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WHEN “OPPORTUNITY” MOVES TO YOU: HOW LIVING IN A
GENTRIFIED COMMUNITY AFFECTS THE EDUCATION
AND ENVIRONMENT OF YOUTH IN PUBLIC HOUSING

by

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ABSTRACT OF THE DISSERTATION

When “Opportunity” Moves to You: How Living in a
Gentrified Community Affects the Education and
Environment of Youth in Public Housing

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The Moving to Opportunity for Fair Housing program gave families with children in urban public housing projects the chance to move from high-poverty neighborhoods to low-poverty neighborhoods in the hope that the move would improve their quality of life, health, and education. In Hoboken, New Jersey, public housing residents did not have to move to opportunity; instead, opportunity moved to them.

This dissertation tells of young people living in public housing in a gentrified community where they are part of a racial and socioeconomic minority. Through qualitative analysis, including ethnography, youth participatory research, interviews, a focus group, and analysis of archival sources, the researcher investigated educational and environmental experiences of these young people. Using these methods and applying theories of neoliberalism, social and cultural capital, and political economy of place, the study examines the following:

- demographic, environmental, and educational characteristics of Hoboken;

- demographics of the Hoboken district-run public schools and whether or not they reflect those of the community;
- who attends which district-run public schools, and why;
- who applies to charter schools, who does not, and why;
- how school choice has influenced the education of youth in public housing;
- what environmental advantages and disadvantages are offered to youth who live in public housing in gentrified Hoboken;
- how youth in public housing relate to their gentrified community; and
- the implications of these findings for housing policy and education policy.

The findings show that, while these young people experience environmental advantages related to living in a gentrified community, they still predominantly attend segregated schools. In an era when public housing is being demolished to be replaced by mixed-income development and school choice policies are proliferating, these findings have implications for both education and public housing policy.

No previous study has analyzed how gentrification may influence youth in low-income public housing, who can remain in their community to reap possible advantages. This is also the only study of the education of youth in public housing in a gentrified community.

Dedication

I dedicate this to my adorable and amusing research assistant, Eileen Penelope Makris;

I love you from here to the moon and back.

Acknowledgments

First and foremost, I thank all of the participants who willingly gave their time, even opened their homes to me, and shared their experiences and opinions on what can be a very personal subject. It is my hope that in some way the children, even the entire community, of Hoboken will benefit from this research.

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At the Center where I conducted observations and research, one young boy always asked me, “How’s the book?” It is my sincere hope that he and his peers will be afforded the educational background, resources, and opportunities to write dissertations or books someday, or to do whatever it is that they dream of doing.

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Chapter 1: Introduction

Tonight I attended a softball game at Mama Johnson Field [part of the main public housing campus in Hoboken]. It is a beautiful night, and the back-to-back games are played under the lights. By 9:00 pm there are at least 50 “yuppies” in the bleachers and on the field. Many are spread onto the sidewalk to practice pitching and catching as they await their games or act as informal cheerleaders for other games. The teams wear matching T-shirts named for popular bars in Hoboken. The Green Rock Tap & Grill team, in their matching T-shirts and black and green striped socks, look like the stunning cast of a primetime drama. Of the eight co-ed teams I observe today, all the players save one are White or Asian. After the games the teams go out for reduced priced drinks at their sponsoring taverns. During the game, the Black and Latino residents of the 21 brick public housing buildings, which hover above and surround the field, hang out nearby. Children ride their bikes past and some residents stop by the outside of the fence to observe or talk to the umpire. Nearby a number of young Black men play basketball on the basketball courts. (Field Notes, June 2011)

At the meeting, the executive director of the Hoboken Housing Authority says that adult sports leagues using Mama Johnson Field now generate \$30,000 annually to self-fund resident services in public housing. . . . He bought I9 and Zog Sports [organized adult sports leagues] into Hoboken. He says there was resistance at first: “What are these White people doing on our field?” but he says he won’t stand for that because “it is 2011, we have a Black president.” (Field Notes, May 2011)

The [redevelopment of Mama Johnson Field] baseball field, that’s good. They’re doing that; I don’t want to say 100% for the kids of the projects, 50%. The other 50% is for them [yuppies], so they can have somewhere to play because I’m pretty sure they didn’t like the way it was looking or how it was going when they were playing kickball down here. (Participant in focus group with public housing residents, October 2012)

Problem Statement

The struggles that low-income public housing residents and their children face are well documented. These can include a lack of educational opportunities, poor health, and physical and social isolation (Anyon, 1997; Bennett et al., 2007; Heinrich et al., 2007; Kotlowitz, 1991; Kozol, 1991, 1995; Lemann, 1991; Lewis, C., Raczynski, Heath, Levinson, & Cutter, 1993; McNulty & Holloway, 2000; Venkatesh, 2000, 2008). This study examines whether the struggles that youth living in public housing normally

experience are alleviated and the opportunities that may be created when the neighborhood surrounding public housing is gentrified rather than highly disadvantaged. As the excerpts above suggest, the relationship between gentrification and low-income public housing in Hoboken is complicated. While renting out the ball field to “yuppie” or “gentry”¹ softball and kickball leagues brings middle-class residents into the public housing neighborhood, earns money for resident services (which the government no longer funds), and leads to upkeep of the field, it also creates periods of time when the ball field is no longer available for residents and local children are relegated to outsider spectator status. Hoboken presents an interesting case for studying the various ways that residing in a gentrified community affects youth in public housing.

The literature is replete with studies of gentrification, but less is known about what happens to low-income residents in an already gentrified neighborhood, particularly those who live in public housing complexes. It is well documented that low- and moderate-income residents are frequently displaced by gentrification (Anderson, 1990; Glass, 1964; Davila, 2004; Lloyd, 2006; Mele, 1996). Yet, in many neighborhoods where gentrification has occurred, a sizable population of low-income residents remains in public housing complexes (Freeman, 2006; Hyra, 2008; Small, 2004). This population has been given little voice in the literature. The political struggles surrounding

¹ In the literature *gentrifiers* are frequently referred to as “yuppies” or “gentry.” Although not a perfect term, for this study the term will be used to describe the predominantly White middle- to upper-middle-class Hoboken residents in their mid-20s to 40s. The gentry will include those sometimes referred to as “new gentrifiers” or “family gentrifiers”; that is, they have children. I deliberately do not use the term *gentrifiers* because most of the gentry whom I encountered had moved to Hoboken after gentrification had occurred. I use “gentry” instead of “yuppie” in my analysis because “yuppie” has a history in Hoboken of being used as an insult, and I see it as a divisive term (see Barry & Derevlany, 1987).

gentrification have been thoroughly researched (Abu-Lughod, 1994; Smith, 1996), but there is far less research about the lived experiences of low-income residents in gentrified neighborhoods (for exceptions, see Freeman, 2006; Small, 2004). Some case studies of gentrification have examined its effects on neighborhood old-timers (Anderson, 1990; Chernoff, 1980; Freeman, 2006; Levy & Cybriwsky, 2010) or on public housing residents (Small, 2004). This study, unlike others, examines the educational and environmental possibilities and problems affecting *youth in public housing* who live in an *already* gentrified neighborhood.

Recent government public housing policies are based on the belief that mixed-income neighborhoods are superior to the isolation that occurred in low-income minority disadvantaged neighborhoods in the second half of the 20th century (Goetz, 2011; Schwartz & Tajbakhsh, 1997). These policies have led to the aggressive demolition of traditional public housing complexes in cities such as Newark, Jersey City, Baltimore, New Orleans, St. Louis, Atlanta, and Chicago (Goetz, 2011; Von Hoffman, 1996). These strategies stem from the belief that concentrated poverty should be alleviated (Smith, J., 2000) because of its negative effects on residents (Jargowsky, 1997; Massey & Denton, 1993; Wilson 1987, 1997). Although the deconcentration of poverty through the demolition of federal housing has not (yet) occurred in Hoboken and there is still some degree of concentration, low-income residents who remain in gentrified neighborhoods should theoretically benefit from the deconcentration of poverty and the mixing of incomes within the city created through gentrification. The well-known Moving to Opportunity (MTO) program moved families from impoverished urban neighborhoods into neighborhoods with less poverty in an attempt to improve outcomes for the poor

(Sanbonmatsu, Kling, Duncan, & Brooks-Gunn, 2007). In Hoboken the public housing residents do not have to be moved to opportunity; instead, opportunity has moved to them.

In addition to its examination of gentrification and housing policy, this case study examines current neoliberal educational policy. Neoliberal educational policies that promote school choice are gaining popularity. Across the country, and in New Jersey in particular, charter schools are proliferating and this can be seen in Hoboken. Yet, research into the effects of charter schools in gentrified communities is limited. No studies have specifically examined who takes advantage of charter schools in mixed-income communities and what effects this has on low-income populations.

This dissertation is based on a qualitative case study of the experiences of youth in public housing in Hoboken. First, I examine the history and current demographics of Hoboken, a post-gentrified community that includes a socioeconomic and racial minority of low-income public housing residents.² I then examine the state of education for the children in Hoboken public housing, specifically, how school choice policies influence their education. Next, I analyze the environmental experiences of life in a gentrified community for youth in public housing, as well as issues of social and physical isolation. Throughout the dissertation, findings are analyzed using theories of social and cultural capital, neoliberalism and neoliberal school choice, and the political economy of place.

² A word about equating race and class. Although all non-Asian minorities in Hoboken certainly do not live in public housing and are not low income (I interviewed members of the gentry who self-identified as Latino and/or Black), every participant whom I interviewed in HHA identified as a non-Asian minority. Census data show that race and class are related in Hoboken, where the median household income with a White alone householder is \$102,920, for Black alone householder \$43,000, and for Latino/Hispanic alone householder \$29,679 (U.S. Census Bureau, 2013).

Research Questions

This study addresses the following research questions:

1. What are the demographic, environmental, and educational characteristics of Hoboken?
2. What are the demographics of the Hoboken district-run public schools and do they reflect those of the community? If not, why not?
3. Who attends which district-run public schools, and why?
4. Who applies to charter schools, who does not, and why?
5. How has school choice influenced the education of youth in public housing?
6. What environmental advantages and disadvantages does living in a gentrified Hoboken offer youth in public housing?
7. How do youth in public housing relate to their gentrified community?
8. What are the implications of these findings for housing policy and education policy?

Significance of the Research

In an era in which public housing is being demolished in favor of mixed-income development (Goetz, 2011), Hoboken still has traditional public housing projects. These residents have not been displaced as a result of gentrification and can potentially benefit from the current demographics of the community and the amenities that gentrification has brought. No studies to date have analyzed how gentrification influences school-age residents of public housing whose families, unlike residents of market-rate housing, do not live in fear of losing their homes and can remain and possibly reap advantages. This study will contribute to the research about gentrification while focusing specifically on

the experiences of school-age children, another group that has been generally excluded from research despite being particularly susceptible to the potential benefits and harms of living in this type of community. This group is of notable interest because community demographics directly influence the schools that these children attend. Many communities where public housing is located have gentrified or are presently undergoing gentrification (Freeman, 2006; Hyra, 2008; Small, 2004). Therefore, other researchers and policy analysts might find that the implications of this research about one American city are applicable to other communities.

This study is important to housing policy as well. Interestingly, and not coincidentally, as gentrification accelerated in the 1970s and middle-class Americans were experiencing renewed interest in living in the city, government policies such as scattered site housing, high-rise project demolition, mixed-income housing, HOPE VI, and Section 8 began to attempt to deconcentrate poor minorities and increase available space in urban centers (Goetz, 2011). The failure of most large-scale, high-rise public housing projects has been well documented (Kotlowitz, 1991; Venkatesh, 2000; Von Hoffman, 1996). Scholars have often blamed isolation and the concentration of poverty for the social and economic failure of housing projects. As a result, the federal government has adopted a new approach for housing low-income families; government policies now embrace poverty deconcentration (Crump, 2002; Goetz, 2003).

In Hoboken the public housing campus, made up of traditional low-rise and high-rise public housing, is surrounded, in some areas, on three sides by luxury apartment buildings. So in Hoboken the government has not forced the mixing of incomes through demolition and new housing development—as in other urban locales; instead, market-

based income mixing has occurred as a result of gentrification. This creates an opportunity to study the effects of income mixing in the context of traditional public housing projects and gentrification.

In addition to its significance in the areas of gentrification research and public housing policy, this study contributes to the sparse research on education and gentrification. In particular, it is the only empirical study of the education of youth in public housing in a gentrified community. It is well established that one of the major problems in American education today is the academic achievement gap (Delpit, 2012; Ferguson, 2008; Sadovnik, 2007; Thernstrom & Thernstrom, 2004), or the measured difference in academic performance between urban and suburban students, African American/Latino students and White/Asian students, and students from different socioeconomic backgrounds. In order to understand the causes of the achievement gap and to identify ways to decrease it, one must explore factors outside of the school. Urban children face myriad problems outside of school that influence their performance in school (Anyon, 2005; Berliner, 2007; Kozol, 2005). Academic successes and failures are embodiments of students' material and social world. As Anyon (1997) explained in *Ghetto Schooling*, "Attempting to fix inner city schools without fixing the city in which they are embedded is like trying to clean the air on one side of a screen door" (p. 168).

This dissertation examines the environmental and sociocultural factors outside of school that influence school-age children; it also takes a critical look at the Hoboken school system and how gentrification and neoliberal school choice policies have influenced the school system. Socioeconomic (and, with it, racial) desegregation in schools is ideal and should be the goal. Low-income students have more success in

middle-class schools (Kahlenberg, 2001, 2006). In theory, gentrification in Hoboken should allow low-income children to attend middle-class schools. This dissertation examines whether this is happening and, if not, why not. It also analyzes how families in public housing utilize school choice and what efforts are being made to recruit them into charter schools. This is a contribution to existing research because other studies of gentrification and education have explored the perspective of the gentry or have focused heavily on gentry school decisions (Butler, 2003; Butler & Lees, 2006; DeSena & Ansalone, 2009; Morrison, 2011; Stillman, 2011). This research establishes empirically why parents in public housing make the educational choices that they make.

This study may be of interest to policy makers, citizens, and public housing residents on a local scale. The Hoboken Housing Authority (HHA) currently has a plan entitled “Vision 20/20: A Sustainable Plan for Public Housing in Hoboken, N.J.” (HHA & Marchetto Higgins Stieve PC, 2010). This vision plan lays out proposed changes to the main public housing campus in Hoboken, including “change the image of public housing; create a secure, healthy neighborhood; increase access to shops, healthy food and jobs; integrate the HHA campus with the City of Hoboken; and create a mixed-income sustainable community with housing choices” (HHA & Marchetto Higgins Stieve PC, 2010, p. 14). The plan is to demolish current public housing to make way for a new U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) mixed-income community that follows the planning principles of new urbanism, traditional neighborhood development, and transit-oriented development (HHA & Marchetto Higgins Stieve PC, 2010). This dissertation argues that many of the goals of this plan are already being met in Hoboken, where, as a result of gentrification, traditional low- and high-rise public housing co-exist

successfully in an upper-middle-class community. If this housing is demolished, there is the risk of displacement of low-income residents (particularly those most at risk), as has happened in other communities that have made this more drastic change (Buron, Popkin, Levy, & Khadduri, 2002; Goetz, 2003; Marquis & Ghosh, 2008; National Housing Law Project, 2002). In addition, the City of Hoboken, which already teeters on the edge of being an exclusive upper-income community, would lose much of its diversity, which this research demonstrates is something that even the most wealthy Hoboken residents claim to value.

Chapter 2: Literature Review and Theoretical Framework

It could be said, in fact, that Gentrification is the knife-edged neighborhood-based manifestation of neo-liberalism. Not only has it created a profit opportunity for real estate capital, but it has also created a high-profile ideological opportunity to replace physically Keynesian managerialistic landscapes of old—represented by public housing, public space, and so on—with the entrepreneurial privatized landscapes of the present. (Hackworth, 2007, p. 149)

This chapter presents background information on public housing and gentrification in the United States. It also examines theories of neoliberalism, neoliberal school choice, social and cultural capital, and political economy of place. The chapter concludes with an examination of existing findings on spatial integration of public housing residents achieved via housing policy and gentrification. It looks at the influence of this socioeconomic integration on education and environment.

Public Housing Background

In the United States, urbanization, industrialization, and immigration have created congested and diverse cities. As a result, in the early 20th century, middle-class and upper-class Anglo-elites maintained that cities were desperately in need of reform (Hall, 2002). After 1929, the Great Depression exacerbated already poor tenement conditions. Reformers adopted the Progressive-era idea that tenements threatened the health and welfare of cities and pushed for slum clearance and public housing construction (Bloom, 2008). During the Great Depression, the Works Progress Administration built 21,800 units of public housing for low-income families (Bickford & Massey, 1991). The subsequent Federal Housing Acts of 1937, 1949, and 1954 increased the role of the federal government in providing low-income urban housing. The Federal Housing Act of 1949 made large urban renewal projects possible. In cities throughout the United States,

public housing projects replaced overcrowded tenements, which often lacked hot water, heat, private bathrooms, or toilets (Biles, 2000).

Some first-generation public housing apartment complexes even “compared favorably with commercially produced apartment building complexes of the day” (Von Hoffman, 1996, p. 428). Although not all public housing developments were of this high quality, they were all built to provide light and air and healthier living conditions. The buildings were sturdy and constructed to last. For tenants, these projects were often a welcome alternative to rundown, unsanitary, substandard tenement housing. Blacks migrating to northern cities and immigrant families found public housing to be an affordable place to raise families. On the day they moved into the brand new Robert Taylor Homes public housing project in Chicago, the Haynes family “chose to rejoice in their good fortune. . . . As Ruby’s son Larry, who was twelve years old at the time, says, ‘I thought that was the beautifullest place in the world’” (Lemann, 1991, p. 107).

Under Presidents Truman and Eisenhower, tens of thousands of public housing units were built each year. Early in the process of public housing construction, the buildings were walk-up buildings; however, when technology advanced, high-rise towers were utilized (Franck & Mostoller, 1995). In 1941 the East River Houses were completed in New York City as the first high-rise project (Sharman, 2006). Throughout the 1950s large public housing projects composed of high-rise buildings were built across the country. As a result, thousands of low-income families were now living stacked on top of one another at very high densities. Many large public housing projects had more than 1,000 units. Robert Taylor Homes in Chicago consisted of 28 sixteen-story buildings with more than 4,300 units, and Pruitt-Igoe in St. Louis housed almost 2,870 units in 33 high-

rises. In New York the Queensbridge project has 3,149 apartments, and Whitman-Ingersoll in Brooklyn has 3,503 apartments (Bloom, 2008). These high-rise housing projects were clearly influenced by the modernist architectural ideas of Le Corbusier (Hall, 2002). They were built vertically and were constructed in geometric patterns that contrasted with the street grid (Franck & Mostoller, 1995). The projects' identical towers-in-the-park were surrounded by open space.

There was a demand in northern cities for increased housing options. Industrialization created a need for workers in northern cities. In addition to immigrants from other countries, in the first half of the 20th century millions of Blacks from the South came north to work in factories. These men and women moved north to escape the violent racism and segregation of the South and, as sharecropping became obsolete, they needed employment. In northern cities Blacks were segregated into certain geographical areas, such as Chicago's Black Belt or Harlem in Manhattan. Blacks of different social classes lived in the same geographical area. Within the Black community there were wealthy and successful Blacks who served as role models for the young, and there were social networks and resources within the community (Wilson, 1997). However, the addition of large numbers of African Americans, desperately in need of housing and social services, strained northern cities. Overcrowding became common, contributing to the perceived need for large-scale public housing.

When public housing projects first opened in the 1930s, the demographics were markedly different from today. Early photographs from the New York City Housing Authority (NYCHA) show many White residents conforming to middle-class ideals and participating in dance classes, dental exams, basketball games, and family activities

(Laguardia Wagner Archives, 2004). Public housing apartments were coveted, and housing authorities could afford to be selective. In New York City in 1935, First Houses had to stop accepting applications after 3,000 applicants had applied for 122 apartments (Bloom, 2008). Although the tenants who were selected had moved from dilapidated housing, most of the wage earners worked in skilled professions and were described as “highly desirable tenants. They made a fine appearance, were intelligent and cooperative” (Bloom, 2008, p. 79). They were largely employed two-parent families, and most were White. In 1939 NYCHA tenants increased from 4.7% to 6% Black. In 1940 Blacks made up 12.4% of units, yet in 1945 Whites still comprised 85% of tenants (Bloom, 2008).

