

# Science confirms what we all know: Gentrification disproportionately affects minorities

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A new study by a Stanford sociologist has determined that the negative effects of gentrification are felt disproportionately by minority communities, whose residents have fewer options of neighborhoods they can move to compared to their white counterparts.

"If we look at where people end up if they move, poor residents moving from historically Black gentrifying neighborhoods tend to move to poorer non-gentrifying neighborhoods within the [city](#), while residents moving from other gentrifying neighborhoods tend to move to wealthier neighborhoods in the city and in the suburbs," said study co-author Jackelyn Hwang, assistant professor of sociology in Stanford's School of Humanities and Sciences.

Hwang and co-author Lei Ding of the Federal Reserve Bank of Philadelphia conducted one of the first studies to examine empirically where disadvantaged residents move as a result of [gentrification](#) and how a neighborhood's racial context affects those moves.

Looking at the city of Philadelphia, Hwang and Ding found that financially disadvantaged residents who moved from neighborhoods that were not predominantly Black benefitted from gentrification by moving to more advantaged locations, but those moving from once predominantly Black areas did not. The research is published in the *American Journal of Sociology*.

"As neighborhoods gentrify, when [poor people](#) can no longer remain in their neighborhoods and move, there are fewer affordable neighborhoods," Hwang said. "Our findings suggest that, for the Black community, there are additional constraints when they move, leading them to move to a shrinking set of affordable yet disadvantaged neighborhoods within the city."

For the purposes of the study, an area was considered to be gentrifying if it experienced a significant increase, compared to other areas in the same city, either in median gross rent or median home value coupled with an increase in college-educated residents. In Philadelphia, there are many historically Black neighborhoods that have undergone gentrification over the last 20 years.

The issue of how gentrification affects different racial groups is particularly relevant right now in light of the increased instability people are facing due to the pandemic and incidents bringing attention to the unnecessary use of policing against people of color in the United States, Hwang said.

## **Fewer Options**

Hwang and Ding analyzed a consumer credit database of more than 50,000 adult residents with financial credit records in Philadelphia.

Recognizing that a primary cause of gentrification-related displacement is increased costs for current residents, the authors looked at individuals with low or missing credit scores who might be more vulnerable to displacement and at the same time might face limitations in housing searches if they did move.

The study found that residents in predominately non-Black gentrifying neighborhoods have a broader set of neighborhoods they moved to, while those from Black gentrifying areas were relegated to less advantaged neighborhoods and faced fewer options. These options included other largely Black neighborhoods or immigrant-populated neighborhoods, exacerbating neighborhood inequality by race and class.

"Gentrification is reconfiguring the urban landscape by shrinking residential options within cities for disadvantaged residents and expanding them for more advantaged residents," the authors write.

Reasons for this discrepancy in Philadelphia and other major cities, Hwang said, include racially stratified housing markets and discriminatory lending practices that have long disadvantaged Black people.

The researchers found that the patterns exhibited by poorer residents moving out of largely Black gentrifying neighborhoods were similar to those of other disadvantaged residents who moved from non-gentrifying neighborhoods.

"Even if people are moving by choice, white people have more advantage when they go into the housing market," she said.

## **Combatting inequities**

In order to combat the likelihood of gentrification increasing socioeconomic and racial segregation within cities, the authors note the need for policies like Philadelphia's recently implemented property tax relief program, which prohibits increases in property taxes for long-time low- and middle-income homeowners.

While the authors consider this a step in the right direction, they also would like to see more cities adopt policies that ensure residential stability for renters. Efforts to address racial discrimination in the housing market and overall racial wealth disparities also require attention, they write.

The authors note that as cities continue to transform, a sustained investment in non-gentrifying neighborhoods is needed to attract racial and socioeconomic diversity. At the same time, policies must be in place that allow disadvantaged residents to stay and that connect them to resources and opportunities.

This greater investment in non-gentrifying neighborhoods would, Hwang and Ding write, "ensure that disadvantaged movers are not limited to [neighborhoods](#) with high levels of disadvantage, high crime and low-quality schools."

The study is titled "Unequal Displacement: Gentrification, Racial Stratification, and Residential Destinations in Philadelphia."

**More information:** Jackelyn Hwang et al. Unequal Displacement: Gentrification, Racial Stratification, and Residential Destinations in Philadelphia, *American Journal of Sociology* (2020). [DOI: 10.1086/711015](https://doi.org/10.1086/711015)

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