services. The organization offers GED classes, and has a Higher Education Resource Center that helps high school students prepare for college. The Higher Education Resource Center includes SAT applications, financial aid applications, and college catalogs. The center also has an education counselor who helps students navigate resources and make a plan for their future.

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Sociedad Latina and ABCD respond to the role that education plays in defining social privilege. These organizations recognize that what separates the students of nearby universities and the young people of Mission Hill are the opportunities that a higher education provides. This stratification is most severe in today’s economy because of the lack of manufacturing and other blue collar jobs that allowed a previous generation in Mission Hill to live a moderate lifestyle without college education. To help the youth of Mission Hill advance beyond service sector employment, these groups encourage educational advancement.

Funded by various private and public funding sources, Sociedad Latina and ABCD redistribute money from privileged people into programs that serve principally low to moderate-income people. But, the strength of these organizations’ education initiatives lies in how they ultimately strive to eradicate the divisions that exist over class and race lines. Even policies like rent control that lessen privileged populations’ advantage in the housing market would not be as necessary if all people had equal access to educational opportunities.

Sociedad Latina and ABCD have the potential to change the entire course of the lives of those that they serve. But, in order for these organizations to have a successful long-term impact, they must assist youth all through their years in grade school to high school; the Higher Education Resource Center at PHF NSC is primarily useful to high school upperclassmen who made choices throughout their school years that prepare them to gain admission at a higher education institution. Hence, programs like Sociedad Latina’s tutoring program at the Tobin School are integral to the ultimate advancement of the youth these organizations serve. While Sociedad Latina and ABCD are active
throughout the scale of the city, only those individuals who are interested in participating in these organization’s programs are helped. With more funding, these groups could enhance their outreach efforts.

The support that ABCD and Sociedad Latina offer youth and their parents is invaluable in helping young people to gain access to greater opportunities, but it is not guaranteed to bring about sweeping change for all of those served. The barriers that class and race create for much of Mission Hill’s youth are not easily transcended. Fundamental social change that extensively transforms patterns of displacement due to privileged influx will involve generations of work surrounding education as a social equalizer.
After decades of fighting to preserve affordable housing for low to moderate-income people in Mission Hill, Maryanne O’Keefe claims that the struggle is not worthwhile anymore. O’Keefe’s daughter, who grew up in Mission Hill, is now the mother of a four-year old. She wanted to settle in Mission Hill to raise her daughter, but prices were too high to buy or rent on her nurse’s salary. She has instead settled outside of Boston. The institutions have won, O’Keefe maintains. She believes there is no way to control privileged influx in the neighborhood. O’Keefe paints a gloomy picture regarding the potential of activism in Mission Hill. Certainly, O’Keefe’s frustrations are not baseless. Nonetheless, an evaluation of the strategies employed in Mission Hill leaves room for optimism.

As is evident from the last chapters, there are a variety of strategies employed in Mission Hill to minimize displacement due to privileged influx. Actors respond to different causes of privileged influx, employ different tools and methods, and engage in minimizing displacement on divergent scales of time and space. The first section of this chapter compares the causes to which strategies respond, and suggests which causal models actors can most effectively react to in order to minimize displacement while still promoting quality of life improvements. The following section speaks to how the use of different tools results in different methods of minimizing displacement. The variety of causal models and tools employed in strategies produces the divergence of spatial scales and time frames that strategies engage issues of displacement. The final section of the

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63 O’Keefe.
chapter assesses the relative effectiveness of strategies as a function of the scales of their influence.

**Comparison of Causes**

Strategies that work within the scale of the neighborhood respond to supply-side causes of privileged influx. The BOTH CDC and the JPNDC recognize that people are displaced from Mission Hill because the market does not provide enough housing that is affordable for low-income people. In response, these community development corporations develop housing that is subsidized for low-income people. CAMH, on the other hand, takes stances on zoning, licensing, and other development issues, and through this avenue the group can stop, stall, or alter the progress of real estate development that may produce privileged influx undesired by the community. Transcending the scale of the neighborhood, City Life responds to supply-side causes of privileged influx as well. The group reacts to the role of landlords in producing displacement by raising rents.