In the early decades of public housing, Blacks were often excluded or segregated into separate buildings. Through legal segregation and racially biased site and tenant selection, White residents were able to avoid living with Black residents (Bickford & Massey, 1991). Public housing projects that were built specifically for Blacks were usually built in low-income segregated neighborhoods that were already comprised of Black residents. Wealthier White residents, with great collective efficacy, fought attempts to move low-income housing projects into their neighborhoods. In cities such as Chicago and Philadelphia, according to Bickford and Massey (1991), “White-dominated city councils and political organizations mobilized to block the construction of minority housing projects in their neighborhood” (p. 1012). In St. Louis, the enormous Pruitt-Igoe housing project was built in an area considered to be “extremely obsolete” and deemed the “worst neighborhood in the city” (Von Hoffman, 1996, p. 186). In Chicago the aldermen wrested control of the selection of public housing sites. Those who opposed public housing hired a bus and selected unrealistic sites within the districts of the

aldermen who supported public housing. As Kotlowitz (1991) explained, “The message was clear: the CHA [Chicago Housing Authority] and its liberal backers could build public housing but not in their back yards” (p. 21). As a result, in Chicago—as in many other cities—public housing for Blacks was built in isolated areas on the edge of Black ghettos.

Although urban public housing projects in the United States built from the 1930s to the 1960s opened amid great fanfare and excitement, over time these projects deteriorated into dangerous homes for society’s most disenfranchised residents. After World War II, the changing nature of cities resulted in a shift in the demographics of public housing residents. This shift, from primarily White upwardly mobile residents to a predominately vulnerable minority population, led to changes in the perception of public housing, a disinvestment in public housing, and the subsequent deterioration of living conditions. In St. Louis, Pruitt-Igoe was intended to be an integrated project but over time could not attract and retain White residents; before long, all of Pruitt-Igoe’s residents were Black (Von Hoffman, 1996). NYCHA attempted to keep “ideal percentages of minorities versus Whites,” but this became increasingly difficult over time (Bloom, 2008, p. 89).

After World War II, Whites fled not just public housing but cities in general. America’s cities peaked in the 1930s; at that time more people lived in cities than outside of them. However, in the second half of the 20th century, changes occurred in and to America’s urban centers. In the post-World War II era, with advances in technology, manufacturing industries—the soul of northern rust-belt cities—began to decline. Between 1945 and 1960 deindustrialization began in the north. Textile factories moved

south because of cheap labor, and the northern economy shifted toward skilled employment (Waldinger, 1989; Wilson, 1997). The changing economic structure of the United States created a geographic concentration of poor minorities in urban centers with insufficient employment opportunities, but also with few role models, few institutions, and little hope to improve the lives of minority residents (Wilson, 1997). Meanwhile, those who could do so fled the inner city. During this time the middle class increased in size but, according to Podair (2002), there were “uneven Black and White rates of participation in this process of middle-class formation” (p. 9). In New York City, “with a reviving and prosperous economy . . . the submerged middle class surfaced and many among them left the projects” (Podair, 2002, p. 177).

In addition to deindustrialization and the growth of the White middle class, “Motor mania gripped the nation” (Teaford, 1993, p. 98). The rise of the automobile and the proliferation of highways led to suburbanization. The federal government assisted this process with government-guaranteed mortgages for suburban housing. It became less expensive for families to buy single-family homes in the suburbs than to stay in the city. White families began new lives in the suburbs, and inner cities began to deteriorate. Government policies promoted not only the suburbanization of people but also of manufacturing and jobs. New highway construction sliced through cities, devastating entire communities and making it easier for residents to leave the city (Berman, 1988). As suburbs grew, people eventually stopped going into the center city even to shop.

In the 1960s, with the Civil Rights Movement and the Civil Rights Act, blatant housing discrimination became illegal, and those Blacks who could afford to do so left the center city for the suburbs. As the Black middle class left, urban Black communities

were no longer socioeconomically diverse (Wilson, 1997). The largely low-skilled, low-income minority residents who remained in public housing had few opportunities for this type of social class mobility. In addition to deindustrialization and suburbanization, the loss of the Black middle class assisted in the process of isolating the inner city and depleting its tax base.

As the population of inner-city neighborhoods shrunk, the residents who remained were increasingly low-income people of color. The Jones Act, which in 1917 made Puerto Ricans U.S. citizens, eventually led to a large increase in the number of Puerto Ricans in the continental United States. Puerto Ricans who came to post-Fordist American cities often lacked the job skills and education to find work in the increasing service-sector economy and, as a result, frequently became residents of low-income urban disadvantaged neighborhoods. These changing dynamics left northern cities with an imbalance between human capital supply and demand, what Kain (1968) termed “spatial mismatch theory.” Immigrants and Blacks were seeking jobs that were no longer available, and the jobs that were available required skills that they did not possess (Kain, 1968; Wilson, 1997). At the same time, the large public housing projects were opening or were under construction.

When public housing projects first opened, public housing authorities could afford to be selective, and so they had strict rules for tenants. The NYCHA listed the following conditions as potential nondesirability for residency: “alcoholism resulting in behavior disturbing to others,” “record of past use of narcotics,” “a record of anti-social behavior,” “record of poor rent payment or eviction”, “highly irregular work history for any member of the family,” “frequent separations of husband and wife,” “one or both

parents under 19 years of age,” “birth of out-of-wedlock child,” “evidence of lack of parental control over child,” “poor housekeeping,” “lack of furniture,” “apparent mental retardation of parent or child,” and “obnoxious conduct in connection with application processing” (Bloom, 2008, pp. 277-278). In the 1930s and 1940s most local housing authorities used some form of tenant selection procedures; however, by the 1950s most had become decreasingly stringent (Bloom, 2008). At the Robert Taylor Homes in 1962, tenant selection procedures that had had been strict in the beginning loosened as the Chicago Housing Authority (CHA) realized that it needed to fill all of the new vacant apartments (Lemann, 1991).

Bloom (2008) described the shift in public housing tenant selection in New York City in 1968 and earlier in many other cities as “the dramatic shift to welfare state public housing” (p. 8). The Brooke Amendment of 1969 capped rent for public housing residents at 25% of income, which hurt the working poor and resulted in lost rental income for public housing authorities (Bloom, 2008, p. 9). As cities were changing from 1945 to 1970, public housing projects were increasingly made up of low-income minority residents who were the recipients of an inadequate education and had few opportunities for mobility (Bickford & Massey, 1991). In New York City by 1968, the projects were more than half minority (Bloom, 2008).

By the 1960s a transition in the clientele of public housing had clearly occurred (Biles, 2000); with this, public opinion turned against low-income projects. This shift in thinking coincided with the demographic shift in public housing. “To many Americans, residents and onlookers alike, public housing had metamorphosed into a dumping ground for society’s unfortunates” (Biles, 2000, p. 152). This change in perception led to

decreased political support (Bloom, 2008). As the demographics of public housing shifted and problems began to occur in public housing, the projects became increasingly unpopular. Over time, “Public housing became associated with the inner city, impoverished dependency, African Americans, and crime” (Von Hoffman, 1996, p. 436).

Beginning in the 1960s, public housing advocates and researchers even turned against the idea of large-scale public housing (Von Hoffman, 1996). In 1961 J. Jacobs wrote *The Death and Life of Great American Cities*, in which she described high-rise projects as “worse centers of delinquency, vandalism, and general social hopelessness than the slums they were supposed to replace This is not the rebuilding of cities. This is the sacking of cities” (p. 4). Then in the 1970s Newman built on Jacobs’s arguments, lending justification to those who now wanted to destroy large-scale high-rise public housing. Newman maintained that public housing high rises were unsafe because residents could not feel ownership of their homes or the land around them and that it was impossible for residents to distinguish other residents from intruders. He argued for creating “defensible space” instead (Newman, 1972). His theories have had a strong and continuing impact on public housing policies (Newman, 1996).

As the government stopped supporting public housing in the 1970s, budgets for maintenance and services decreased (Goetz, 2011). The problems with public housing in the 1970s included welfare concentration, corruption, shoddy construction, social disorder, and budgetary shortfalls (Bloom, 2008). Living conditions deteriorated badly (Venkatesh, 2000). In the 1980s and 1990s gang activity, the proliferation of guns, and the crack epidemic began to deal painful blows to residents of public housing. Much of the violence was associated with drug trafficking (Venkatesh, 2000). Images and stories

in the media furthered the notion that the projects were filled with criminals partaking in something akin to tribal warfare. This perception negatively influenced support, which in turn negatively influenced funding. In the 1990s most of the apartments in the Henry Horner Homes in Chicago had not had a new coat of paint since 1970, and in 1991 half of the 1,760 apartments were vacant because management did not have money to make them suitable for rental (Wacquant, 2008). Eventually, many public housing projects did not have money for security guards, elevator repair, or even light bulbs in hallways and stairwells. It was as if they had been abandoned, even though families still lived inside. Despite their reputation, Venkatesh demonstrated that life inside the Robert Taylor Homes in Chicago in the 1990s was not socially disorganized; many residents had extensive social networks and most were not criminals (Venkatesh, 2000).

Beginning in the 1960s, budgets for public housing were cut. With the Housing Act of 1961, public housing programs became increasingly decentralized. This Act implemented rent subsidy programs and scattered site housing. In 1968 the Federal government stopped high-rise public housing construction. In 1973 President Nixon placed a moratorium on funding for housing programs. The frozen funds were replaced with federal sharing grants, which critics noted were “controlled by local elites who redirected them to the benefit of the real estate industry and property owners” (Wacquant, 2008, p. 84). In 1996 HUD began to support demolition of high-rise public housing projects. Under his administration, President Clinton repealed a federal mandate for one-for-one replacement of demolished public housing. In cities such as St. Louis, Chicago, Baltimore, Atlanta, Philadelphia, and Newark, large-scale public housing projects were seen as failures and, by the end of the century, had been demolished. Between 1990 and

2011 more than 159,000 units of public housing were razed or sold (Goetz, 2011). The paternalistic ideas of the middle class reformers—that public housing projects would fix the poor by making them middle class—had failed.

Although today townhouses, mixed-income, and scattered site public housing is seen as a possible solution to the low-income housing need, the amount of housing being built is not on the same scale as it once was (Von Hoffman, 1996). The initial investment and excitement for large-scale public housing from the 1930s through the 1960s has been unmatched. However, public housing policy makers still maintain that public housing can be used to instill middle class values and improve lives (Joseph, 2006; Von Hoffman, 1996). Now, however, this is being implemented by scattering residents, mixing incomes, and moving low-income residents into more middle-class communities; unfortunately, the needs of many fewer families are being addressed.

Public housing policy now stresses the deconcentration of poverty (Crump, 2002). These government policies include two types of overall strategies: dispersal programs and mixed-income developments. Dispersal programs have included Section 8, the Gautreaux Assisted Housing Program, and the national MTO Program that relocates low-income residents to higher income communities. Mixed-income programs, on the other hand, can include a wide variety of tactics. Mixed-income housing can mean luxury market-rate buildings with a certain percentage of dedicated set-aside apartments for low-income residents, or whole new communities created (often where high-rises once stood) for low- and moderate-income residents. Unlike dispersal programs, mixed-income programs generally have the goal of keeping a significant number of low-income residents together, involve new architecture, and keep residents in, or close to, their

current urban locations (Joseph, Chaskin, & Webber, 2007). Mixed-income housing policies are being used as a strategy to meet one of the following objectives: reforming failed public housing, revitalizing blighted urban areas by de-concentrating poverty and increasing the tax base through higher-income residents, incentivizing upward mobility among low-income families, or stimulating large-scale economic redevelopment (Joseph et al., 2007).

There is a variety of programs that are part of the effort to deconcentrate poverty through housing reform. Section 8, or Housing Choice Vouchers, is a program of HUD and is the main dispersal program for the deconcentration of poverty. According to HUD, it is “the federal government’s major program for assisting very low-income families, the elderly, and the disabled to afford decent, safe, and sanitary housing in the private market” (HUD, n.d., Section 8). Housing vouchers are used on the private market so that individuals can select their own housing, as long as it adheres to the guidelines of the program.

Hill v. Gautreaux in Chicago found in 1976 that the CHA had violated the Civil Rights Act by building public housing in segregated minority neighborhoods, which led to the first scattered-site housing program. As part of the Gautreaux Program in the late 1970s, Section 8 vouchers were given to qualified residents of these isolated housing projects in Chicago. They were intended to be used to move into private housing in areas that were predominantly White or of mixed race. The selected families received training and counseling. Those families who chose to move to suburban neighborhoods were then compared to those who had chosen to stay in urban locales. When the program was

deemed a success, it was used as a model for the MTO Program and other programs nationwide (HUD, n.d.). A second wave of the Gautreaux Program began in 2002.

Moving to Opportunity for Fair Housing was a 10-year experimental program under which the housing authorities in Baltimore, Boston, Chicago, Los Angeles, and New York City gave families with children the opportunity through rental assistance and housing counseling to move to low-poverty (no more than 10% poverty) neighborhoods from high-poverty neighborhoods (40% or more). The lotteries for this program took place from 1994 until 1997. Unlike Gautreaux, this program focuses on settling families in a place that is socioeconomically higher income rather than White or mixed race. The program's mission is to avoid some of the pitfalls of Section 8—such as families struggling to find acceptable housing in lower-poverty neighborhoods—through counseling and to monitor the outcomes carefully. HUD has stated that the program is being closely studied through controlled longitudinal research to analyze the effects of moving to opportunity (HUD, n.d.).

HUD's Housing Opportunities for People Everywhere (HOPE VI) program began in 1992 in an attempt to revitalize public housing throughout the United States. This mixed-income program stemmed from the National Commission on Severely Distressed Public Housing, which according to HUD, "was charged with proposing a National Action Plan to eradicate severely distressed public housing" (HUD, n.d., para. 1). This eradication was undertaken through rehabilitating some developments and demolishing and replacing others. New housing was created to be mixed-income in design. More than six billion dollars in grants have been awarded for HOPE VI (HUD, n.d.). Today's mixed-income public housing construction looks very different from the traditional

public housing of the past. Gone are the towering high-rises surrounded by open space. Modern public housing is inspired by Newman's theories of defensible space (Newman, 1972) and the ideas of New Urbanism (Popkin et al., 2004). These row houses or townhouses generally face the existing street and have private yards and distinct fronts and backs (Franck & Mostoller, 1995). HUD's newest initiative, Choice Neighborhoods, is purported to be based on the success of HOPE VI.

Choice Neighborhoods grants transform distressed neighborhoods and public and assisted projects into viable and sustainable mixed-income neighborhoods by linking housing improvements with appropriate services, schools, public assets, transportation, and access to jobs. A strong emphasis is placed on local community planning for access to high-quality educational opportunities. (HUD, n.d., para. 1)

Although large-scale public housing projects now have a negative reputation and public housing policy has steered clear of them, some argue that this reputation is unfair. The National Housing Law Project maintained, "In fact, the public housing program's reputation is greatly undeserved. Apart from a comparatively small number of visible and dramatic failures, public housing is a vital national resource that provides decent and affordable homes to over a million families across the country" (National Housing Law Project, 2002, para 2). The new initiatives in public housing that favor the private sector over the public sector are representative of neoliberal policies shaping cities today.

Gentrification

Hoboken is a gentrified community. To understand the experiences of low-income public housing residents in Hoboken, one must understand the concept and history of gentrification. In 1987 Zukin defined gentrification as "the conversion of socially marginal and working-class areas of the central city to middle class residential use" (p. 129). In 2004 Perez gave a more expanded definition of gentrification as "an

economic and social process whereby private capital (real estate firms, developers) and individual homeowners and renters reinvest in fiscally neglected neighborhoods through housing rehabilitation, loft conversions, and the construction of new housing stock” (p. 139).

Although gentrification as it is known today is a relatively recent phenomenon, beginning in the 1960s, similar processes have occurred throughout history. In *The New Urban Frontier* (1996) N. Smith provided a history of gentrification. He described a 19th-century print that shows a family in Nantes in 1685 being displaced from their tenement as a result of the revocation of the Edict of Nantes by Louis XIV. Then in the mid-1800s, a process known as *embourgeoisement* occurred in European cities. Smith quoted Engels: “The result is everywhere the same: The most scandalous alleys and lanes disappear to the accompaniment of lavish self-glorification by the bourgeoisie on account of this tremendous success” (as cited in Smith, N., 1996, p. 35). This description from Engels could easily describe modern-day gentrification. As early as the 1940s and 1950s, some precursors to modern-day gentrification appeared in the United States in neighborhoods such as Georgetown in Washington, DC, and Beacon Hill in Boston. In the post-war 1960s the process of gentrification began in earnest in places such as Greenwich Village in Manhattan, Glebe in Sydney, Society Hill in Philadelphia, and the West End in London.

Ruth Glass coined the term *gentrification* in her seminal work *London, Aspects of Change* in 1964 (Glass, 1964). She studied how London’s West End changed from a working-class neighborhood to a middle- and upper-class neighborhood and how this transformed the character of the area. Her description of the neighborhood’s new features

such as espresso bars, high-rise office blocks, and attractive store windows is similar to subsequent descriptions of gentrification in the literature. Glass introduced the social, cultural, political, and economic contexts of gentrification. She connected gentrification to post-World War II social changes and the consumerism of the time. Social factors such as women entering the workforce in larger numbers led some young people away from suburbia and into cities. Glass also contrasted the wealthy White professionals to the porters who are “black or brown men from the West Indies” (p. 1) and told how gentrification displaced all or most of the original residents of the neighborhood. With her 1964 book she began discussions and debates over gentrification that have lasted almost 50 years.

After World War II, disinvestment and demographic and socioeconomic changes made many American cities ripe for gentrification in the 1960s. These sociocultural and political-economic forces left urban areas with low-cost real estate and vacant, deteriorated properties, making them accessible to gentrifiers. Over time, cultural shifts in American society, such as increasing numbers of dual-income couples, couples choosing to have fewer children or have children later, changing ideas of domestic aesthetics (e.g., desirability of loft living), and the youth rebellions of the 1960s and 1970s, generated an increased interest in urban living, with more people willing to move into areas that were considered low-income, diverse, dilapidated, or dangerous (Ley, 2010). In addition, neoliberal government and economic policies promoted free-market policies.

Anderson (1990) chronicled a classic story of gentrification in his book *Streetwise*. He described the gentrifiers in his case study as “yuppies” who are well-to-do, usually White, usually childless, 22- to 35-year-old professionals who move into an

undiscovered area of the city. They come to renovate old affordable homes and in the process they gentrify the neighborhood. A larger number of middle- and upper-income Whites in the neighborhood increases the value of the space and results in better city services and higher property values and taxes. Because of increasing prices, the poor residents, usually not home owners, are forced to move. As a result of gentrification, neighborhoods might look integrated when in reality there is little fraternizing between racial groups except when they are from the same social class.

Zukin's influential 1982 study, *Loft Living: Culture and Capital in Urban Change*, introduced the concept of art culture as an engine of change in American cities. In her study of Manhattan lofts, Zukin provided a description of the sociocultural forces behind gentrification. She showed how artists, desperately in need of well-lit space in which to work, changed the city of Manhattan. These artists, together with city politicians in need of economic growth and development, came together to remake one Manhattan neighborhood. The artists harnessed wealthy and powerful friends, publicity, and politicians to turn the industrial lofts of SoHo into an artists' community. These changes, and the publicity they garnered, then fueled gentrification throughout the neighborhood. The idea of gentrification through loft conversion spread beyond SoHo. The growing acceptability of loft living and the new-found trendiness of SoHo became a precursor to, and model for, gentrification in many other communities.

SoHo is certainly not the only neighborhood where a culture surrounding the arts has resulted in gentrification. In *Neo-Bohemia* Lloyd (2006) used ethnographic research to describe how the movement of artists into Wicker Park in Chicago began the process of gentrification. Initially, this influx of young artists led to the creation of art galleries,

coffee shops, and trendy bars. The artists also provided labor for many of these ventures. Eventually, however, the neighborhood became trendier and more expensive, and the artists were displaced as wealthy young professionals moved to the neighborhood.

In other neighborhoods, local culture has been used to spur gentrification. Davila (2004) examined gentrification and Latinization in East Harlem in Manhattan. She discussed how neoliberal policies and reforms exclude long-time residents of the neighborhood and how in East Harlem culture is used as a commodity to increase gentrification. Ironically, this Latinization could lead to the displacement of the very Latino residents upon whose culture it is based. Mele (1996, 2000) wrote about how local culture and aesthetics can lead to, and be used to promote, gentrification. He told how developers reinvent areas using local bohemian culture as a marketing tool to attract high-end consumption. Just as they packaged the “Latin” in East Harlem, they packaged the “rawness” of Alphabet City in Manhattan and provided opportunities for people to consume “the glamour of poverty” (p. 236). The pro-development policies of city government furthered this gentrification and the manipulation of rent control laws to allow for the displacement of long-time residents.

The strategy of using a creative class of urban residents as an engine for economic growth in cities has become popular in recent years. Florida’s (2003) theory that creative people, “the creative class,” are the drivers of innovation and economic growth in cities has had a strong influence on urban studies and urban planning internationally. Florida posited that highly educated people in creative fields cluster together and choose to live in areas that are open to diversity and thus “validate their identities as creative people” (2003, p. 9). He said that gone are the days when recruiting more companies made a city

successful; he asserted, “The rise of the Creative Economy has altered the rules of the economic development game” (2010, p. 345). Florida maintained that cities should build the kind of amenities that attract creative types (urban parks and bike lanes are two examples). For many housing activists, Florida has become the enemy, whom they see as wanting to make cities even more comfortable for the gentry and ignoring the working class, immigrants, and people of color (Jacobs, K., 2005; Oehmke, 2010; Whyte, M., 2009).

There are many critics of gentrification. Zukin (2010) began *Naked City* by writing, “In the early years of the twenty-first century, New York City lost its soul” (p. 1). She argued that areas such as Williamsburg, Harlem, the East Village, Red Hook, Union Square, and the community gardens in New York City have become inauthentic and that the “people, streets, neighborhoods, and public spaces [are] being upscaled, redeveloped, and homogenized to the point of losing their distinctive identity” (p. xi). She said that these places have become popular because people move there seeking a certain kind of authenticity (that they cannot find in the suburbs) but that their very presence in these communities leads to the end of authenticity. First, the local businesses close; eventually, the death knell of authenticity—a Starbucks®—arrives. She described how the “hipperati” or “bourgeois bohemians” move in, followed by rising prices, and eventually the initial gentrifiers sell their homes to even wealthier citizens. She called this process *re-urbanization*.

Other scholars have challenged the way gentrification is frequently depicted. N. Smith (1979) questioned the assumption that young suburbanites are fleeing the suburbs for a new lifestyle. He asserted that the true driver of gentrification is not a quest for a

more urban existence by young childless pioneers, but instead a market that is open to profitable redevelopment. In his study of Society Hill in Philadelphia, Smith showed that only 14% of the gentrifiers had moved from the suburbs, compared to 72% who had moved there from within the city (many simply in search of better real estate deals). Logan and Molotch (1987) utilized the political economy paradigm. They argued that those with power, such as real estate speculators, newspaper editors, insurance companies, utility companies, universities, and politicians are in fact the ones who determine neighborhood advantage and disadvantage. Thus, large economic structures, special interests, and politics influence neighborhood change and property values. Similarly, Gotham (2005) argued that in the French Quarter in New Orleans tourism gentrification has been fueled by large corporations, not individual actors. He described how tourist attractions and entertainment facilities now dominate the French Quarter, and the poor and African American residents have been displaced as property values and rents have risen. The French Quarter has changed from 79% White in 1940 to 91.9% White in 2000.

When capital shifts, the housing and real estate market shift to meet its needs. Sassen (1990, 1991) examined the impact of economic restructuring, maintaining that the dominant individuals, particularly in cities, are those who work in FIRE industries (financial, insurance, and real estate). These globalized industries generate wealth, and these individuals with high-end service-sector jobs are dependent on cheap labor from individuals in low-end service-sector jobs. The result is a large gap between the top and the bottom of the economy, with very little growth in the middle. These disparities within

cities, between the very wealthy and those whom they employ, have made gentrification a key element of global cities.

Globalization—the interactions among and flow of capital between countries—has also scaled up gentrification. In her study of Brooklyn Heights, Lees (2003) used the term *super-gentrification* to describe what happens after gentrification. This, like Zukin's re-urbanization, occurs when the wealthy gentrifiers sell their homes to the super rich. This intensified re-gentrification, or gentrification superimposed on gentrification, is a result of global cities and wealthy financiers who have large amounts of money to spend. This super-gentrification, or re-colonization, pushes out the initial gentrifiers. The super-gentrifiers, unlike traditional gentrifiers, do not feel a particular connection to the community or passion for diversity. They have much more money, work long hours in the financial services, and do not send their children to public primary or secondary schools (Butler & Lees, 2006).

Gentrification is part of the neoliberal move away from the public (public housing, public education, and public space) to the private. According to Hackworth (2007), "Gentrification is the knife-edged neighborhood-based manifestation of neoliberalism" (p. 149). Hackworth described how, because of neoliberalism, large corporations now have power over real estate, a phenomenon he called *corporatized gentrification*. With increasing frequency, corporate firms enter gentrification at the beginning rather than the end stages, as they did previously. "Overall, gentrification is now more corporate, more state-facilitated, and less resisted than ever before" (Hackworth, 2007, p. 149). N. Smith (1996) argued that the revanchist upper-middle class have taken over the inner city. With this process, resulting from the changing

political economy, low-income and working-class residents are displaced to serve the more privileged economic and political elites. Smith argued that the government, corporations, and the market are working against the interests of low-income people of color. He took issue with the terminology that is used to describe gentrifiers—the urban pioneer or urban homesteader. He pointed out that describing gentrifiers as pioneers in effect describes long-time residents as nonexistent, uncivil, or savage.

Hoboken, New Jersey, in 2013 is a gentrified, not a gentrifying, city. This dissertation is an examination of the experiences of youth in public housing living in an already-gentrified community. The gentry who move to Hoboken today do not see this move as a risk or an investment for the future; no one would label them “urban pioneers.” They are members of Florida’s (2003) creative class moving into a predominantly White, middle- to upper-middle-class city with an abundance of amenities that they desire. Like the super-gentrifiers whom Butler and Lees (2006) described, they are not moving to Hoboken to seek a diverse experience and they are likely to socialize with those from similar socioeconomic backgrounds. It is the aim of this study to understand how this environment influences the lives of youth in public housing.

Neoliberalism

Public housing policy and gentrification are both influenced by neoliberalism. The term *neoliberalism* was first used in inter-war Germany by Rüstow and Eucken in the 1930s (Seiler, 2009). It began to be used more frequently in the 1970s, 1980s, and 1990s. The administrations of Prime Minister Thatcher and President Reagan espoused the ideas of neoliberalism. It is important that this term not be confused with “new liberalism” of Democrats. In actuality, it is a conservative laissez-faire strain of thought.

This theory can be traced back to the ideas of economists such as Alexander Rüstow, Ludwig von Mises, Friedrich von Hayek, and Milton Friedman (Seiler, 2009). The “neo” refers to the fact that it was a new way of approaching the classic liberal economics of Adam Smith and *The Wealth of Nations*. This revival of liberal economics now includes a push for free markets, decrease in public social services, deregulation, and privatization in a now-globalized world (Martinez & Garcia, n.d.).

The international term “neoliberalism,” which stems from the classical meaning of “liberal” and refers to contemporary free-market reformers often is misinterpreted in this country to be the equivalent of a “New Democrat.” While many so-called New Democrats are neoliberal and subscribe to the ideology that deregulated competition between non-government service providers will cure all social ills, the term better describes more right-wing pundits who argue for extreme shifts toward total deregulation and free-market reform. (Stuart Wells, 2002, pp. 24-25)

Over the past 30 years the state has become less involved in areas of social welfare but has become increasingly interventionist in creating “favorable conditions for capital accumulation” (Lipman, 2011, p. 29). This has been evident in the support and incentivizing of the re-urbanization of cities by middle-class Americans and corporate development. In the 1990s an “important phase of deregulation of capital and transition to neoliberal urban governance” (Lipman, 2011, p. 29) began. This changing role of urban governance is evident in the privatization of much that was once public, from housing to infrastructure to public space to education.

The role of the state in neoliberalism is clearly on “the side of capital” (Lipman, 2011, p. 29) and this is evident in gentrification. For example, it is most often neighborhoods inhabited by people of color that are deemed *blighted*—a term often applied haphazardly, using subjective criteria—and cleared for redevelopment. As a result, it is communities inhabited by people of color that are seen in the collective

conscience, and portayed by the media, as the “Wild West,” ripe for urban pioneering by White gentrifiers. Crump (2002) argued that, to pave the way for profitable, mixed-income urban housing development, “minority residents of public housing projects have been systematically demonized” (p. 593). As Goetz (2011) showed, the demolition of public housing in the 1990s was also related to gentrification and neoliberalism. “Where market rents are significantly higher than public housing rents, more demolition occurs. This suggests that market pressures to redevelop are an important determinant of the aggressiveness of local housing authorities in pursuing demolition and removal” (p. 280). Goetz found that, in locations where there is a discrepancy between the racial background of residents and the rest of the population, there is a larger effort to raze public housing. Federal auditors found that HOPE VI was being utilized in places “most amenable to higher income redevelopment rather than the most severely distressed” areas in the 1990s (National Housing Law Project, 2002, p. ii).

As the creative class reurbanizes cities, the government backs pro-gentrification free-market policies that have displaced working-class and poor residents and demolished public housing in many urban locales, leaving cities at the mercy of corporations and the gentry (Wyly & Hammal, 2000). These same forces are promoting a neoliberal school choice agenda. These neoliberal policies are justified as assistance to the poor (e.g., they are said to provide better housing, less concentrated poverty, freedom to choose the best school for the child) but these same policies are benefitting the gentry exponentially more than the poor and disproportionately harming low-income people of color (Lipman, 2011). This neoliberal agenda is a lens thorough which I examined the education and enviornment of youth in public housing in Hoboken.

Neoliberal School Choice

This neoliberal shift from public to private is evident in the education sector. There has always been choice in education; parents with economic capital can purchase the kind of education they desire for their children. Since public education was established in the United States, religious schools, private schools, and home schooling have provided alternatives to the public school system. Families with economic capital have also exercised choice in selecting to live in districts with successful school systems. Magnet schools, open enrollment policies, and choice districts expanded school choice further. In recent years neoliberal politicians have supported the idea that, if students from families with means have the opportunity to opt out of their local public school, then students from families without means should have the same opportunity. This neoliberal school choice theory is based on free-market principles and the idea that all schools will become more successful when they experience enhanced competition. As Stuart Wells (2002) explained, “Proponents of this view argue that the best way to improve public education is to force schools to compete for ‘customers’ by providing parents greater choices of where their children attend school” (p. 6). For some this entails the use of vouchers, which are coupons issued by the government to a parent or guardian to be used to fund a child’s education. Recently, school choice has come to include the rapid expansion of charter schools. Charter schools are public schools that receive charters from a charter organization and, although they receive public money, are exempted from the rules and regulations of traditional public schools.

Historically, school choice has not always been associated with equality for low-income children of color. In fact, in the South after desegregation, some school districts

implemented “freedom of choice” policies in order to maintain segregated schools (Ravitch, 2010). Then, after the federal government strictly enforced desegregation, many southern states embraced “schools of choice,” which were segregated private schools. In Virginia the government even gave tuition grants for students to attend private schools (Ravitch, 2010).

In 1955 the libertarian economist Friedman wrote “The Role of Government in Education,” in which he argued that the government should fund schools but not be involved in running them. He suggested that families be given vouchers to enable their children to attend schools of their choice (religious, for-profit, nonprofit). He maintained that the private market would be more effective than the government (Friedman, 1955). Until the Reagan Era, because of its history with regard to segregation, school choice was not a mainstream idea. However, President Reagan encouraged the use of vouchers, which fit with his neoliberal beliefs in deregulation and the free market (Ravitch, 2010). Then in 1990 Chubb and Moe argued in *Politics, Markets, and America's Schools* that choice is the only reasonable option for families because public schools are incapable of reform. They argued that school choice, specifically vouchers, would undermine unions and the inept politics of education. They asserted that the extant school system could not be fixed and they offered choice as a solution (Chubb & Moe, 1990).

The idea of charter schools began in 1988 with Budde, who proposed teacher-run, teacher-empowering “charter schools.” These schools, he argued, should use cutting-edge pedagogical techniques to meet specific goals. Teachers would be given contracts or charters by the school board to experiment with these new techniques, and the schools would be held to high standards as a prerequisite to renewal of their contracts (Budde,

1988). In 1988 Al Shanker had a similar idea of creating teacher-led charter schools that might be able to reach students who struggled in traditional public schools (Ravitch, 2010).

Charter schools were less controversial than vouchers and garnered more political support. In 1991 Minnesota was the first state to enact a charter school law, and the first charter school, City Academy High School, opened in St. Paul in 1992 (Bulkley & Wohlstetter, 2003). Beginning in the early 1990s and continuing until the present, charter schools have gained in popularity (Ravitch, 2010). During President Clinton's term, he awarded federal dollars to encourage the growth of charter schools. In 2012 in the United States there were more than 5,600 charter schools in 41 states, serving close to two million students (McMullen, 2012).

Charter schools are based on the concept of choice. Students are not assigned to a charter school; rather, parents choose to send their child to a particular charter school. When the charter schools have more applicants than openings, a lottery is conducted. Charter school laws are different in each state. Different states also have various levels of accountability for charter schools, but the schools usually have autonomy over their budget, personnel, and curriculum. They are outside the purview of the school board and generally do not follow union contracts. They are public schools and thus tuition free. Charter contracts generally last 3 to 5 years; if the school is not successful, the charter can be canceled at the end of the contract years (Bulkley & Wohlstetter, 2003).

Charter schools are heavily concentrated in low-income, high-minority, urban areas. In the state of New Jersey 54.1% of public school students are White, yet in charter hosting districts only 19% of students are White. Charter-hosting districts also have twice

the New Jersey state average of students who are eligible for free or reduced-price lunch. Charter schools are now beginning to expand into higher-income suburban communities, as well (Hu, 2011). In nearby New York City, charter schools comprise 77% free/reduced-price lunch students, 60% African American students, and 33% Latino students (New York City Charter School Center, 2013).

Proponents of charter schools argue that charter schools create increased choice for at-risk populations and have the potential to close the achievement gap (Brooks, 2009; Thernstrom & Thernstrom, 2004). Yet, many studies have shown that charter schools do not serve the most at-risk student population (Stuart Wells, 2002). Critics argue that charter schools “cream” students from the public school system. When Kozol visited KIPP [Knowledge is Power Program] Academy in the South Bronx, he observed that, although it looked good, the children appear to be far better dressed (with Lands End backpacks and quality prescription glasses) than any South Bronx students he had ever experienced (Sgobbo, 2010). Ravitch (2010) admitted that some schools are producing excellent results. However, she warned that these charter schools are taking the most-motivated students and students with the most-involved parents out of the traditional public schools and that this could create “a two-tier system of widening inequality” (p.145). The KIPP schools in particular have been accused of “creaming” good students from public schools (Tough, 2006). Yet, some point out that charter schools hold great potential and can encourage renewed community involvement in education, as well as new opportunities for progressive education in the public school context, and therefore should not be discounted (Rofes & Stulberg, 2004).

Debates over neoliberal school choice and charter schools are fierce in Hoboken, where there are three charter schools. In addition to charter schools, neoliberal school choice exists within the district-run public schools, where parents can choose from the three elementary schools in the community. These policies influence the demographics of the schools, but also have implications for relationships within the community.

Capital

In addition to neoliberalism, capital is another lens that can be used to examine the educational and environmental experiences of youth in public housing in a gentrified community. *Economic capital* refers to financial resources and underlies this study of a socioeconomic minority of low-income public housing residents living in a wealthy gentrified community. Economic capital influences the education and environment of all Americans, with low-income urban minorities frequently facing segregated neighborhoods, segregated schools, and a subpar education system (Anyon, 1997; Kozol, 2005; Massey & Denton, 1993; Wacquant, 2008; Wilson, 1997). However, when analyzing the experiences of low-income children in a gentrified community, two other types of capital—social capital and cultural capital—are important theoretical concepts. These two concepts, as well as the political economy of place and neoliberalism, can be used to understand the potential benefits and problems associated with children from public housing growing up in Hoboken. These concepts are intricately tied to both education and the urban environment.

Social Capital

In social science the term *social capital* generally refers to people's social networks, contacts, and relationships. Like economic capital, social capital yields benefits

to those who possess it. As Putnam (2000) defined it, “Social capital refers to connections among individuals—social networks and the norms of reciprocity and trustworthiness that arise from them” (p. 19). Social capital can mean having connections in a community that lead to employment opportunities or beneficial personal relationships. It can also include understanding the values or expected social norms of a group; role models; the collective efficacy or social control created through group ties; or the trust established through close connections. This intangible social capital can lead to tangible economic capital for those who harness it.

The term social capital has been associated with education from its very first usage. The concept of social capital was utilized in 1916 in reference to education. Arguing that communities would benefit from the cooperation of individuals and the schools would improve with community involvement, Hanifan wrote,

If he comes into contact with his neighbor, and they with other neighbors, there will be an accumulation of social capital, which may immediately satisfy his social needs and which may bear a social potentiality sufficient to the substantial improvement of living conditions in the whole community. (as cited in Putnam, 2000, p. 19)

This concept later resurfaced and was used in relation to the urban environment by researchers such as Jacobs in the 1960s, who wrote of the importance of relationships between neighbors and “eyes on the street” to keep a community safe (Jacobs, J., 1961). Then education sociologist Coleman solidified social capital’s place in educational theory with “Social Capital in the Creation of Human Capital” in 1988. In it he examined how both a family’s social capital and a community’s social capital influence the chances of students dropping out of high school. The more social capital the parents and local community possess, the less likely the child is to drop out of school.

The concept of social capital helps to frame this research because social capital in a gentrified community could potentially benefit public housing residents both environmentally and educationally. Many scholars and policy makers maintain that low-income individuals can benefit from being surrounded by middle-class social capital. As Putnam (2000) pointed out in *Bowling Alone*, the most beneficial access to social capital would be for an individual with many connections who lives in a well-connected community. However, “a poorly connected individual may derive some of the spill-over benefits from living in a well-connected community” (p. 20). There is potential for low-income individuals in a higher-income community to form relationships and networks with middle-class gentrifiers that could be beneficial.

For school-age children from public housing in Hoboken, middle-class social capital has the potential to influence many aspects of their lives. Attending socioeconomically diverse schools or playing with children from higher-income backgrounds could create middle-class social capital for them. Social capital might also be harnessed through parental involvement in the schools, which could potentially benefit all students and the school system. In addition, scholars argue that, as children get older, they are influenced by their neighborhood and neighbors; thus, a middle-class neighborhood may even be involved in “directly shaping their worldview or behavior” (Ellen & Turner, 1997, p. 836).

Yet, the gentry may also use their middle-class social capital to benefit themselves at the expense of those with different social capital. In education, for instance, this could result in the gentry using social networks to establish or access particular

public schools, while those without the same social networks do not access them, as is the case in Hoboken.

Public housing residents have their own social capital, which is evident in this study. Their social networks can function as social controls that keep children in public housing in Hoboken safe and comfortable. However, this is not the kind of social capital that American institutions value, and the influence of middle-class social capital (which is highly valued and rewarded) on education, government, and housing policy may lead to situations that actually undermine the social capital of public housing residents.

Cultural Capital

Like social capital, *cultural capital* refers to non-monetary capital that is beneficial to individuals. Cultural capital can include educational background and education credentials, personal experience, cultural values or knowledge, an understanding and appreciation of possessions (such as artwork or books), use of language, habitus, and taste. Cultural capital is generally acquired over time and is directly related to status in society. The term was first used by Bourdieu in the 1970s as he attempted to understand how the successes of children were tied to their social class. Bourdieu explained the connection between social class and cultural experiences:

The statistics of theatre, concert, and, above all, museum attendance (since in the last case, the effect of economic obstacles is more or less nil) are sufficient reminder that inheritance of cultural wealth which has been accumulated and bequeathed by previous generations only really belongs (although it is theoretically offered to anyone) to those endowed with the means of appropriating it for themselves. (as cited in *New Learning: Transformational Designs for Pedagogy and Assessment*, 2012, para. 5)

Bourdieu and Passeron (1977) argued that education—both formal and informal—serves to maintain the power structure through reproducing inequalities.

It is widely recognized that cultural capital can greatly influence students' success in school and in life. Bourdieu maintained that the capital that students accumulate outside of school influences their success inside of school. Success, he argued, is not based on innate ability or even money alone, but instead on capital obtained through one's own background. Similarly, Bernstein (1971, 2007) looked at the effect of social class on academic outcomes. He stated that children are socialized in the speech of their parents, which stems from the division of labor by socioeconomic class. People from different class backgrounds have different codes, and lower-income students likely do not have access to the codes that allow middle-class students success in school (Bernstein, 1971, 2007). Willis (1981) argued in *Learning to Labor* that working-class boys are part of a subculture that results in their attaining in their adult lives the same social status as their parents. They are not simply passive cogs in a system; they have agency and actively resist in school, which results in their working-class status as adults.

In *Unequal Childhoods* Lareau (2003) examined the differences in child-rearing practices of middle-class, working-class, and poor parents. Lareau noted that middle-class parents engage in concerted cultivation, while poor and working-class parents are more likely to facilitate natural growth in their children. These differences can be seen in the way in which middle-class children spend their free time in lessons and other organized activities, while working-class and poor children are more likely to have unstructured time surrounded by extended family. Lareau argued that middle-class children learn from a young age how to advocate for themselves, question authority, and look adults in the eye (as opposed to poor children, who are socialized to understand that looking others in the eye is dangerous (Anderson, 1990). Lareau posited that the

experiences of middle-class children in current society benefit them in interactions with institutions.