Government policy strategies address supply-side causes and indirectly address demand-side causes. Section 8 indirectly addresses demand-side causes of privileged influx by enabling low-income people to compete with people of higher income brackets for housing. Rent control reduces the advantage of privileged groups in the housing market, thus also indirectly addressing demand-side causes. Additionally, rent regulation legislation tackles supply-side dynamics by eliminating the ability of real estate interests to profit from targeting privileged consumers.

Finally, the education initiatives of Sociedad Latina and ABCD do not fit into the supply-side or demand-side schools; these groups contend with the global economic patterns that create a significant income gap between those that have college degrees and
those who do not. By encouraging youth from Mission Hill and other neighborhoods to pursue higher education, these groups promote upward economic mobility for youth and, in this way, minimize future displacement due to privileged influx.

Worth noting is the lack of strategies that directly challenge demand-side causes. What accounts for these absences? It is helpful to consider how strategies that respond to these causes would function. To reduce the privileged demand that causes privileged influx would necessitate making the neighborhood an unattractive place to live for privileged populations. Yet, many of the characteristics that attract privileged people to the neighborhood - the vibrancy of the commercial district, the improved safety over the past decades, the ease of transportation systems – are factors that improve quality of life for all people in the neighborhood. The community wants to minimize displacement that fractures the existing community, while encouraging change that improves neighborhood quality of life. Hence, there is emphasis on strategies that redistribute privileges and that minimize the advantage that privileged groups enjoy without eliminating the privileged demand altogether.

**Tool and Methods for Contending with Privilege**

There are different ways to challenge patterns of privileged influx that cause displacement. Different tools direct actors to distinct methods. The BOTH CDC and JPNDC redistribute material privilege in the city by utilizing city money as a tool. The Back of the Hill Community Housing Initiative is partially funded by taxpayers. So, some of the money of higher income populations is redistributed to aid low-income people with housing. Section 8 operates similarly. Federal taxes are channeled to the Department of Housing and Urban Development, who in turn allocates Section 8
vouchers to local housing authorities to give to low-income people throughout the nation. Again, money is redistributed, this time on the scale of the nation rather than the city.

Rent control is redistributive to the extent that tenants pay less while landlords profit less as a result of regulated rents. But, rent control also functions to reduce displacement in a different manner: by regulating rents, rent control legislation makes privilege less significant. If rents are affordable for most of the population, people with higher incomes do not have advantages in the competition for housing. City Life’s collective bargaining efforts are similarly redistributive in the sense that money that landlords would make from tenants stays with tenants. Through the Anti-Displacement Zone, however, City Life approximates the influence rent control has of making privilege less relevant by creating a multi-neighborhood area in which landlords understand that rental hikes will be challenged. The difference in the tools involved in collective bargaining and those in implementing rent control make collective bargaining a more limited strategy in terms of time and spatial scales.

Sociedad Latina and ABCD strive to minimize privilege distinctions altogether with their work surrounding education. By supporting youth in the path to college, these organizations attempt to eliminate the need for strategies that redistribute income or control the housing market to lessen the advantage of privileged populations. While other actors mitigate the negative impacts of class distinctions, Sociedad Latina and ABCD react to the structural components of American society that privilege some groups of people over others. Ultimately, strategies like these education initiatives are a powerful means of contending with displacement. But, there are strong and weak points
to all the strategies presented that become evident when they are compared to one another regarding the scales of space and time in which they effect change.

**What Is Working and Why: Issues of Scale**

Strategies discussed in this thesis range in terms of spatial scale. The ability of some strategies to aid larger numbers of people over bigger areas indicates the greater strength of these strategies. The Back of the Hill Community Housing Initiative and CAMH each utilize strategies that work on small spatial scales. The BOTH CDC and the JPNDC have together developed 80 units of housing; the long wait lists for housing in the development highlight the small proportion of needing people this strategy accommodates. Similarly, CAMH gets involved in permitting issues for specific developments, so the group’s victories are rooted to the scale of specific developments within Mission Hill. To target landlords, City Life uses the same tool as CAMH: the power found in organization and mobilization. Yet, by employing this tactic on greater spatial scale, the victories of City Life have farther-reaching implications. The Anti-Displacement Zone set up by City Life has been widely recognized for its success in making landlords throughout a multi-neighborhood district responsive to tenant agendas.