Cultural capital is relevant to this case study of Hoboken. Wealthy parents can, and do, bequeath cultural capital to their children in the ways in which Bourdieu, Bernstein, and Lareau posited, but the question is whether this capital can also benefit other children in the schools and community. In Hoboken, if the gentry merely utilize their own middle-class cultural capital to the advantage of their children, then living in a gentrified neighborhood will not be beneficial and could even be harmful for children with lower social class cultural capital. However, if this cultural capital is used in the community to provide sociocultural opportunities for the entire community and low-income public housing residents are able to, and do, take advantage of it, this could be beneficial to children in public housing. Youth in public housing may also gain middle-class cultural capital by living in a middle-class community if they access the amenities of the middle class. However, in a gentrified community it is also possible that the type of cultural capital that children from lower-income families possess is less understood and respected, which could lead to further isolation and discrimination.

Political Economy of Place

The argument for the political economy of place is that low-income people can benefit from living near or with residents who have more economic, social, and cultural capital because those people wield influence that results in better goods and services for the community at large. Low-income urban neighborhoods have experienced disinvestment, marginalization, and neglect, which influences the environment and education of children in these communities (Anyon, 1997; Kotlowitz, 1991; Kozol, 1991;

Wacquant, 2008). However, the concept of political economy of place as explained by Joseph et al. (2007) “suggests that the influence of higher income residents will generate new market demand and political pressure to which external political and economic actors are more likely to respond” (p. 373). Therefore, gentrification in communities, or a mixing of incomes, could lead to increased goods and services such as higher-quality supermarkets, banking options, a greater police presence, higher quality teachers, better school facilities, and increased municipal services. These changes could benefit children from low-income families in a community such as Hoboken. As Ellen and Turner (1997) maintained, public school quality is one piece of the political economy of place that is of particular importance because children from low-income backgrounds are likely to have parents who cannot afford to send them to private school and may not have the educational background themselves to supplement a subpar education. However, with improved services would theoretically come improved schools.

This same wielding of capital to influence outside actors could also be used to the detriment of the low-income population (Joseph et al., 2007). This could be the case particularly in a community such as Hoboken, where the low-income residents are a numerical and racial minority. Also, in Hoboken the low-income public housing population resides predominantly in one area of the mile-square city, which could allow for a difference in quality and quantity of services even within such a small space. As Joseph et al. (2007) stated, “The particular needs and priorities of low- versus higher-income residents may differ substantially, and the unequal distribution of power and influence among residents . . . may exacerbate such differences and lead to differential benefits that favor those with more influence” (p. 394). This research examines the ways

in which the participation, market demands, and pressure from higher-income residents both benefit and do not benefit the education and environment of children in public housing in Hoboken.

Consequences of Spatial Integration for Public Housing Residents

In this study, for the purpose of comparison, the literature on the consequences of deconcentrating poverty through spatial integration can be looked at in two ways: through public housing policy and through gentrification. Both of these phenomena have led to spatial integration, and both are relevant to this study, which analyzes the environment and education of children in public housing in a gentrified community. A review of the findings of studies in these two areas follows.

Spatial Integration via Public Housing Policy

A variety of opinions exist about the success of mixed-income housing and dispersal strategies. Overall, research has shown that new housing resulting from these initiatives is a physical improvement, but these new public housing programs have also displaced many residents, particularly those most at risk. Displacement occurs from the lack of one-for-one replacement when buildings are demolished, the extensive time required to build new housing while residents are displaced, screening requirements for residents in mixed-income housing, and screening in mixed-income or private housing (Joseph et al., 2007; Popkin, Buron, Levy, & Cunningham, 2000). However, the results of these policies for improved neighborhood environment and educational opportunities are quite varied.

Environment. The findings about mixed-income housing policies aimed at deconcentrating poverty and the resultant changes to the environment for residents are

mixed. Popkin et al. (2004) described their findings based on 10 years of the HOPE VI program: “Some people characterize it as a dramatic success, while others view it as a profound failure” (p. 2). In some instances researchers found that HOPE VI replaced dilapidated public housing with better housing, and some new developments helped to revitalize neighborhoods. There is no doubt that in some cases “hundreds of profoundly distressed developments have been targeted for demolition, and many of them are now replaced with well-designed, high-quality housing serving a mix of income levels” (Popkin et al., 2004, p. 2). However, their research also showed that many original public housing residents had not benefited from the new and improved accommodations and lived in housing that was as bad as their housing before the implementation of these changes, if not worse (Popkin et al., 2004). Brown explained that, of HOPE VI redevelopment at two sites in Camden, NJ, fewer than 32% of the residents returned to one site and an estimated 15% would return to the other despite the fact that in both instances most residents wanted to return (Brown, 2011). The HOPE VI Resident Tracking Study was the first systematic study of original public housing residents involved in the HOPE VI program (Buron et al., 2002). It showed that in 2001 most of the original residents were living in decent housing in lower-poverty neighborhoods and were satisfied with their living conditions. However, a “substantial proportion” was struggling with violent neighborhoods or with meeting housing expenses (Buron et al., 2002).

Popkin et al. (2000) argued that, although there were benefits for public housing communities in two cases in Chicago (the Horner Revitalization Initiative and a relocation with Section 8 program), the poorest, most at-risk residents in public housing

were often forced out of the assisted housing market because of increased screenings and competition in the private market.

Researchers have examined the assumption that mixed-income housing promotes socioeconomically diverse social networks. Briggs (1997) questioned the assumption that low-income and higher-income residents will engage with one another and form networks, given the differences in their backgrounds. He cited empirical evidence that, particularly when there are large differences in race or class, “geographic proximity does not a neighbor make” (p. 197). Brophy and Smith (1997) found little neighboring interaction in seven successful HOPE VI mixed-income developments. Buron et al. (2002) found low levels of HOPE VI residents interacting with neighbors and Hogan (1996) found minimal socializing between public housing residents and neighbors in scattered-site housing, as did Brown (2011).

There are some exceptions to these findings regarding social networks. Krohn (1986) observed that, in areas with a smaller number of low-income residents in relation to middle-class residents, there was a greater frequency of socializing between groups. Rosenbaum, Stroh, and Flynn (1998) noted that, in the mixed-income development of Lake Parc Place in Chicago, some neighboring interaction occurred, although it is important to note that residents in this development were all of low or moderate income, and 60% of the moderate-income residents were former public housing residents (which might make for easier social interactions based on common experiences).

Although existing research suggests that a mixed-income neighborhood may not generate sharing of social capital among adults, there is evidence that it can positively influence children and adolescents (Ellen & Turner, 1997). In fact, Krohn (1986) found

that, when they live in neighborhoods with lower proportions of low-income residents, young people are less likely to be involved in delinquent behavior. Research also shows that role modeling can have a beneficial effect on children and adolescents (Anderson, 1990; Ellen & Turner, 1997), but it is a big leap to assume that middle-income residents, as opposed to lower-income residents, will automatically serve as positive role models for children (Joseph et al., 2007).

There is little empirical evidence regarding the political economy of place in efforts to deconcentrate poverty through public housing. A. Smith (2002) noted that with higher-income residents comes a market for services. Joseph (2006) maintained that with a mixed-income constituency, the market and external institutions will respond differently to demands for higher-quality goods and services (Joseph, 2006). Yet, others warn that these services may still be inequitably distributed (Ellen & Turner, 1997).

Some clear environmental benefits for residents in the area of crime and safety have been documented. As Duncan and Zuberi (2006) explained, “Almost all families enrolling in MTO reported that their primary motivation in signing up for the program was moving away from violent, gang-ridden neighborhoods to safer ones” (p. 3). Rosenbaum found that both the Gautreaux Program and MTO led to safer living environments for movers (Rosenbaum, 2011). In the MTO program this improved safety has been linked with improved mental health outcomes, as well.

In terms of the environment, findings show that mixing residents of different income levels through housing policy improves safety and may increase services. Yet, the findings are contradictory regarding improved neighborhood conditions, in part because the original residents often do not move back into the redeveloped housing or, if they

have vouchers, find housing in neighborhoods that are not significantly better than where they started. In terms of social network formation, there is little evidence of network formation across income groups, but there may be some networking benefits for children and adolescents.

Education. One of the anticipated benefits of mixed-income housing policy is that “low-income households will have the benefit of better schools” (Brophy & Smith, 1997, p. 6). Critics of this position, such as Lipman (2008), argue that mixed-income housing will not have this benefit and that this is based on cultural deficit theories and is a justification for the neoliberal push toward privatization. A variety of studies have been conducted to determine whether these new housing policies do, in fact, result in improved performance for children from low-income households.

In New Kids on the Block: Results From the Moving to Opportunity Experiment

Sanbonmatsu, Kling, Duncan, and Brooks-Gunn (2007) compared children whose families received vouchers in the MTO program to children in the control group who had applied but were not given vouchers. They looked at 5,000 children between 6 and 20 years old who were within 4 to 7 years of entering MTO (with a 90% response rate) and found little evidence that young people who were part of the program benefitted educationally. “We expected that in 2002, the year of our study, children whose families were offered vouchers of either type would, on average, live in lower-poverty neighborhoods, attend higher-performing schools, and would, as a result, have improved educational outcomes” (p. 6). Instead, they found no overall educational improvement. The students themselves did not rate their new school climates as improved, and overall they did not experience statistically significant test score improvements (even for the

youngest students with fewer years in higher-poverty schools) or statistically significant changes in attitudes toward school/school engagement or student behavior. Surprisingly, they found that for boys, moving with a restricted voucher to the lower-poverty neighborhoods adversely influenced behavior; for both boys and girls with restricted vouchers and “characteristics associated with higher test scores” (p. 6), the use of the voucher was associated with more behavior problems (Sanbonmatsu et al., 2007).

Several explanations for the surprising MTO education findings have been proposed. Although the children were moved into lower-poverty neighborhoods, overall student achievement in the schools that they then attended was only modestly higher. There were other factors, as well. Frequently, the neighborhoods to which they moved became lower income during the time period of the study; some participants chose to move back into neighborhoods that were lower income; the neighborhoods to which the participants moved were in general higher-income but not high-income communities; and they were not racially integrated neighborhoods (three fifths were in 80% or more minority neighborhoods). Also, the fact that the control group could utilize school choice might have influenced the results. Yet, the authors concluded, “In the end, we were surprised and disappointed by the inability of the Moving to Opportunity experiment to help poor children succeed in school” (Sanbonmatsu et al., 2007, p. 36).

In “All Over the Map: Explaining Educational Outcomes of the Moving to Opportunity Program,” DeLuca (2007) pointed out that, despite the disappointing overall findings on academic achievement, the MTO program improved the lives of families. “Parents commonly expressed the sentiment that their children would not ‘survive’ in the city schools, and this fear drove many of the experimental movers to participate in the

program” (p. 30). DeLuca found that, although neighborhood matters, many other factors influence student achievement and can explain the lack of educational improvements. Assistance with housing, mental health, and employment are all needed to produce improved education outcomes. DeLuca maintained that poor families operate differently from middle-class families and may not have knowledge about schools and school choice—an area ripe for further research (DeLuca, 2007). Rather than choosing the local school or the best school academically, some families may have opted for the same school that their children had attended before or a school convenient for child care purposes, or they may have chosen the school for reasons other than academic outcomes (Duncan & Zuberi, 2006).

Rosenbaum (2011) noted that the Gautreaux Program, on the other hand, resulted in improved educational outcomes for children. He found that suburban children were more likely to graduate from high school, attend college, attend 4-year colleges, or have better employment opportunities than children who had participated in the MTO program. He concludes that environmental changes must be “radical” to have a great effect (Rosenbaum, 2011). Although it is more difficult to study the outcomes of Gautreaux because there is no control group, the findings show that families that moved to suburban neighborhoods with lower poverty rates have stayed and that children who are old enough to move out have remained in lower-poverty neighborhoods themselves (Duncan & Zuberi, 2006). With Gautreaux, researchers have also found that students’ attitudes toward school improved and that grades did not get worse (Northwestern University Institute for Policy Research, 2010).

Overall, the findings demonstrate that merely dispersing low-income families into wealthier communities is not enough to improve educational outcomes significantly. Nevertheless, there is potential for improvement when the change is radical enough. For many families, there may not be direct academic outcomes, but these changes may still improve the quality of their day-to-day lives. School choice may also play a role in the lack of educational improvement, although this has been insufficiently researched.

Spatial Integration via Gentrification

Most of the studies of the consequences of gentrification, like the research on mixed-income housing policy, has focused on displacement. But how does gentrification change the environment and the schools for those who remain?

Environment. A limited number of scholars have studied the effects of gentrification on the environment of long-time residents. In his case study of Harlem and Clinton Hill, Freeman (2006) looked at the effects of gentrification on natives of the neighborhood. He found some benefits to gentrification, such as increased amenities, more mainstream commercial businesses, more opportunities for upward mobility without leaving the neighborhood, greater collective efficacy, and more role models. In an argument that supports social network theory he concluded, “Gentrification certainly brings individuals with more leverageable connections into spatial proximity with indigenous residents” (p. 147). He maintained that even weak social ties can have benefits. He gave examples of gentrifiers acting as mentors, interacting with the police, bringing increased institutional resources, or fighting for tenants’ rights with landlords—all activities that can benefit long-time residents. Freeman asserted that the gentrifiers improved existing institutions in the neighborhood, and “one could argue that

gentrification both strengthened internally based organizations . . . and changed the way externally based institutions interacted with the neighborhood, encouraging those latter institutions to provide more and better services” (p. 153). This makes a strong case for the political economy of place. However, Freeman pointed out that there are not as many benefits as supporters of poverty deconcentration contend and that gentrification does not mean mobility for all.

Gentrification has been linked to discrimination against long-time residents. With ethnographic data, Perez (2004) showed how gentrification in the Near Northwest Side of Chicago led to the harassment and intimidation of long-time residents, particularly young Puerto Rican men. “[They] are the most vulnerable to these demographic shifts and the attendant use of state power to protect the neighborhood’s newest residents through surveillance and manipulation of young Puerto Ricans’ bodies” (p. 143). She told stories of young men who were taunted, followed, and embarrassed by police officers just for walking in their own neighborhood. These men, because of their gender and race, experienced discrimination and stigmatization, not just from the police but also from others, such as business owners in the neighborhood.

Patillo (2008) also connected discrimination to gentrification. She argued that, when police in a gentrifying neighborhood target what they consider “quality-of-life” environmental issues, this often results in class-based and racial tensions. In the beginning of neighborhood change, police target major crimes; when they begin to fight crimes such as loitering or littering, the long-time residents “switch from being part of the policing effort—complaining about drug dealers, calling 911 when they hear gunshots . . . to *being the targets* of policing” (p. 288). Behavior such as fixing cars on the street,

public drinking, playing loud music, and even barbequing can lead to conflict with gentrifiers and the police. Landlords and management companies feel beholden to gentrifiers and impose rigid rules and screening on tenants. Patillo concluded that, although long-time residents benefit from gentrification in the beginning, they are eventually hurt by it.

In *Villa Victoria: The Transformation of Social Capital in a Boston Barrio* Small (2004) described a public housing community surrounded by a gentrified neighborhood in Boston. Small showed how these two communities, although geographically connected, are socially separate communities with no meaningful interaction or ties between the two groups of residents. He argued that this stems not from a lack of resources or social capital in the low-income Puerto Rican community but instead from a large amount of their own resources within that community. He vividly demonstrated how the low-income neighborhood (the Villa) is separated from the surrounding South End. He quoted a resident: “It’s like two different worlds in one section of the city” (p. 100). He found that middle-class residents do not walk their dogs in the Villa, do not know residents of the Villa, and have distinctly separate public spaces, restaurants, and shopping.

DeSena (2009) argued that in Greenpoint, Brooklyn, gentrifiers and long-time working class and lower-income residents are segregated. She examined how issues such as bicycles, noise, filmmaking, dog walking, and housing ignite issues between the two groups in the neighborhood. In the chapter “Soccer Moms in the City” she examined how gentry families even opt out of community-based sports programs to form their own soccer leagues, furthering segregation between the communities.

Generally, research shows that gentrification may result in the improvement of neighborhood conditions and amenities for long-time residents. Along with the benefits, however, these residents also face the risks of discrimination and isolation and the possibility that racially and socioeconomically disparate groups, while physically close to one another, will still experience a complete lack of interaction.

Education. A range of educational possibilities exists for children from low-income households who live in gentrified communities. The ideal scenario would be that the mixing of incomes and increases in economic, social, and cultural capital that would result in improved middle-class schools for all children in the community. However, researchers have found that what often results is a kind of “between-school tracking” (DeSena & Ansalone, 2009). Where this between-school tracking occurs, gentrifiers choose to send their children to better schools outside the district, while the low-income population continues to utilize local public schools. DeSena and Ansalone (2009) examined this process in Greenpoint-Williamsburg, Brooklyn, and found that many gentrifiers moved to town before they had children, were unhappy with the local public schools, and, rather than trying to fight for change within the massive structure of the New York City Department of Education, opted out of their local schools.

Findings suggest that often, the outcome of this negotiation in gentrified communities contributes to the development of *between-school* tracking. This is accomplished when children of affluent white families, attend more prestigious out of area schools, while those from relatively low income backgrounds, which are racially and ethnically mixed, enroll in local schools. (DeSena & Ansalone, 2009, p. 65)

Engquist (2007), in an article about accelerated city-backed gentrification in Greenpoint-Williamsburg, described the local school culture of test preparation, strict

discipline, and examinations beginning in kindergarten, conflicting with the gentry's more progressive preferences for education. He declared that the results are clear:

With few exceptions, the neighborhood's new arrivals are sending their kids anywhere but their zoned schools. Many use false addresses to enroll them in schools in lower Manhattan. Others opt for a charter school in Fort Greene, Brooklyn, or private or magnet schools as far as an hour away. (p. 65)

It is evident that improving the traditional district-run public schools is not the gentry's priority. One developer noted, "I don't have an answer [to the problem] for you. There's talk of a charter school, a new magnet school or maybe even a new private school. It would be great if that occurs" (as cited quoted in Engquist, 2007, para. 11).

Hankins (2007) tied the development of charter schools to the overall neoliberal agenda and gentrification. In her examination of a charter school in Atlanta, she looked at new gentrifiers—those with children. "The neoliberalization of social service provision has enabled private groups, such as middle class gentrifiers, to transform critical social institutions in gentrifying neighborhoods" (p. 113). Currently, much that was once public is now quasi-public or public-private, and education is no exception. Charter schools have given parent gentrifiers an opportunity to create schools that meet their personal needs in the public realm.

Butler and Lees (2006) found that, with super-gentrification in London, the families that were moving in were not committed to and did not send their children to state-run schools. As Butler explained in "Living in the Bubble" (2003), gentrifiers today are not truly invested in diversity; they socialize with and send their children to school with others like themselves, and their children are unexposed to those from different backgrounds. Butler and Lees (2006) posited that these gentrifiers do not invest social

capital in their community and associate only with other people like themselves, leading to or perpetuating social stratification.

Stillman (2011, 2012) investigated the school choice decisions of gentry parents and the process of integration that occurs, which she called “tipping in,” when gentry parents send their children to public schools that were segregated in New York City. She found that attracting and retaining gentry children is a challenge, as school administrators attempt to please both gentry and non-gentry parents.

In her study *Gentrification and Inequality in Brooklyn: The New Kids on the Block*, DeSena (2009) focused on the relationship between working-class and lower-income residents in Greenpoint and the gentry in the neighborhood. She found that the gentry did not send their children to the local public school, despite its high ratings. These parents often chose instead to send their children to schools outside their neighborhood and frequently in Manhattan, unlike working-class and lower-income residents who “want to school their children locally” and are “largely unaware of the options within the public school system” (DeSena, 2009, pp. 50, 55). In addition, gentry parents made attempts to start a new, more progressive school in the community: The River School. DeSena argued that the choice by gentry parents to avoid local schools “serves as a way for gentry to maintain and reproduce their social status, upward mobility, and empowerment as parents negotiating a global city” (p. 57).

It is clear that school choice—whether in the form of private schools, magnet schools, out-of-district schools, or charter schools—has become a way for the gentry to circumnavigate the traditional public-school structure and, in the process, avoid sharing their social and cultural capital. The existing research in the area of gentrification and

education has examined the choices of middle-class residents navigating the terrain of education in a gentrifying urban community. What is lacking is the perspectives of low-income residents.

Chapter 3: Methods

I like to dig. I love the doing of it, the research, digging in, digging up, digging out, digging it, rolling around in the dirt of everyday life trying to find the fossilized meanings in the moment, like a dog with a bone. (Jenkins, 2009, p. 1)

This dissertation is a multimethod, qualitative, single-case study. It received Institutional Review Board (IRB) clearance from Rutgers University (IRB Protocol # 12-355Mc). The use of a case study is suitable for this research because, as Yin (2009) explained, case studies are the “preferred method” when the “focus is on a contemporary phenomenon within a real-life context” and when the researcher is not in control of the events (p. 2). Case studies have been used frequently in neighborhood research with much success (e.g., Abu-Lughod, 1994; Gans, 1962; Jacobs, J., 1961; Lloyd, 2006; Patillo-McCoy, 1999; Sanjek, 1998; Small, 2004; Whyte, W., 1955). Despite their reputation for being “soft science,” case studies are in fact “remarkably hard” (Yin, 2009, p. 21). A single case, as was used in this study, can “represent a significant contribution to knowledge and theory building . . . [and] can even help to refocus future investigations in an entire field” (Yin, 2009, p. 47).

An appropriate case for a case study must illuminate the research questions and must be one to which the researcher has access (Yin, 2009). The case of school-aged children in public housing in Hoboken provided both of these opportunities and was, therefore, an apposite case study. The gentrified community of Hoboken provided the context for this empirical case study.

Qualitative Research

The methods for this dissertation included ethnography, semistructured interviews, a focus group, participatory research with youth in public housing, and analysis of existing data sets and archival sources. Qualitative research proved a good fit

because qualitative methods “are used to understand some social phenomena from the perspectives of those involved, to contextualize issues in their particular socio-cultural-political milieu” (Glesne, 2006, p. 4), which was the goal of this research. In addition, this dissertation analyzes current education and housing policy and draws policy implications based on these findings. Sadovnik (2006) explained that qualitative research has a role to play in policy and should be “recognized as an important tool for policy makers” (p. 424).

Multiple methods were utilized in this study because having a variety of sources and methods allowed me to avoid “the systemic biases or limitations of a specific source or method” and “to gain a broader and more secure understanding of the issues” being investigated (Maxwell, 2005, p. 93). In order to triangulate the findings, I utilized multiple methods and interviewed individuals from a variety of backgrounds. For example, by interviewing both public housing residents and gentry residents, I gained understanding of the diversity of public spaces; by interviewing school founders and public housing residents and gentry, I verified findings about school choice from multiple perspectives.

This research uses an interpretivist approach. However, like Freeman (2006), whose research subject and method were similar to those used in this study, I also “sought to meet some of the criteria being put forth by qualitative researchers as a means of establishing standards that could be used to evaluate this type of research” (pp. 211-212). This is in essence what Freeman referred to as “an anarchic, ‘anything goes’ paradigm” (p. 211). Although there are limitations (discussed below), I worked to establish validity, transferability, and reliability.

Sources of Data

Methods for data collection were ethnography, interviews, a focus group, youth participatory research, and analysis of existing data sets and archival sources. Table 1 displays the sources of data used within each method. The sections that follow explain each of these in more detail.

Ethnography

Beginning with the Chicago School sociologists, powerful ethnographic studies have proliferated in urban sociological research (Sadovnik, 2006). Like other scholars in this field (Anderson, 1990; DeSena & Ansalone, 2009; Morrison, 2011; Sharman, 2006), I chose to study the city in which I reside. My experience was similar to Anderson's: "When my wife Nancy and I moved to the Village in 1975, I had not planned to study the area; but this changed as I encountered the local community and discovered what seemed an ideal urban laboratory" (1990, p. ix). In fact, when I moved to Hoboken, I thought I would find a homogenous community that would not interest me, and I intended to do my dissertation research in Newark. We had thought seriously about moving to Jersey City instead of Hoboken for reasons of affordability and diversity, but because of the financial crisis that occurred in 2008, we found an affordable apartment near a dear friend in Hoboken. I reflected on the community soon after moving to Hoboken:

When we decided to move to Hoboken I was hesitant to leave my diverse New York City community for what I perceived to be a White yuppie enclave. Upon arrival, I was pleasantly surprised to find that where I live in Hoboken is more diverse than I had anticipated. I began to wonder, however, what it is like to live in Hoboken if you are low-income and Black or Latino. I find it difficult at times to live in Hoboken surrounded by such wealth. I would like to better understand how Hoboken became a city with vast economic disparities and how the experience of poverty differs in an upper middle class community from a traditional "ghetto." (Field Notes, October 2009)

Table 1

Sources of Data

Method	Sources
Ethnography	Participant observation at Center for Youth from public housing Community events Hoboken Board of Education meetings Hoboken Housing Authority meetings District school open houses Charter school open houses School fair Board of Education candidates' debate Fundraiser for charter school Events for public housing residents Observations and involvement throughout the community (on the street, churches, baptisms, sporting events, daycares, grocery store, parks and playgrounds)
Interviews	52 interviews
Focus group	8 public housing residents
Youth participatory research	10 teenagers Mapping of community Photographs of daily lives and captions Listing of words to describe Hoboken
Analysis of existing data sets	U.S. Census Bureau, 2000, 2012, and 2013 American Community Survey 3-year estimates, 2009-2011 School report cards, State of New Jersey Department of Education 2010-2011
Analysis of archival sources	Periodicals School documents (newsletters, emails, memos, brochures, websites, menus) Hoboken Housing Authority documents (PHA 5-Year Plan, Vision 20/20 Plan, website, requests for proposals, requests for qualifications) Blogs

I have lived in Hoboken, three blocks from the public housing neighborhood and less than one block from the school that serves the majority of children in public housing, for more than 3.5 years. One of the first papers that I completed in my doctoral program when I moved to Hoboken was on this topic (“Hoboken: An Exploration of Poverty in an Upper Middle Class City”); I have been observing the relationship between public housing residents and the larger Hoboken community in some capacity for 3.5 years.

I have been conducting formal direct observations and taking copious field notes for 1 year and 9 months. Direct observations “take place in the natural setting of the ‘case’” (Yin, 2009, p. 109). My direct observations took place in a wide variety of settings: Hoboken Board of Education meetings, HHA meetings, free community events/festivals/carnivals/parades/concerts, district school open houses, charter school open houses, a school fair, a Board of Education candidates’ debate, events and meetings for Hoboken mothers, volunteer opportunities, a block party fundraiser for a charter school, events for families in public housing (Daddy-Daughter Dance, Hispanic Heritage Night, and a parent meeting), at the supermarket and bodegas, at Mama Johnson Field, at parks and playgrounds, and at restaurants and taverns throughout town, as well as in the public housing neighborhood. These observations also included reading the local newspaper, *The Hoboken Reporter*, and the Hoboken Moms Yahoo group (which has about 5,800 members) and other local blogs on a regular basis.

In addition to the methods listed above, as a community member and mother of a baby (born and grown to 18 months during the data collection phase of this research), many of my observations were conducted while walking my daughter through town, going to the pediatrician, at day care drop-off and pick-up, and while attending a new

moms support group at the local hospital. In this capacity, I was a member-researcher (Adler & Adler, 1987). I wrote extensive and detailed field notes and vignettes upon returning home after conducting observations. At times, I recorded voice memos on my iPhone in the moment to remember quotes or experiences precisely.

Although I am a community insider with access to the gentry, the focus of my research is youth who reside in public housing. In order to work with these young people and their families and to access them to maximize opportunities for their perspectives to be presented, I conducted participant observations at a center (herein referred to as Center) that is adjacent to the public housing campus and whose mission is to serve the children of that neighborhood in Hoboken. The Center provides after-school programming, summer camps, tutoring, mentoring, and other services to youth in Hoboken. Over the course of data collection, I volunteered with them in a variety of capacities: working with the Teen Group, attending girls' mentoring nights, volunteering weekly with after-school homework help, and attending Toddler Time, Breakfasts With Santa, and Lunch With the Easter Bunny (with my daughter in tow) at the Center. There I acted as a *participant as observer* (Glesne, 2006). The relationship formed with the Center (a trusted institution in the public housing community) and the children who attend their programs enabled me to recruit participants for the study (see Lareau, 2003) and helped me to share the perspectives of the youth and their families, who are the true experts on this topic.

This research is part of a field of gentrification and education research, wherein female researchers have utilized their status and insider knowledge as mothers in a community (DeSena, 2006; Stillman, 2011). This type of feminist research provides an

avenue and an opportunity for females, who often struggle with multiple commitments as mothers and scholars, to benefit from rather than be handicapped by their multiple commitments. This acknowledges the insider status of mothers, in particular, with regard to navigating the school system (a role historically dominated by women; see DeSena, 2009) and forces the mother-researcher to face her own potentially conflicted issues in making school choices for her children, giving insight and depth to the analysis.

Interviews and Focus Group

Sixty participants in this study took part in either interviews or a focus group. I conducted 47 interviews with 52 individuals (five interviews were conducted with two people at the same time at the request of the participants). The majority of interviews were focused interviews that were open-ended and conversational but stemmed from a predetermined set of questions (Yin, 2009). The interview protocols are included as Appendices A through E. Interview questions varied depending on the participants' background but included questions such as the following: Do you think Hoboken is a good place to raise children, why or why not? What public spaces do you frequently utilize in Hoboken? What are your favorite and least favorite places in Hoboken? Would you, or do you, send your children to the district-run public schools? If not, where would/does your child attend school? If you would not send your child to the district-run public schools can you articulate why? Would you consider sending your child to a charter school? What do you know about charter schools in Hoboken? Have you ever been given an application for a charter school? Do you know anyone who attends a charter school? In addition, I established relationships with key informants, with whom I conducted more in-depth open-ended interviews and ongoing conversations over time.

The 52 interviewees were members of the gentry; a publicly elected official; charter school founders and administrators, founding parents, advocates, and teachers; a former administrator of a district-run public school; adults who work with children in public housing; teenagers who live in public housing; a realtor; and adult residents of public housing in Hoboken. Stakeholder and criterion purposive sampling was utilized to ensure that the researcher interviewed stakeholders in education and a sample of both gentry and public housing residents, as well as residents whose children attend, or had attended, a variety of schools (Table 2).

The study participants were not a representative sample of Hoboken; instead, I oversampled public housing residents and non-Asian minorities because they are the focus of the study and the population whose experiences are most different from my own. As a result, participants included 33 residents (or former residents) of the HHA (55% of participants), 36 residents or (former residents) of HHA or subsidized housing in Hoboken (60% of participants), and 44 African Americans or Latinos (73% of participants).

I also utilized purposive sampling to interview a charter school founder, administrator, or founding parent from each of the three established charter schools in town, as well as the fourth charter school that was in the application phase and was denied a charter during data collection.³ In addition, I interviewed at least one parent

³ During the 2011-2012 school year, the founding team of the proposed DaVinci Charter School of Hoboken, applied for a charter. The new school was fiercely debated in the community. In October 2012 the DaVinci team learned that they did not receive the charter. They are included in analysis of charter school founders and advocates and the conversations about charter schools because at the time of this research they had not abandoned the idea of this school.

Table 2

Interview and Focus Group Participant Information

Participant category	<i>n</i>
Charter school leader in Hoboken ^a	8
Former district-run school leader	1
Gentry mother	10
Gentry father	2
Publicly elected official	1
HHA public housing resident	33
HHA public or subsidized housing resident	36
Teenagers in HHA public or subsidized housing	10
Non-Asian minority	44
District-run school parent or student	37
Charter school parent	7
Private school parent	5
Young adult HHA public housing resident	8

Note. Many participants were in multiple categories (e.g., gentry, mother, and charter school founder or a parent with children who attended public preschool and then private school); some participants fit into none of the listed categories (White, lower-middle-class born-and-raised Hobokenite who live in private housing). ^aThis includes founders, founding parents, teachers, directors, school leaders.

from each public school (including charter schools) in Hoboken and parents of children who had attended the four K–8 private elementary schools in town.

To recruit gentry participants for the study, I posted an advertisement for participation on the Hoboken Moms Yahoo Group twice. Each person who responded was contacted for an interview. Snowball sampling was then utilized to find charter school founders, administrators, and parents. Recruiting participation from the gentry and school leaders did not prove to be a challenge.

The larger challenge was finding ways to access the public housing community. With an acute awareness that this type of research is often not conducted empirically and is instead based on the assumptions of researchers alone, it was of the utmost importance to me to access this population and to share the perspectives of the youth and parents in public housing. However, research conducted with minority/indigenous populations has historically often done harm to the community (Smith, L. T., 1999). With this in mind, I did not want to be a researcher who merely comes in, knocks on doors, asks questions, draws conclusions, and leaves. Therefore, I developed relationships with trusted organizations with which I have volunteered and plan to continue volunteering. I also worked with staff members at the Center to lend my experience in areas where it was of use; I hope that in the future they will be able to utilize the findings from the study to support the services that they provide to the community.

I knew that random sampling would not be feasible for this topic and this population (particularly given limited resources and time constraints), so through accessible and trustworthy channels I attempted to meet a variety of public housing residents with different socioeconomic backgrounds. In addition to attending HHA meetings to meet and network with residents (and to attempt to work with the HHA to reach residents), I worked with three community organizations to access residents. Two of these organizations target the most at-risk public housing residents with their programs (through baby supply drives and employment services) and the third, the Center, is utilized by a wide variety of public housing (and nonpublic housing) families. I attended events and/or meetings held by these organizations and asked people to participate then and there. I interviewed anyone who was willing to participate. I was overwhelmed by

the level of support for the research and the number of people who were willing to participate. I very rarely found (I can think of two instances) people unwilling, despite the fact that at a number of the events the parents had little children with them and, at one event, armloads of baby supplies. As I wrote after Hispanic Heritage Night at the Center, “Many people were willing to stop with their hands full of leftovers and overtired children at their legs to speak with me” (Field Notes, October 2012).

To incentivize participation, all adult interview and focus group participants were entered into a raffle to win a \$100 Target[®] gift card. The winner was drawn at the Center when data collection was complete. In addition, I brought food such as cookies (see Lareau, 2003; Morrison, 2011) to all interviews and to the focus group session. When I attended events in the public housing neighborhood, I brought dozens of homemade chocolate chip cookies for the parents and their children.

I felt that providing homemade cookies provided an “in” with the mothers today. One said, “You had me at chocolate chip cookie” and many asked if they were homemade. This seemed a tangible way to build trust with my participants and provided an easy topic for discussion as we filled out paperwork and began the interviews. My role as a mother was also helpful as I could comment on the merit of baby gear at the drive and I helped one mother fold her new activity mat. (Field Notes, October 2012)

All focused interviews were tape recorded—when permission was given by the interviewee—and transcribed. Interview protocols are presented in Appendices A through E. Interviews ranged in length from 10 minutes to 100 minutes, depending on the participant’s interest in and knowledge of/experience with the topic, personal time constraints, whether or not the participant had children, and the talkative or taciturn nature of the participant. Interviews were frequently conducted in participants’ homes, which ranged from public housing high rises to brownstones and new condominium housing, as well as at local establishments, offices, and community events. Two

interviews were conducted by telephone and were not tape recorded at the request of the interviewees.

In addition to the interviews, I conducted one focus group session with residents of the HHA. This was conducted at the Center with employees (all but one were young adult employees) of the Center. This was done for the convenience of participants who worked there and had repeatedly expressed interest in participating in the study; I also did so to test whether I would receive different information depending on whether I collected it within a homogenous group dynamic or with individuals. I recognize that participants' perceptions of me (see Role of the Researcher) could influence my findings and wanted to test the difference when public housing residents were interviewed in a group rather than individually. There were eight focus group participants, all of whom lived in HHA buildings and identified as non-Asian minorities. The seven who grew up in Hoboken had attended Hoboken High School. Two of the focus group participants were parents, four were males, and four were females. I acted as the focus group facilitator or moderator. The focus group session was recorded and transcribed for accuracy. It was my goal that the use of a focus group would, as Glesne described it, give "voice to silenced experiences or augments personal reflection" (Glesne, 2006, p. 104). The focus group protocol is included as Appendix F. Focus group questions included questions such as, How would you define your neighborhood? Where do you grocery shop? Where do you cash your paychecks? Do you know anyone who attends a charter school? Do you think there is a lot of socializing between children in HHA and "yuppie children"?

The conduct of interviews and focus groups ended when a broad enough sample had participated and saturation was reached within each of these groups (Glaser &

Strauss, 1967). By the time I had completed the interviews, I could predict with accuracy what each interviewee would tell me based on prior interviews. As Glaser and Strauss explained, “As he sees similar instances over and over again, the researcher becomes empirically confident that a category is saturated” (1967, p. 62). However, after completing all of the interviews and reaching saturation with gentry, HHA residents, HHA teenagers, and charter school founders and administrators, I realized that, despite the various means of recruiting a diverse sample of public housing parents, none of the parents whom I had interviewed from public housing had children who had ever attended charter schools. Although that is highly representative of the findings (Chapters 4 and 5), I knew that there was a very small number of families at the Center that would fit this description and hoped to speak to at least one of these parents who could fill this gap and provide the viewpoint of the “exception.” So I reached out to the Center, and they directed me to one parent who fit this description so that I could speak to someone with that specific (albeit rare) perspective.

All interviews and the focus group session were transcribed and coded using inductive and deductive coding for the theories from the theoretical framework and explanations for the research questions. I utilized 35 codes. Data analysis was an iterative process; the data were analyzed using pattern-matching leading to explanation building (Yin, 2009). Transcribing and coding all of the data counteracted any inclination to focus on certain findings while ignoring others.

Coding the transcriptions imposes some degree of neutrality on the researcher as the coding process forces one to deal with and analyze at least at a superficial level all of the data. Consequently although one might be myopically focused on particular themes, the process of coding ensures that other themes in the data are recognized. (Freeman, 2006, p. 215)

The identities of all participants are confidential. Although it is a city, Hoboken has the feel of a small town. Residents often say “everyone knows everyone.” In this dissertation names are not used to identify participants in this study. The only time individuals are identified by name is when statements were made publically rather than in interviews. Because some groups (such as founders from a specific charter school or school administrators) were small and therefore more easily identifiable, when possible, I group all charter school founders and do not identify which founder from which school made the statement. In some cases the school may be identifiable in the context but in these cases the specific founder or leader from the school is not identifiable.

Youth Participatory Research

Subjects in a study about the education of youth in public housing should be the youth themselves, who can act as participant experts (Harding, 1998; Smith, L. T., 1999, 2006; Torre & Fine, 2006). With that in mind, I worked closely with a teen group from the Center to involve them in a participatory role as key informants. The methods loosely followed an established participatory style in the field of research into children and the environment (Loukaitou-Sideris, 2003; Lynch, 1977; Ward, 1978). The young people with whom I worked sat for interviews, mapped their community, and used disposable cameras that I supplied to take pictures of their community, which they then captioned. I chose these multiple avenues for collecting data to invite a relationship with the teenagers, but also to provide a variety of complementary formats for data (Darbyshire, MacDougall, & Schiller, 2005). I met with the teenagers a few times before I began the study, conducted ice breakers with them, and assisted the leader of the group with elements of her curriculum planning; therefore, they knew who I was before I began to

work with them on this project. Each teen group member who completed the project received a \$20 Target gift card as a token of appreciation.

Ten teenagers participated in the research in some capacity. Eight of them lived in HHA buildings and the other two lived or had lived in subsidized housing. All 10 self-identified as Black and/or Latino (a staff member at the Center refers to the population they serve as “Blacktino”). Six were female and four were male. All 10 attended the district-run public Hoboken High School. All 10 were interviewed individually for the first phase of the participatory research (interview protocol, Appendix C). The youth interviews included questions such as, Do you think Hoboken is a good place to grow up, why or why not? Can you tell me about your favorite places in Hoboken? What about your least favorite? Where do you and your friends hang out, outside of school? Do you have a role model (that you actually know, not a celebrity)? Who is it? How often do you see the water (Hudson River)? For the second phase I gave them disposable cameras and directions to photograph their community, including their favorite and least favorite places. I told them that I wanted to know what their lives are like on a daily basis.

Specific directions were as follows:

- **Do** take pictures of the places you go, the places that are important to you, and the things you see
- **Don’t** take pictures of people (including yourself)
- **Don’t** take any inappropriate pictures
- **Don’t** take pictures inside your house, these should be pictures of your public environment
- **Do** take pictures of your favorite places to go and hang out
- **Do** take pictures of places you go a lot
- **Do** take pictures of places in your environment you don’t like as well

- **Try to tell the story of your life outside of your house, through photography.**

The youth participants returned the cameras to me, I developed the pictures, and they captioned each picture. Six completed the photography project. In the third phase of the participatory research, the teenagers filled in maps of the city of Hoboken, documenting their daily travels and frequently used places. Eight completed the maps. Finally, seven wrote lists of words to describe Hoboken. In order to find commonalities and common themes in their words, I developed a word cloud from the frequency of words they listed. I developed the word cloud using a word cloud generator (Word It Out, 2013).

Analysis of Existing Data Sets and Archival Sources

In addition to collecting data, I utilized existing data sets to address the research questions. To investigate the demographics of Hoboken, I used U.S. Census data from 2000 and 2010 and American Community Survey Data 3-Year Estimates from 2009 to 2011. For school demographics and test scores, I used New Jersey Department of Education 2010-2011 school report cards and demographic information.

To address the research questions, archival sources were also employed, including periodicals and local blogs. I analyzed school documents, such as school newsletters, memos, brochures, websites, and menus, as well as HHA documents, including budget information, the Vision 20/20 Plan: A Sustainable Plan for Public Housing in Hoboken, NJ, and the website and requests for proposals and qualifications.