In terms of spatial scale, the Section 8 program provides rent assistance to millions of households throughout the nation. The program clearly has influence on a wide spatial scale. Still, just as waiting lists for housing developed the BOTH CDC and the JPNDC indicate that the housing development is serving only a small proportion of the population in need, waiting lists for Section 8 vouchers demonstrate the necessity for increased funding for the program, and for a policy that offers universal housing support to low to moderate-income people.
Rent control meets this need. Legislation that controls the rents that landlords can legally charge in Boston would minimize displacement throughout neighborhoods experiencing privileged influx. Because of the wide spatial scales that rent control is effectual, it is also valuable as a means of supporting communities that engage in initiatives to improve quality of life in the neighborhood. Without regulation, community efforts, such as the Back of the Hill Community Housing Initiative, that aim to improve quality of life for neighborhood residents, may translate into increased privileged influx and displacement, so that original residents will not enjoy improved neighborhood livability.

Education initiatives of Sociedad Latina and ABCD do not reach all of the city’s needing youth. Only those youth who know about services and who seek out services consistently can achieve large gains, and increased funding would surely help these organizations to increase outreach and to accommodate a greater number of youth. These programs have the theoretical potential to effect radical transformation of the social class system through their promotion of education as a social equalizer. Yet, the time frame in which this effectiveness can be realized makes some people prefer to put energy into strategies that work more immediately.

Spatial scale is not the only factor in measuring a strategy’s relative effectiveness. The promptness that strategies are influential and the amount of time that their effects endure are further key aspects. Neighborhood-based responses differ in the time frames of their effectiveness. CAMH takes action on an immediate time frame, fighting potentially harmful, imminent development. The Back of the Hill Initiative is less immediate in its effects, as it involved years of planning, but its influence will be long-
lasting: the employment of resale restrictions and the use of a land lease allows the community development corporation partnership to ensure that the cooperative remains affordable for 99-years. In contrast, CAMH’s achievements are ephemeral. Though specific cases of development unwanted by the community can be stopped, this approach does not ensure that changes will not come to pass at a later date.

While some collective bargaining efforts facilitated by City Life have resulted in contracts between tenants and landlords for periods of up to eight years, many negotiations have concluded in shorter-term agreements or without an agreement. Moreover, tenant organizations that successfully settle a contract with their landlord must renew negotiations when the contract expires. Clearly, collective bargaining does not provide a consistently reliable means for tenants to negotiate affordable rents. For this reason, groups such as City Life and the Boston Tenant Coalition have put effort into penetrating the policymaking process by working with elected city officials.

Both rent control and Section 8 can also be effective for long periods of time. Section 8 allows voucher-holders to pay 30 percent of their income for as long as they remain eligible for a voucher, while rent control regulates rents on most property for as long as the policy is law. Yet, the effective implementation of both Section 8 and rent control is undermined by the current political realities. The number of Section 8 vouchers available will probably be cut for next year, though there were long waiting lists for vouchers this year and in years past. The potential for rent control legislation in Boston is equally questionable. Banned statewide in 1994, Mayor Menino’s proposal to revive a similar policy in Boston was rejected by the City Council in 2002, suggesting a dismal forecast for the political feasibility of a rent control policy in Boston in the near
future. Though it will be an uphill battle, groups such as the Boston Tenant Coalition and City Life are committed to waging a tough war. Tenant advocacy groups in the city generally agree that legislation regulating rents would be the most effective way to minimize displacement and destruction of community accompanying privileged influx.

Strategies that react to the global dynamics that create striking economic class divisions are not generally a part of the discourse of tenant advocacy groups and other community organizations. Even groups like Sociedad Latina and ABCD that promote educational advancement do not often portray their strategies as reactions to the changing global economy. As a means of protecting neighborhood residents facing pending displacement as result of rising property values, these strategies are not appropriate, and for this reason strategies of this type are often not recognized. Nonetheless, these strategies are important means of effecting fundamental societal change over generations of work. By bring about long-term, structural change, these strategies are the only ones that eradicate the problem of displacement itself.