Role of the Researcher

When I was describing my dissertation topic to my family, my 10-year-old niece said, “But Aunt Molly, you don’t know what it’s like to be one of those poor people in

Hoboken; how will you describe it?” This profound statement from a fifth grader encapsulates both my vision for, and concern about, this research project. It is important for scholars to tell the stories of low-income children of color who too often are not given a voice in the literature. Yet, I am a White, blonde, middle-class professional living in the community that I am studying. I am undeniably a member of the gentry.

While I will never be a true insider (a “born and raised” or “B & R”),⁴ my status as a resident and mother in the community granted me access and in-depth understanding of community dynamics. I will never understand the experiences of low-income people of color who live in public housing in Hoboken (as one of my participants pointed out when he grudgingly told me to switch places with him if I want to know what it is like). I am mindful of this and of the long history of racial oppression in the United States, which is in the background (and sometimes the foreground) of all that I do. However, it is important to do this work and to give voice to all those in the community, particularly those who have been disenfranchised and segregated and unfortunately are still underrepresented in academia. This research deals with very real situations and policy proposals that affect the lives of all residents of Hoboken, and I hope that I can present the perspective of a community that, although overflowing with social and cultural capital of its own, is seen as lacking the middle-class capital that is valued and powerful in the institutions that I examine and that influences their lives. I have utilized a research design that, whenever possible, allowed me to speak with residents and use their words

⁴ In Hoboken a “B & R” is someone who was born and raised in Hoboken. People in the city often self-identify in this way. As a result of long-standing issues between “yuppies” and “B & Rs” (also sometimes called “old-timers,” “old guard”), many carry the label with pride. It also has political and historical implications in the community. A current hot-button issue is that the children of family gentrifiers who stay in Hoboken are yuppies but are also technically B & R.

and interpretations, not my own. Throughout this dissertation I allow the words of all participants to speak for themselves, as it is not my place to determine intentionality and to place blame. I was particularly committed to giving young people in Hoboken a voice and a role in the research through their words, photographs, and maps.

My role as a member of the gentry meant that a part of this research was what Adler and Adler called “member-research” (Adler & Adler, 1987). This allowed members of the gentry to feel comfortable with me in opening up about their personal beliefs about sensitive issues surrounding diversity, the schooling of their children, and public space. It also means that I have a bias toward their perspective that must be acknowledged.

I do not deny my bias, but instead whenever possible I work to embrace it and use it to deepen my understanding of the issues. This study follows in the tradition of qualitative inquiry that involves acknowledging one’s bias and questioning the idea of true objectivity (White, 2006). That being said, an obvious challenge of the research, as my niece so clearly stated, is that any interpretations or observations are my own and are influenced by my own White, middle-class, able-bodied, heterosexual background. My own bias and perspective also influenced the choice of theories and methods of analysis. In addition, my background and appearance may have influenced data collection and theoretical analysis in ways that I acknowledge and in other ways that are impossible for me to know or acknowledge. Yet, I agree with Lareau (2003), who maintained that researchers should not be constricted to studying individuals like themselves, which she maintained would have the “invidious effect of relegating every Black social scientist to studying Black Americans rather than whatever suits his or her fancy” (p. 10).

Measures were taken to increase the reliability and validity of findings, in addition to field notes, memoing, triangulating, transcribing, and coding. When possible, I quote extensively and use the words and thoughts and analysis of participants. Member checking was also utilized. A draft of this dissertation was sent to three participants and two provided feedback. The findings are not simplistic and are not wholly what I expected to find, or even what I hoped to find when I began this research, which made this a more complicated and ultimately more accurate story. In the end, it is my research and influenced by my own role in it; I believe that it is important to share my choices, methods, and criteria and to reveal how I worked to make this research as open and accurate as possible

Limitations

This research has several limitations. This is an in-depth qualitative study and, as such, it is reliant on the perceptions, beliefs, and experiences of those who were interviewed and observed. Some people whom I interviewed or heard speak at meetings were described by others as “crazy” or telling stories that were “untrue.” The beauty of this research is that my role was not one of an investigative reporter or detective, and I was not trying to prove my participants’ stories as true or false. Instead, I found, analyzed, and reported their experiences and perceptions. I do not establish absolute truth; I attempt to tell a helpful story about these social processes and how different community members talked about and contended with them. For example, one parent in public housing said that she had looked into a specific charter school in town, but it would not take her son because of his speech issues, so he had to attend a district-run public school. When I contacted a leader from the charter school about this, I was told

that they take students with all disabilities and have students in attendance with those very issues. The point of this research was not to find out the truth, but to show that, whether true, untrue, or misunderstood, this was this woman's reality and the reality of any other person with whom she may have shared her story, as well as the reality of the charter school leader and of any other person with whom she shares her perspective.

Another limitation was my own role in the research. I am a White, blonde, middle-class, educated mother who lives in the community that I studied. I believe that living in the community helped me to gain access to youth and their parents in public housing, but it is also possible that their perceptions of me shaped their stories. I do not believe that this was a problem for the research, because overall the findings from all groups of people were consistent (with findings from the gentry and school founders and observations triangulating findings from individuals in public housing). However, it is impossible for me to know this with certainty. In individual interviews I attempted to build a rapport with participants quickly, discussing our children, community events, or food. Most of the interviews ended with participants sending me the names and contact information for more people to be interviewed. The issue of my role was particularly apparent when I conducted the focus group with eight public housing residents who worked at the Center. When I began the focus group session, a few of the young men were grumbling a bit angrily about the research. When I said that I wanted to "understand the experiences of youth in public housing in Hoboken," one young man muttered that I should trade places with him. I also noticed in this group that they seemed to feel awkward discussing issues that they experience with gentry in the community. Here is a section of the transcription in which I attempted to deal with this:

Interviewer: And that's fine, you can call them that [yuppies]. I know I kind of look like a stereotypical yuppie. Let's just put that out on the table. I totally am, I have a toddler in town. I'm one of those yuppie moms with a toddler in a stroller.

Participant 7: Oh, you are?

Interviewer: Yeah I am. But you can totally bash them, that's OK with me. Honestly, this kind of research I'm doing needs to be done because there's too much research about yuppie families and where are they going to send their kids to school and what are they doing, and not a lot of researchers look at families that live in public housing or children of color growing up in neighborhoods like this. So I'm trying to get that perspective, and I didn't grow up in Hoboken. I didn't even grow up in New Jersey, so I have to talk to other people. So I'm really relying on you guys to be experts, so it's totally OK—I won't be offended by anything you say.

After I said this, there was laughter and then the entire tone of the focus group shifted from some outward animosity toward me to outright openness about their experiences and issues with injustices in the community. This dynamic was at times evident with teenagers who in their interviews made comments such as “no offense” when referring to gentry or White people in the community. To counteract these issues as much as possible, I use the words of the residents and their interpretations throughout the dissertation, rather than my own.

Sample size is always an issue with which researchers grapple. Initially, I had intended to include a large-scale survey as part of a mixed-methods research design. However, shortly into data collection I realized that a survey would not provide useful information. Issues such as diversity and school integration are very difficult to inquire about on a survey because some people interpret the word “diversity” as implying a mixture of racial/ethnic/socioeconomic backgrounds, while other people use it as a code word for a school that is majority minority and/or low socioeconomic status (SES). In addition, I wanted to ask questions about what parents knew about charter schools, their names, and the pedagogical philosophies. These complex issues are more easily

explained than written on a survey. Some parents might know part of a name or be able to tell me the location of school, but on a survey this would be a challenge. Access to low-income public housing residents was a challenge, and I did not want to squander opportunities for access on a survey that would not provide adequate data. I also realized that my desire to “delve more deeply into those individuals, settings, subcultures, and scenes, hoping to generate a subjective understanding of *how* and *why* people perceive, reflect, role-take, interpret, and interact” (Adler & Adler, 2012, p. 8) was a far better fit for qualitative research than mixed-methods research.

When I decided against conducting a survey, I did not enter into this with a fixed number of interviews to conduct. As I began to interview and draw conclusions, I had to rethink constantly which other participants would benefit the analysis so that I could address the research questions and draw conclusions (Becker, 2012). So I deliberately sought a parent from public housing with children who attended a charter school when this became the focus of the research. I also sought those involved in the early childhood education system in town and an open house for the program when I realized how relevant early childhood education was to the study. When I reached saturation, I stopped collecting data.

Sample size and selection bias were limitations to the youth participatory research component in particular. The group with whom I worked was small—10 students, all teenagers who planned to work with the younger children at the Center during summer camp. That said, they had all lived in either HHA (eight of them) or subsidized housing (two of them) and some had had to overcome very difficult personal situations.

There were major limitations to the Abbott preschool research. The quantitative data for Hoboken preschool attendance presented by the New Jersey Department of Education were incomplete. Further research would be required to gain a thorough understanding of the demographics of preschool attendance and opt out in Hoboken.

Chapter 4: From the “Armpit of Hudson County” to the “Gold Coast”: Hoboken, NJ

I, too, once lived in Hoboken; that was, before I was forced out by a suspicious fire. I lost everything I owned. If you yuppies wouldn't pay such high rents, knowing that people before you were paying low rents, we never would have lost our homes. It's too late to do anything about it now, but one day a new generation will want to move in, and I hope you people suffer as much as we did. (Letter to the Editor, Sonia Rodriguez, August 24, 1986, as cited in Barry & Derevlany, 1987, p. xiii)

Over the past 50 years Hoboken has undergone a dramatic transformation as this small city in the shadow of Manhattan has experienced wholesale changes in its economic and cultural landscape. This chapter summarizes these changes and examines the demographics of Hoboken, the history and possible future of public housing in the city, and how the case of *Abbott v. Burke* has had educational and environmental consequences for the community.

Brief History of Hoboken

Hoboken, known as the Mile Square City (although its actual land area is 1.28 square miles), sits across the Hudson River from Manhattan. Hoboken extends from the Hudson River on its east side to the Palisades cliffs on the west and is limited by Jersey City to the south and west and Weehawken to the north. The population is slightly more than 50,000.

In 1658 Peter Stuyvesant purchased the land between the Hackensack and Hudson Rivers from the Lenni Lenape. After the land changed hands a few times, in 1784 Colonel John Stevens bought and named Hoboken. Stevens turned Hoboken into a playground for Manhattan's wealthy elite. Hoboken became a place for them to escape the increasingly congested and diverse city. It was a resort community, a place to picnic by the water or even own a summer home (Hoboken Historical Museum and Cultural

Center, 2012). New Yorkers even came to Hoboken's parks to duel (Gabrielan, 2010). All of this was possible because of technological advancements that facilitated travel between Manhattan and Hoboken.

Then, as a result of the Industrial Revolution and the city's waterfront location, Hoboken became a rail-and-water transportation hub. In its industrial heyday, "Factories outnumbered telephone booths, longshoremen walked to work, and people sitting on stoops knew it would rain when they smelled the coffee brewing at the Maxwell House factory" (DePalma, 1990, p. B1). Tea bags, coffee, steel, Wonder Bread™, and Tootsie Rolls™ (made by American Sweets®) were produced in Hoboken. It was a "bustling port" with factories, railroad, some 270 saloons, and mansions on Castle Point owned by "shipping magnates and robber barons" (Barry & Derevlany, 1987, p. xvi). Because of factors such as available industrial work, ports, and its location near Ellis Island, Hoboken became increasingly diverse, boasting a sizable German, Irish, and later Italian immigrant population. In 1910, 70,000 people lived in Hoboken; during World War II, 100,000 people worked in Hoboken during the day (Barry & Derevlany, 1987).

Hoboken's 20th-century history mirrors that of many Northeastern cities in the United States. In the second half of the 20th century, the face of the city began to change. The 1950s and 1960s saw increasing numbers of Puerto Ricans moving into Hoboken (Gale, 2006). As Puerto Ricans arrived, tension arose between the "new" Puerto Rican immigrants and the "old" immigrants, who were competing for jobs that were rapidly disappearing to the suburbs of western and southern New Jersey. In the post-War era, as technology advanced—specifically, the containerization of ship cargo and air travel—Hoboken's industries began to decline (Hoboken Historical Museum and Cultural Center,

2012). Shipping now required more space than Hoboken's docks could offer. After World War II, as many companies left the city, many Hoboken residents also departed for the suburbs, moving into single-family homes with yards and automobiles. The Italian immigrant and other White working-class populations decreased. In 1949 the HHA was founded, and in the 1950s public housing projects were constructed in Hoboken. According to Barry and Derevlany (1987), "By 1971, the thriving port of Hoboken had dwindled to a single cargo pier" (p. xvii), and by 1975 a mere 15,000 people worked in Hoboken during the daytime. By 1970 Puerto Ricans made up 40% of the population in Hoboken (Henry, 2002) and had a 40% unemployment rate (Barry & Derevlany, 1987).

These demographic and economic changes generated problems in Hoboken. As in so many other cities, crime increased as the disenfranchised were left behind in cities. In the 1970s "Hoboken was so broken down that some residents feared for their lives" (Hu, 2007, p. 1). A survey in 1971 found that drugs, crime, and housing conditions were the major concerns of residents (Barry & Derevlany, 1987). Hoboken was called by some the "armpit of Hudson County" (Foster, as cited in Holl, 2007, para. 4) with "the lowest per capita income, highest unemployment, [and the] lowest education levels" (para. 6). It also had the highest per capita welfare rate, and 90% of those who were working made \$2.50 an hour or less. Hoboken residents had the highest rates of diseases in New Jersey, including heart disease, respiratory disease, tuberculosis, and diabetes (Barry & Derevlany, 1987). According to Barry and Derevlany (1987), in the 1970s the perception of Hoboken was a "hopeless, leftover orphan of the Industrial Age. . . . [It] was not a city—it was a punch line, a place synonymous with Nowheresville" (p. ix).

In an era that showed no shortage of urban unrest, in 1971 in Hoboken Puerto Rican residents, upset with their SES and treatment by the police department, held sit-ins and demonstrations and, according to Barry and Derevlany (1987), “a few sorry marches dubbed the ‘Hoboken Riots’” (p. xix). Indicative of the social unrest of the time, remaining White longshoremen, upset with these events and with the Mayor’s reaction, “counter-rioted” and “demanded to be deputized and issued guns” (p. xix). The Mayor did not agree to this (and then lost in the next election).

A few decades later this trend reversed in Hoboken. Sometime around 1976 or 1977, stories of a Hoboken renaissance emerged in papers nationwide (Barry & Derevlany, 1987). A burgeoning art scene developed in Hoboken in the 1970s and 1980s and, as is often the case, paved the way for gentrification that became increasingly apparent in the 1980s and 1990s. As crime statistics decreased, real estate prices increased. Developers began by reviving historic brownstones in the city. Yet, “Once revitalization made Hoboken a ‘desirable’ place to live, market forces exploded. Around 1980, there was a rash of suspected arson-for-profit fires, and tenements began to be converted to condominiums at a breath-taking rate” (Axel-Lute, 2001, para. 6). Between March 1978 and November 1981, 41 people, including 30 children, died in arson-related Hoboken fires—with no convictions. Sister Norbetta was quoted in *The New York Times* in 1981 asking, “Is this the price we have to pay for renaissance?” (as cited in Laura, 1981, para. 9). Eventually, developers simply bought out existing tenants (Axel-Lute, 2001).

In 1981 a *New York Times* article, “Hoboken Change Bringing Problems,” detailed the fear felt by long-time Hoboken residents over “condomania.” At that time a

one-bedroom condominium on Bloomfield Street cost \$70,000, when in 1978 a four-story Victorian home on the same street cost that amount (Schept, 1981). In 1981 there were 41 condominium units; by 1986 that number had grown to close to 2,000 (Barry & Derevlany, 1987).

This gentrification led to displacement of residents, as well as homelessness and racial, socioeconomic, and generational tensions that continue in 2013. “It was always our city, our town . . . now all of a sudden it isn’t. It’s a Greenwich Village West. How many of them look down at us poor deprived people. We don’t need them telling us how to eat with a fork” (Miss Ratti, as cited in Schept, 1981, p. 16). Letters to the editor of the *Hoboken Reporter* reflected many of the conflicts between old-timers and gentrifiers at the time and were published in Barry and Derevlany’s (1987) book *Yuppies Invade My House At Dinnertime: A Tale of Brunch, Bombs, and an American City*. One telling exchange involved a “yuppie” resident, William W. Daniel, who commented, “When I go walking late at night on the deserted street of Hoboken, my upward glance is greeted by a troubling sight: a cluster of athletic shoes, hung by the laces from utility lines, revolving mutely in the breeze. My question is, why?” Old-timer Paul M. Drexel responded to Daniel, in a heated exchange that continued from June through September,

I can just see you tapping your loafers in disgust as you stare up. . . . in case you haven’t noticed (and I doubt you have), this is a city you live in, young yuppie. Kids in places like Hoboken, Brooklyn, and Manhattan do have rituals like tossing their old “rides” over telephone wires. (Barry & Derevlany, 1987, pp. 41-46)

As the field notes below demonstrate, this research was not immune to tensions between “Old Guard” Hoboken and “yuppies” that still exists, particularly regarding politics.

Tonight I meet two women who are non-Asian minorities and born and raised Hobokenites for interviews at a local restaurant. They are regulars here and seem

to know everyone. They are clearly known by, and in with, the “Old Guard” in Hoboken. Sitting behind us is a former assistant superintendent, next to us is a very politically powerful family in town (a member of which served prison time). On the other two sides of our table are local business owners of old Italian establishments. Everyone has politics on the brain tonight as Election Day is less than two weeks away. Throughout the evening when people come in I hear them discuss with pride being “born and raised.” A local developer who is also involved in politics and education comes in and tells us how he is “very upset” at the direction in which this town is going, the patrons nod in agreement. Everyone in here tonight (who is sharing their opinion) hates the mayor (considered a yuppie), they mock her and one man calls her “scarecrow.” One of the tables laughs when they hear where I live because the mayor is my neighbor. One man jokes that she was “something like magna something, first in her class in school . . . must have been from clown school with that face.” They are advising anyone who will listen how to vote on the election (against the mayor and the changes she supports to the voting laws and for changes to the rent control laws). Two people come over to tell me to vote for whomever the two women I am with advise me to vote for. At the end of the night the waitress told us the meal was paid for by the one of the local business owners. (Field Notes, October 2012)

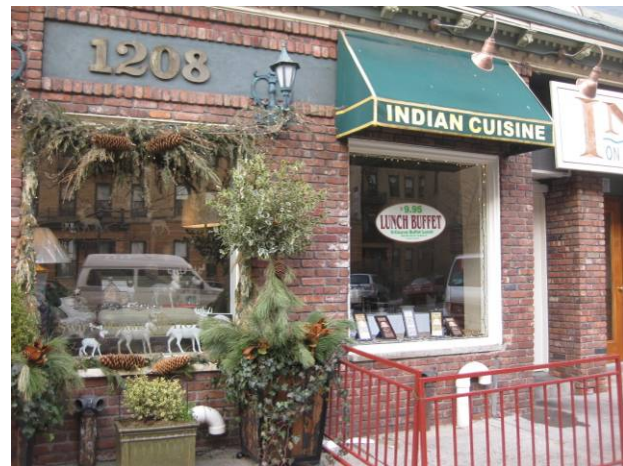
In the 1990s and 2000s, when development in Hoboken led to increased prices in the most desirable parts of the city, gentrification turned into super-gentrification (Lees, 2003) and artists and hipsters left Hoboken in search of more affordable neighborhoods, such as Jersey City. This is particularly evident along the waterfront in uptown Hoboken. Yet at the turn of the century Hoboken was considered, “the poster child for gentrification in the eastern U.S.” (Axel-Lute, 2001, para. 1). Hoboken was viewed as a prime example of a “rags-to riches transformation” (Hu, 2007) and the city “enjoys a reputation as a hip and urbane yet quaint and neighborly place” (Nieves, 1994, p. B1).

Hoboken in 2013 tells a tale of two cities. It is a predominantly wealthy, middle-to upper-middle class, well-educated, white collar, White community. However, in Hoboken there is still a sizable economic and racial minority (11%) which lives below the poverty level (U.S. Census Bureau, 2012). Yet to walk along Hoboken’s waterfront on a beautiful summer day, it appears that Hoboken is once again filling its historical role as a “playground for the elite.” Gentry residents push expensive baby strollers, sunbathe,

run races, drink frozen cocktails, and eat gourmet food from food trucks on the pier
(Photographs 1 and 2).



Photograph 1. Downtown Washington Street in Hoboken (October 2011).



Photograph 2. Uptown Washington Street (January 2013).

In 2013 Hoboken's once-thriving industrial waterfront (Photograph 3) is lined with expensive apartment buildings, businesses, and the luxury W Hotel (Photograph 4). This area is called the Gold Coast (Photographs 5 and 6). Beyond the waterfront are restaurants, taverns, boutiques, and many brownstones and luxury buildings (Photographs 1, 2, and 7). Like most urban areas today, Hoboken is not the same city it was in the first half of the 20th century. As Gale (2006) put it, Hoboken is leaving behind its "blue-collar, manufacturing past and embracing a white-collar, postmodern future" (p. 120).



Photograph 3. Reminders of the waterfront's history (January 2013).



Photograph 4. The luxury W Hotel on the Hoboken waterfront (January 2013).



Photograph 5. Luxury buildings lining the Hoboken waterfront uptown (January 2013).



Photograph 6. Advertisements for The Shipyard Luxury Apartment Rentals, Uptown Hoboken (January 2013).



Photograph 7. First Street in Hoboken (November 2009).

Throughout Hoboken, even from the far west side where Photograph 8 was taken, there are views of New York City. There are public parks throughout Hoboken, as well as public walkways and piers on the Hudson River waterfront. The piers host events such as summer concerts, exercise classes, a harvest festival, and movies under the stars (Photograph 9).



Photograph 8. View of New York City (March 2013).



Photograph 9. View of lower Manhattan from a waterfront walkway in Hoboken, showing Pier A and Pier C (January 2013).

Hoboken was hit hard by SuperStorm Sandy in October 2012 (Photograph 10).



Photograph 10. Madison Street in Hoboken 2 days after Super Storm Sandy (October 2012).

Demographics of Hoboken

Hoboken’s transition from an industrial city to modern-day “playground for the elite” is evident in the 2010 census and American Community Survey data for the city. According to these data, in 2010 Hoboken had 50,005 residents with a median age of 31.1 years. Hoboken is a young city, with 50.4% of residents between the ages of 18 and 35 years. Hoboken is 82.2% White, 7.1% Asian, 3.5% Black or African American, and 15.2% Hispanic/Latino (Figure 1).

Hoboken is a predominantly white-collar community. The percentage of residents with a bachelor’s degree or higher is 72.4% (compared to 35% for the state of New Jersey), with 24.1% of those working in the FIRE (finance, insurance, or real estate) industries. About 89.9% of residents work in managerial and professional or sales and office jobs, while 6.1% work in service occupations, and 4% in construction, extraction, and maintenance and production, transportation, and material moving occupations.

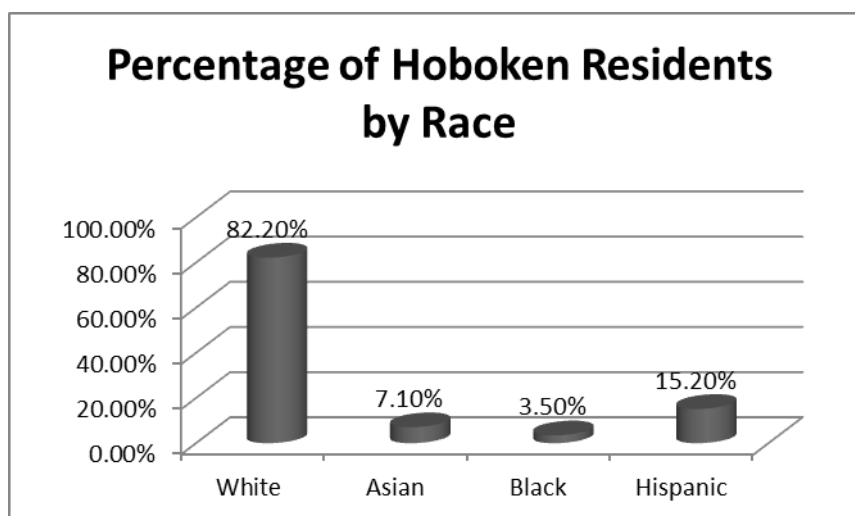


Figure 1. Percentages of Hoboken residents by race. Source: Data Dictionary, Census 2010: Statistics, Hoboken, NJ, by U.S. Census Bureau, 2013, retrieved from <http://www.socialexplorer.com.proxy.libraries.rutgers.edu/pub/reportdata/TableSelection.aspx?Census=2010&Reportid=R10469921>. Note: These numbers do not total 100%; these are selected categories and there is overlap.

In Hoboken, 20.5% of residents make \$200,000 or more annual salary. The median home value for owner-occupied units is \$567,700 and the median family income \$104,789 (compared to the New Jersey average of \$71,180; U.S. Census Bureau, 2012).

Figure 2 shows that Hoboken's population is dominated by residents between the ages of 18 and 45. Stevens Institute of Technology is located in Hoboken, which increases the number of college-age residents. It is also evident that the percentage of school-age children decreases significantly as children get older, a phenomenon that is explored in Chapter 5. The under-5-year-old population is 6.8% of the total population, while the entire age 5-to-18 population is 5.5% of the total population (U.S. Census, 2013).

Demographics in Hoboken have changed since 2000, with an increased proportion of families with young children. Children under 5 years old are a rapidly

growing demographic in town; in 2000 they were just 3.2% of the population but in 2010 were 6.8% (Palasciano, 2013a). The large number of children under the age of 5 is apparent in the number of mothers and fathers pushing strollers throughout Hoboken.

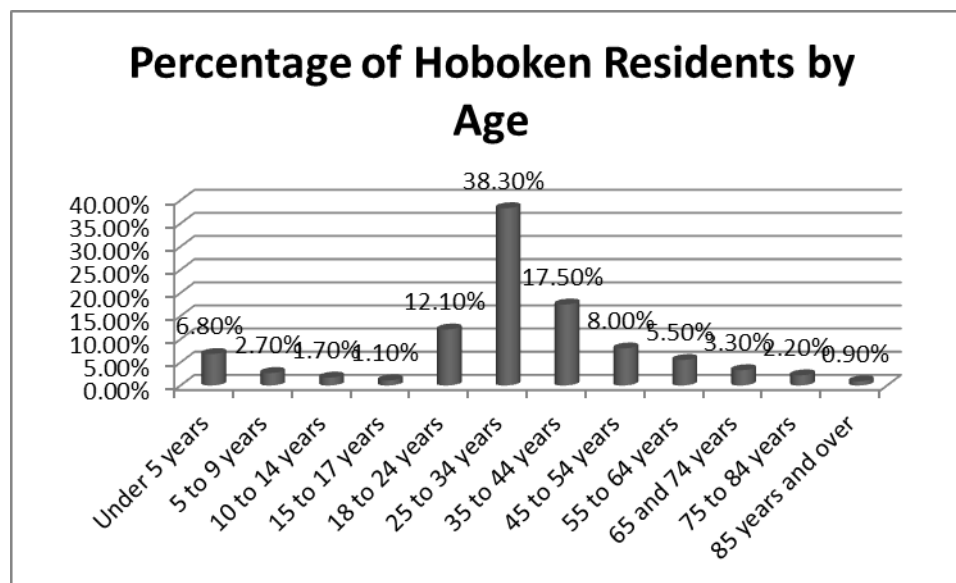


Figure 2. Percentages of Hoboken residents by age. Source: *Data Dictionary, Census 2012: Statistics, Hoboken, NJ*, by U.S. Census Bureau, 2013, retrieved from <http://www.socialexplorer.com.proxy.libraries.rutgers.edu/pub/reportdata/TableSelection.aspx?Census=2010&Reportid=R10469921>

“The Stroller Mafia” is a term commonly used to refer to the large groups of gentry mothers pushing strollers in Hoboken (Ritchey, 2010). A single male realtor reflected on the changing demographics in town and told me that the strollers lined up are “more intimidating than the bikes lined up outside a biker bar.” (See Photograph 11).

Although more gentry are staying in Hoboken and having babies in Hoboken, a large number of gentry families still leave the city when their children are older. Figure 3 demonstrates a large number of gentry families (loosely identified here as “White only”) who leave Hoboken as their children are older. The below-poverty population of



Photograph 11. “The Stroller Mafia,” Hoboken (January 2013).

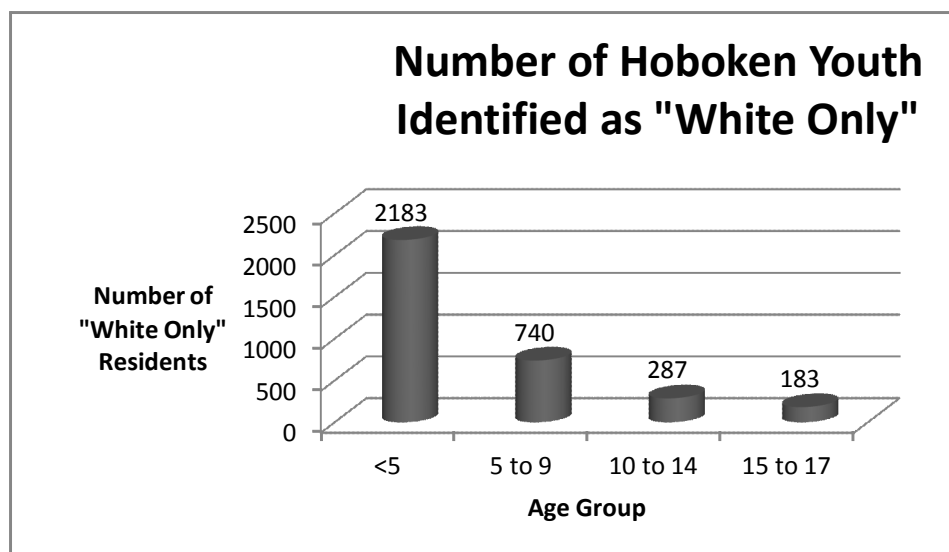


Figure 3. Number of Hoboken youth identified as “White only.” Source: *American Community Survey 3 Year Estimates 2009-2011*, by U.S. Census Bureau, 2012, retrieved from http://factfinder2.census.gov/faces/tableservices/jsf/pages/productview.xhtml?pid=ACS_11_3YR_B17001&prodType=table. By category, “Sex by Age White Alone (not Hispanic or Latino), adding together “White only” males and females.

school-age children (Figure 4) is much higher than that of children under the age of 5, once again demonstrating the tendency of gentry families to leave Hoboken as their children become older.

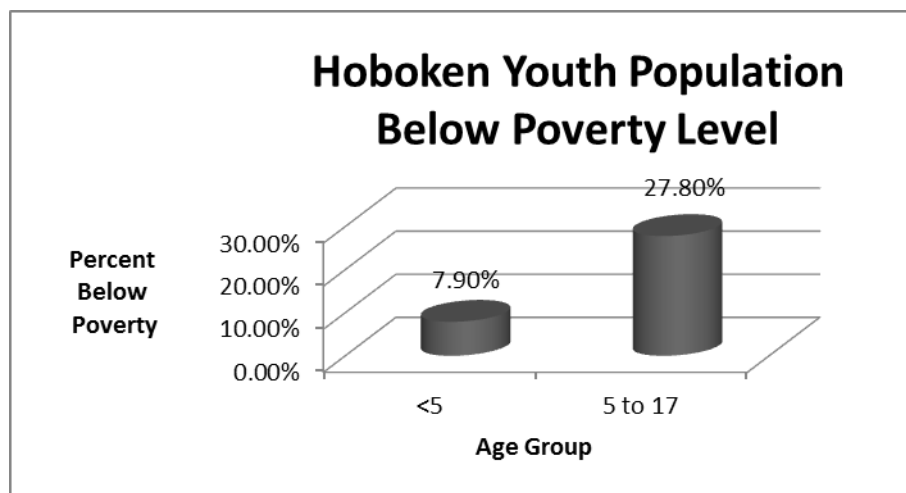
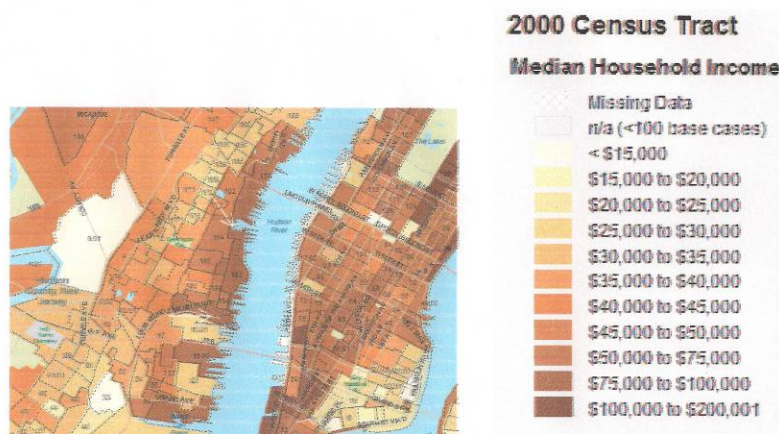


Figure 4. Hoboken youth population below poverty level. Source: *American Community Survey 3 Year Estimates 2009-2011*, by U.S. Census Bureau, 2012, retrieved from http://factfinder2.census.gov/faces/tableservices/jsf/pages/productview.xhtml?pid=ACS_11_3YR_B17001&prodType=table. By category, "Sex by Age White Alone (not Hispanic or Latino), adding together "White only" males and females.

Figure 5 shows the relative wealth of Hoboken (centered on the west bank of the Hudson River between the white arrows), particularly the waterfront; the darker the color, the wealthier the area, as indicated in the key below the map.

According to a local realtor whom I interviewed who tracks up-to-date real estate data, the average sales price of a three-bedroom apartment in Hoboken in September 2012 was \$800,000; the average sales price of a two-bedroom apartment was \$525,000.

This doesn't include new construction, so if you add in the actual new construction being sold directly by the sales office . . . for example Toll Brothers. Anything being sold by Toll, add another 25% on to that. So a three-bedroom at Hudson Tea or Maxwell [Place] is well over a million.



Source: U.S. Census, 2000

Figure 5. Census map of median household income for Hoboken and surrounding area. Source: *Quick Fact Finder*, by U.S. Census Bureau, 2000, retrieved from <http://www.socialexplorer.com.proxy.libraries.rutgers.edu/pub/maps/map3.aspx7g=0>

Hoboken is predominantly a White middle- to upper-middle-class community.

One gentry woman interviewee who described herself as mixed ethnicity (Black and Hispanic) reflected on the racial demographics in Hoboken:

When I think about having a kid and being around in the day-time, I wonder if I would fit in with the moms. Especially being married to a white man there's a possibility my child will look different. So on the one hand I would stay in Hoboken because we are a mixed household and we're going to have a child who is mixed like me so I would want to stay somewhere where there are other people of color [as opposed to less diverse suburbs]... When I walk around Hoboken in the daytime, like, where are the brown moms? But whatever I mean I say all that knowing we're so close to New York and the wonderful little city that we have.

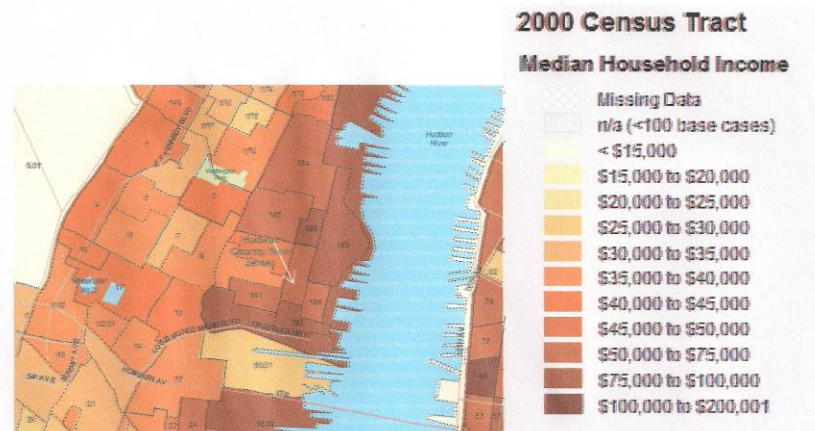
In Hoboken today the gentry can stop by a gourmet food truck for a gluten-free, organic snack for their dog (Photograph 12), which they can also sign up for dog swim lessons or send to summer camp on a farm, and for which they can utilize a “pet taxi service” that “is available to pick up and drop off day care guests in Hoboken” (Hoboken Unleashed, 2013). Gentry mothers can send their designer strollers to the Stroller Spa (n.d.) for a full service cleaning for \$89.99, attend music classes (or frequently send



Photograph 12. A food truck for dogs located next to Church Square Park (July 2012).

nannies to attend) for newborns with live bands that cost \$545 for a session (Kidville, 2013), and use day cares facilities overlooking the Hudson River that have infant rooms with descriptions such as this one: “As a child woke up from her nap, she looked up and listened to the flute player in her room. She stared and swayed to the sound of the familiar lullabies” (Beyond Basic Learning, 2011, para. 3).

Yet this is still in many ways a tale of two very different cities. Despite the statistics, which demonstrate that Hoboken is a young, upper-middle-class community, and its reputation for successful gentrification, 11% of the population remains below the poverty line. As Figure 6, using 2000 census tract information, shows, within Hoboken, the area in the southwest (shown with a white arrow) is home to a public housing campus that can be seen in the lower median income in that section.



Source: U.S. Census, 2010

Figure 6. Census map of median income in Hoboken. Source: *Quick Fact Finder*, by U.S. Census Bureau, 2000, retrieved from <http://www.socialexplorer.com.proxy.libraries.rutgers.edu/pub/maps/map3.aspx7g=0>

Public Housing in Hoboken

Set against the extreme wealth of Hoboken today, in the southwest corner of the Mile Square City sits the HHA main campus (Figure 7). Hoboken still has traditional

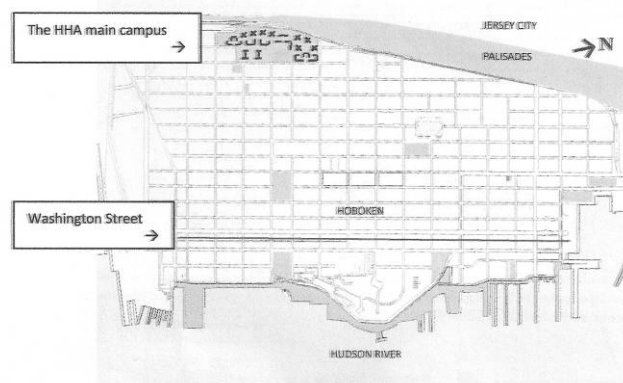


Figure 7. Map of Hoboken highlighting the Hoboken Housing Authority Main Campus, the focus of this dissertation. Source: *Vision 20/20: A Sustainable Plan for Public Housing in Hoboken, NJ*, by Hoboken Housing Authority & Marchetto Higgins Stieve PC, 2010), Hoboken, NJ: Author.

low-rise and high-rise public housing buildings, none of which has been demolished. There are 1,353 units of public housing in Hoboken on 28 properties in six locations. The main campus of the HHA (which is the focus of this research) comprises family housing—not senior housing—and is made up of 806 units in 21 buildings on 17 acres in the southwestern portion of the city. The developments that are the focus of this study are Andrew Jackson Gardens and Harrison Gardens. These units include 11 three-story garden apartments, 8 seven-story T high rises, and 2 ten-story H high rises.

The HHA was established in 1949, with construction of public housing taking place in the 1950s. Andrew Jackson Gardens was built in 1952 and Harrison Gardens in 1959. The HHA also administers 326 Section 8 vouchers, as well as the public housing buildings (Housing Authority of the City of Hoboken, 2012). In the 1970s Joseph Barry's company, Applied Housing, built approximately 800 subsidized housing units in Hoboken (Schept, 1981). Today, Applied Housing and the HHA are the two dominant affordable housing providers.

The public housing neighborhood is aesthetically more pleasing than traditional urban public housing is generally perceived to be. In fact, several people with whom I spoke did not know that the garden apartments, with their mansard roofs and shutters, were public housing. The high rises, on the other hand, have the modernist “tower-in-the-park” feel of traditional public housing. They are an example of what Franck and Mostoller (1995) labeled an “open space” design approach and, as such, are feared by many gentry. This neighborhood is as far from the Hudson River and as far from Washington Street as possible while still within the confines of the city of Hoboken. The

Hudson-Bergen Light Rail, Patterson Plank Road, and the Palisades cliffs provide a backdrop for public housing (Photographs 13 through 16).



Photograph 13. The Hudson-Bergen Light Rail and the Palisades cliffs border the public housing campus to the west (March 2013).



Photograph 14. Hoboken Housing Authority campus (March 2013).



Photograph 15. Hoboken Housing Authority campus (November 2009).



Photograph 16. Views of the Hoboken Housing Authority campus (January 2013).

In Hoboken before gentrification, and in the early days of gentrification, the gentry considered it dangerous to live anywhere “west of Willow” (still an expression that some interviewees referenced). As gentrification gradually moved west of Willow, the area of Hoboken perceived as dangerous and undesirable by the gentry shrank. Now there are luxury condominiums surrounding public housing, in some places on three sides (Photographs 17-21). Also, the light rail used by the gentry is west of public housing, and there is a large ShopRite[®] just northeast of public housing. One of the HHA participants



Photograph 17. Hoboken Housing Authority main campus on the far right next to high-end condominiums (November 2009).



Photograph 18. Luxury housing adjacent to Hoboken Housing Authority main campus (March 2013).



Photograph 19. Hoboken Housing Authority on the left (October 2011).



Photograph 20. Hoboken Housing Authority campus on the left (January 2013).