What time frame for controlling privileged influx is most essential? Though eliminating the issue of displacement due to privileged influx is a valuable ultimate goal, strategies that work quickly are critical to protecting communities dealing with imminent displacement. Therefore, there is need for a simultaneous array of strategies.
CONCLUSION

The development of Mission Hill has been and is continually shaped by the interactions of a variety of specific players who make the neighborhood a unique entity. The same can be said of any neighborhood. In no way can the specific dynamics of Mission Hill be interpreted as representative of the experiences of all neighborhoods where privileged influx occurs. Still, the evaluation of strategies in Mission Hill offers lessons that can be read on a variety of scales. In the analysis of Mission Hill, there are lessons specific to Mission Hill, as well as lessons important for all localities where elite institutions and a low to moderate-income population contest space. There are broader lessons for neighborhoods experiencing privileged influx in the city of Boston, the state of Massachusetts, the United States, and internationally.

Beyond Mission Hill: Lessons for Broader Scales of Space and Time

Privileged influx is not a passing phenomenon. The global economy has created concentrated centers of financial and professional activity in cities, and these cities will remain popular sites for living amongst professionals. While this influx will help cities to thrive by providing an augmented tax base and increased expendable income, privileged influx too often implies displacement and disruption of low to moderate-income communities. Hence, there is much need for the examination of strategies that can combat the destruction of existing communities and allow the revitalization of neighborhoods to be enjoyed by existing residents.

When neighborhoods experience privileged influx, is it possible to successfully minimize displacement while promoting quality of life improvements? Activists and academics are not united on this question. Within the case study neighborhood of
Mission Hill, people employ a diversity of strategies that contend with this dilemma. On the neighborhood scale, community development corporations develop subsidized housing for low-income people, while CAMH participates in the zoning and licensing processes to curb development undesired by the community. The citywide group City Life organizes tenants so that they can collectively bargain with landlords, and also lobbies elected officials to support the Section 8 program and city rent control legislation. Two other citywide groups struggle with the demands of the global economy by encouraging low to moderate-income and minority youth to pursue higher education.

The case of Mission Hill suggests that, in order to minimize displacement while encouraging quality of life improvements, strategies that respond to supply-side causes and indirectly to demand-side causes, as well as strategies that react to global economic demands, are all viable. Both strategies that redistribute privilege and strategies that lessen that advantage of privileged populations in the housing market are valuable means of addressing displacement that accompanies privileged influx, though diminishing the privilege distinctions between people is ultimately most effective.

Mission Hill’s example further indicates that strategies on the scale of the neighborhood can be effective in minimizing displacement, but that this success is limited in scales of time and space. The limitations of neighborhood-based strategies can be surpassed effectively through government policies; Section 8 and rent control have the potential to be the broader-reaching and longer-lasting means of curbing displacement. Even more extensive in scale are education initiatives with the distant goal of providing equal opportunities to higher education to all segments of society. But, neither government policies like rent control and Section 8 nor education initiatives provide a
viable response to the issue of displacement because of their dubious practicality in a close time frame. The current political climate in Boston and throughout much of the nation makes the feasibility of policies that radically address inadequacies in the housing market tenuous in an immediate time frame. The broad efficacy of education initiatives is even more remote.

Consequently, it is vital that a variety of strategies that engage on different scales of time and space be pursued. Communities must employ some strategies that work locally to reduce displacement on an immediate time frame. Without such strategies, communities may be swiftly be dismantled. Still, strategies that have the potential to minimize displacement on broader scales of time and space are most effectual. These strategies are also imperative to supplement efforts to improve the quality of life in neighborhoods; without broad-reaching strategies that control privileged influx, efforts to effect quality of life improvements can inadvertently intensify privileged influx and displacement. Hence, communities must aspire to implement strategies that penetrate the policymaking arena and that challenge the daunting, global economic patterns that create privilege distinctions.

The study of Mission Hill offers examples of effective strategies. These are just a sampling of strategies that engage in the restructuring process to control the types of changes that occur. Some specific aspects of these strategies can be applied in other neighborhoods, but more importantly, the analysis of strategies in Mission Hill shows that innovation is a potent tool. There are many different angles from which to look at the interlocking issues of privileged influx and displacement of existing neighborhood residents. While there are undeniable challenges, hope for the future of dynamic, low to
moderate-income urban communities is realized through the combination of creative approaches that identify causes of privileged influx and respond with awareness of scales of space and time.
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