Photograph 21. The entrance to the building next to public housing (January 2013).

described the area around the Center: “They’ve gotten more rich over here, because this used to be a junkyard and now it’s a condo.”

On my way to the Center today, since it was nice out, I had the opportunity to observe a large number of people hanging out on Jackson Street [a street adjacent to the public housing campus]. There were older men gardening and young men hanging on Jackson street eating and sitting in what looked like a LaZBoy or sofa chair in front of some of the strip mall stores. I noticed signs against loitering on the outside of some of these stores. Right next to public housing was a UHaul with two young white men moving into an apartment. Inside their UHaul I could see Mac computer boxes and expensive suitcases. (Field Notes, June 2011)

The streets bordering public housing—Monroe, Jackson, Marshall, and Harrison—are still considered “undesirable” by some gentry. Gentry Hoboken residents can frequently name, or are at least familiar with, all of the streets in Hoboken except those directly surrounding public housing. One woman, who had just bought a home on Madison Street (the street before Monroe when walking west), said “I live on the last

street in Hoboken,” completely discounting the four streets west of her home. I had conversations with residents who do not want to go to parks on Jackson Street or are not interested in looking at real estate on Jackson Street. Frequent conversations in town, on blogs and other outlets, discuss whether it is safe to move onto those streets, how safe it is for children, and the cost benefit of living on one of the streets near public housing.

The local realtor explained,

There is some resistance to being back on Madison and Monroe because of safety concerns, because there is more crime on the west side of town. But there are many families who recognize that in order to be able to get an apartment big enough that they can afford that that’s the tradeoff they have to make. So, there’s a relationship between location and price, and if they’re willing to give up a little bit on the location they can get something more affordable.

Figure 8, which shows the street grid, is from a popular Hoboken blog, Hoboken411. The blogger labeled what he sees as the neighborhoods within Hoboken and gave each of them a nickname. He labeled the public housing neighborhood from Jackson to Marshall “The Projects” and wrote, “The Projects: Hey, people call it the projects. What do you want?” (Hoboken 411, 2007).

There is a divide between the immediate area around public housing and the rest of Hoboken. Even though gentry-owned apartments surround the campus, there remains a distinctly different feel to this area. Next to Mama Johnson Field is a live poultry store, Super Chicken[®], with a distinct odor; across the street from the campus are two small strip malls that house the Big Banner Plaza with the Big Banner Super Market (a local market), a Chinese restaurant residents call the “Chinese store,” a dollar store, a liquor store, a nail salon, a pizza shop, and a laundromat (Figure 9 and Photographs 22 and 23). It is a distinct visual contrast to the rest of Hoboken. One of the teenage participants described his neighborhood as “Pretty unsanitary at times . . . alcohol bottles, cigarette

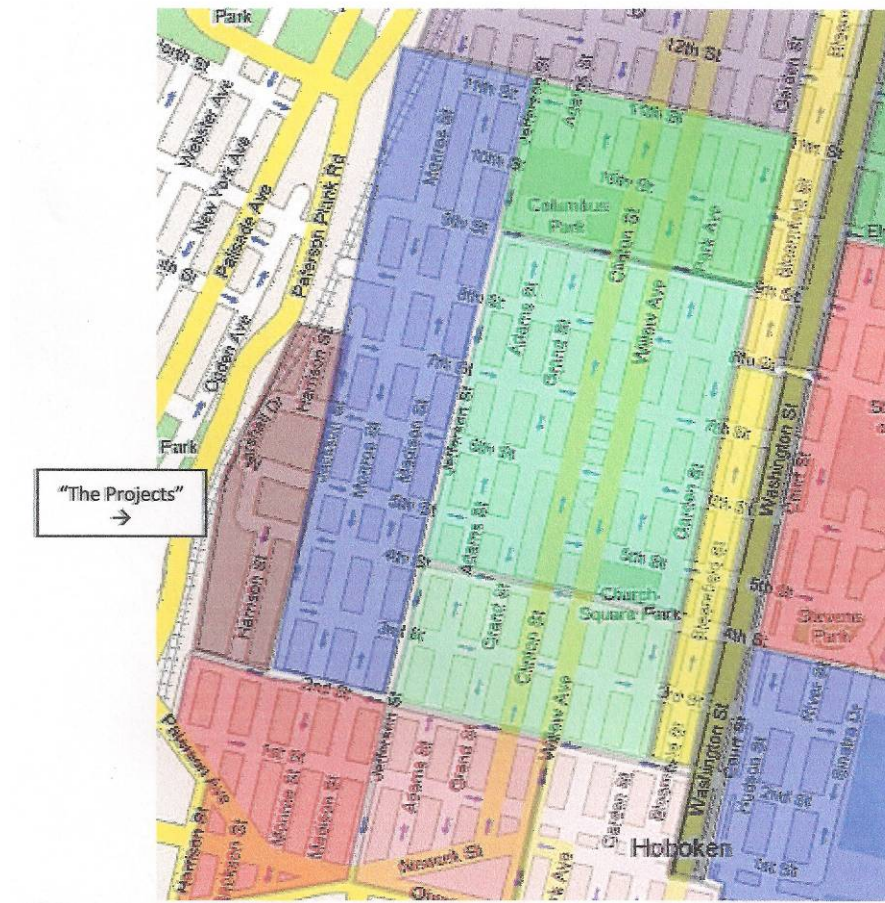


Figure 8. The Hoboken street grid and “Hoboken ’Hoods.” (Source: *Ruckus 5th and Jackson Comments*, by Hoboken411, 2007, retrieved from <http://hoboken411.com/>)

butts, dog droppings, on occasion the chickens from over there will come running loose.”

A guest blogger’s entry on the local Hoboken411 blog speaks to this divide:

Don’t want chicken that’s been sitting in the cooler for a couple of weeks? Head on over to Super Chicken of Hoboken, nestled in the picturesque southwestern corner of Hoboken. (And we have plenty of pictures to prove it’s picturesque.) It’s located at 655-4th Street, between Jackson and Harrison Streets, just across from the supermarket and the liquor store” (Bridget, 2008, para. 1-2)

Figure 4.11 Location of Shops in HHA Community

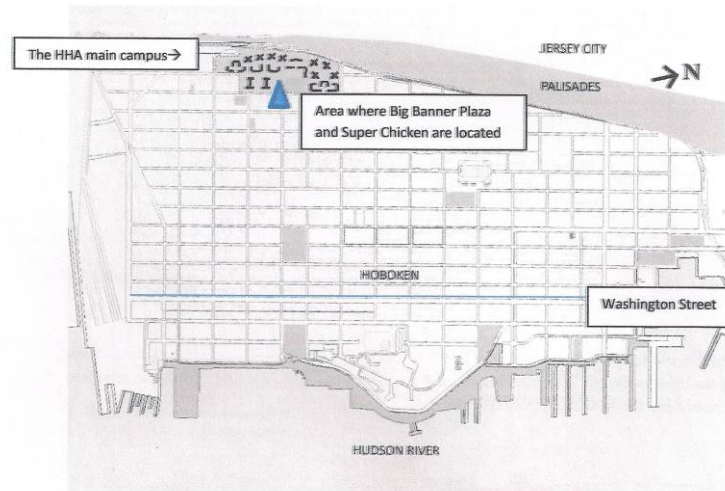


Figure 9. Location of shops in Hoboken Housing Authority community. Source: *Vision 20/20: A Sustainable Plan for Public Housing in Hoboken, NJ*, by Hoboken Housing Authority & Marchette Higgins Stieve PC, 2010, Hoboken, NJ: Author.

One visitor I took on a walking tour of this area described it as feeling like a different country.

This area contrasts to the sidewalks of Washington Street teeming with expensive strollers, outdoor cafes, and well-heeled gentry. For just a few short blocks I feel as if I am back in East Harlem or the South Bronx. As a White woman, I am suddenly a racial minority. (Field Notes, January 2013)

People (usually males) hang out on the sidewalks along Jackson Street. In December there was an ornate Christmas display complete with a Nativity and a man in a Santa costume. Once, at a gentry adult softball game at Mama Johnson Field, I mentioned to a member of the gentry that I planned to go into the Big Banner Market for my research and he said, “This would be a good time, since your husband is nearby with a baseball bat” (Field Notes, June 2011). This is indicative of how many of the gentry feel about this area. When I asked the gentry whom I interviewed whether they had walked



Photograph 22. Typical scenes around the Hoboken Housing Authority neighborhood (January 2013).



Photograph 23. The neighborhood around the HHA main campus (January 2013).

around this area, the answer was usually negative, unless they lived in one of the apartment buildings very close by.

There is also a different style of social interactions within this neighborhood.

As I walk down Jackson Street today, I pass two middle-aged, African American men standing outside the strip of stores, one smiles at me and says, “Good afternoon, how are you? Have a beautiful day. Happy holidays in case I don’t see you. God, you’re gorgeous.” As I continue down the street a man with a thick accent passes by and comments, “Oh, you don’t like the cold, huh?” Then at the next corner I see a young Black woman with five children of different ages, one little girl is pushing a baby stroller. The adult walks into the street and starts dancing with the crossing guard, who is cracking up, then she pushes the crossing guard aside and takes over her job directing cars, all the while dancing. Then a grandmother walks by with her grandson.

On the next block I see two large adult Black males standing on either side of an entrance to one of the low-rise public housing buildings. I notice that there are seasonal wreaths hanging from the outside of the public housing buildings. (Field Notes, December 2012)

Today I went into the Big Banner and was struck once again by similarities to East Harlem; the music, the food selection, the ambiance inside all felt like East

Harlem, where I used to work. There is bulletproof glass surrounding the check cashing area. (Field Notes, January 2013)

Aesthetically, this area appears different from the rest of Hoboken, but it is also architecturally different because, typical of the design of traditional public housing complexes of this era, the superblock housing does not follow the grid of the streets (Franck & Mostoller, 1995; Photographs 24 and 25). Looking west on many of the streets in the city, the last thing seen in Hoboken are the public housing high rises. Although there is now high-end private housing alongside public housing, the western side (the light rail, Patterson Plank Road, and the Palisades Cliffs) lend the main public housing campus an isolated feeling.



Photograph 24 (left). The street grid of Hoboken (March 2013). *Photograph 25* (right). Looking west, the view of public housing, which is off the street grid of the city (December 2012).

When I began this research, there was an arch at the light rail stop at 2nd Street, theoretically welcoming visitors and residents to Hoboken as they exited the light rail. But the arch was blocked by a fence separating the public housing campus; residents of public housing could not walk directly to the light rail without circling the block and nonresidents could not walk through the arch or take a shortcut through the southern end of the public housing campus (Photograph 26). During the study, at the urging of the HHA's executive director, the fence was taken down and now the arch is an accessible shortcut (Photograph 27).



Photograph 26 (left). The arch from the light rail when there was a fence (October 2011). *Photograph 27* (right). The arch from the light rail after the fence was removed (January 2013).

There is a plan, call “Vision 20/20: A Sustainable Plan for Public Housing in Hoboken, NJ,” which was designed to completely transform the public housing neighborhood in Hoboken. According to the executive director, Carmelo Garcia, “Vision 20/20 will be an inclusive, community-based process to take us from the projects to

prosperity” (HHA & Marchetto Higgins Stieve PC, 2010, p. 8). This plan calls for harnessing private and public capital to turn the HHA campus into a Choice Neighborhood, a “sustainable, transit-oriented, mixed-use, mixed-income neighborhood” (p. 8). The first and final phases of the plan are depicted in Figures 10 and 11. These Choice Neighborhoods (described in Chapter 2) are based on the perceived successes of HOPE VI. The plan for the HHA involves demolishing existing housing to make way for mixed-income development. The plan defines phased development as follows:

At the completion of each phase, the number of new units would exceed the number of decommissioned units, ensuring that existing residents will not be displaced and, at the same time, providing for a variety of mixed-income housing options, allowing for upward mobility within the neighborhood and a deconcentration of poverty. (HHA & Marchetto Higgins Stieve PC, 2010, p. 69)

The plan calls for the creation of “homes, not “public housing” (HHA & Marchetto Higgins Stieve PC, 2010, p. 75). Figure 12 shows the proposed plan for creating this vision through “context-sensitive building styles.”

This plan won a New Jersey Future Award in Smart Growth in 2011. It clearly reflects current thinking on deconcentration of poverty (Goetz, 2011), as this quote from the chairman of the HHA, Jake Stuiver, shows: “There’s sort of a general view that conglomerating all people in a community who are of a low-income level isn’t good for them. . . . It’s a more positive approach to have people be among other people of different income levels” (as cited in LaMarca, 2012, para. 21).

In conducting this research, I heard many different opinions about this plan. Born and raised Hobokenites commented that they had been hearing rumors of this for years but it never happens; other public housing residents had heard that it is happening and expressed concerns and fears about it. One HHA resident said that it sounds good to her



Figure 10. Phase 1 (first phase) of the Vision 20/20 Plan. Source: *Vision 20/20: A Sustainable Plan for Public Housing in Hoboken* (p. 70) by Hoboken Housing Authority & Marchetto Higgins Stieve PC, 2010, Hoboken, NJ: Author.



Figure 11. Phase 10 (final phase) of the Vision 20/20 Plan. Source: *Vision 20/20: A Sustainable Plan for Public Housing in Hoboken* (p. 74) by Hoboken Housing Authority & Marchetto Higgins Stieve PC, 2010, Hoboken, NJ: Author.

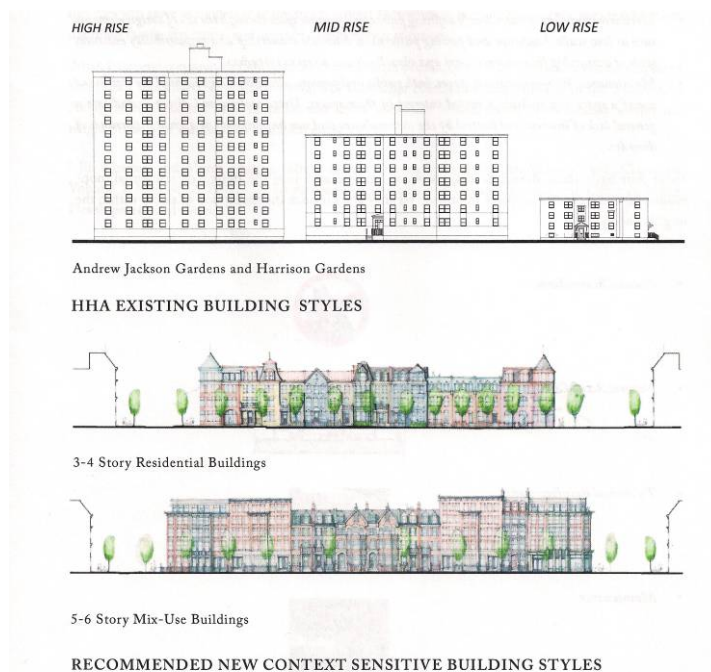


Figure 12. Vision 20/20 Plan's changes to the style of building. Source: Hoboken Housing Authority & Marchetto Higgins Stieve PC, 2010, p. 75.

as long as she can get a home there. As LaMarca reported in the *Hudson Reporter*,

For years, rumors have floated around about people being forced out of the projects, as has happened in other communities when buildings were revitalized. Stuver said that residents needn't worry about being permanently vacated from their housing units. "I would never support anything that will cause the quantity of housing stock to be lowered or for people to be displaced from their homes long-term," said Mello, adding there may be situations that would call for temporary displacement. "I would not want to disrupt people's lives any more than necessary." (LaMarca, 2012, para. 31)

As of December 20, 2012, there was a Request for Qualifications (RFQ) for a developer of a new 44-unit rental residential building on the public housing campus, with an approval of the developer by the HHA Board scheduled for February 14, 2013. In the RFQ this development was referred to as the "first phase" of the Vision 20/20 plan. The Executive Director of the HHA reported that damage sustained from SuperStorm Sandy,

as well as the threat of future equipment damage from storms, could aid in acquisition of funding for this project (Field Notes, February 2013).

Abbott v. Burke

The educational and environmental consequences of the *Abbott v. Burke* (Abbott) school finance equity case for Hoboken are explored in this dissertation. *Abbott* was a landmark lawsuit in New Jersey and in the nation. With their decision in the *Abbott* case the New Jersey Supreme Court made history. After 30 years of battles over school financing and equity, the result was a progressive set of reforms and parity for the 31 urban “Abbott Districts” in New Jersey. Hoboken was one of those districts.

This battle for equity began in 1970 *Robinson v. Cahill* (*Robinson*). In *Robinson*, lawyer Harold Ruvoldt argued that, because school financing in New Jersey was based on property taxes, it violated the state’s constitution. Residents in wealthier districts spent a smaller portion of their income on school funding while still significantly outspending urban school districts. Ruvoldt maintained that this violated the *thorough and efficient clause* of the state constitution. In 1875 the New Jersey constitution was amended to include this particular clause: “The Legislature shall provide for the maintenance and support of a thorough and efficient system of free public schools for the instruction of all the children in the state between the ages of five and eighteen years” (as cited in Yaffee, 2007, p. 30). In 1973 the New Jersey Supreme Court ruled that the system of funding public schools discriminated against poor urban districts. The judge wrote, “There is no compelling justification for making a taxpayer in one district pay a tax at a higher rate than a taxpayer in another district, so long as the revenue serves the common state educational purpose” (as cited in Yaffee, 2007, p. 30).

Despite the court ruling and a 1975 Public School Education Act to provide state funding, lawmakers did not comply. In 1976 the Supreme Court shut down the public school system for 8 days, forcing the legislature to enact an income tax to fund the Act. In 1981 the Education Law Center (ELC) joined the fight to reform the school funding formula in New Jersey. In *Abbott*, a class-action lawsuit, the ELC argued on behalf of 20 plaintiffs from 10 families in four districts that the 1975 Public School Education Act was not providing all students with a *thorough and efficient education*. They argued that there was a “continued overreliance on local property taxes” (Yaffee, 2007, p. 99) and that the funding shortages in poor districts caused the most needy students to have dilapidated school buildings, large class sizes, and underpaid, inexperienced teachers. Beginning in 1985, in a series of decisions (a “tortuous legal odyssey”; Yaffee, 2007, p. 4), the Court gradually moved toward ordering and attaining funding parity for the Abbott Districts.

In the *Abbott II* decision, Chief Justice Wilentz maintained that, if *thorough and efficient* applied only to basic skills, parents in the suburbs would stage a revolution when they learned that a basic education was all their children were entitled to receive. This decision created the original 28 (later 31 [Education Law Center, 2013]) low-income, urban Abbott Districts. After years of relentless perseverance, the seminal *Abbott IV* decision in 1997 “ordered spending parity for urban districts and a detailed study of their programmatic needs” (Yaffee, 2007, p. 267). The ruling required that funding for urban Abbott Districts match the average of the I and J Districts (the districts in the state with the highest achievement). The court ruled that, to meet this funding, the Abbott Districts had to spend only as much money as they could raise through a formula of property taxes and the state would pay the difference through income taxes. The 1997-1998 school year

was the first time that spending was equalized between urban and suburban districts. In 1998 *Abbott V* ordered whole-school reform, supplemental programs, full-day kindergarten and preschool, and facilities construction for Abbott schools.

The Abbott remedies were strikingly detailed and comprehensive. The mandates also broke new ground in school finance and education policy in the United States. No other state had equalized—or assured ‘parity’—in the education resources provided to children in its lowest-wealth communities at the level spent in more affluent ones. (Education Law Center, 2013, para. 15)

In the years following these decisions, the case has gone back to court numerous times in attempts to resolve disputes over financing, implementation, and other related issues. The 2008 School Funding and Reform Act (SFRA) essentially replaced Abbott, and the districts, including Hoboken, are now referred to as former Abbott Districts, but are still to be given additional funds. Alas, the fight continues. In 2011, the New Jersey Supreme Court found that the State’s failure to fully fund the School Funding Reform Act of 2008 caused “instructionally consequential and significant” harm to at-risk students in districts across the state. The Court also found that the harm to New Jersey schoolchildren from the funding cut is not a “minor infringement” on their right to a thorough and efficient education, but “a real substantial and consequential blow” to that right. In Abbott XXI, the Court ordered that the formula be fully funded in FY12 for students in the 31 high-need, urban districts” (Education Law Center).

Despite Hoboken’s gentrification, which makes it the most expensive and gentrified of the 31 Abbott Districts, it is still considered, with the others, a former Abbott District. As such, it offers free preschool for 3- and 4-year-olds in the district. Hoboken’s status is seen by many, particularly those who do not support *Abbott*, as an indication of the problems with *Abbott* (Hu, 2007).

Chapter 5: School Choice and Segregation in a Mile Squared

A sense of inferiority affects the motivation of a child to learn. Segregation with the sanction of law, therefore, has a tendency to [retard] the educational and mental development of negro children and to deprive them of some of the benefits they would receive in a racial[ly] integrated school system. (*Brown v. Board of Education*, 1954, Opinion, para. 12)

Hoboken is a gentrified community with a majority of middle- to upper-middle class residents and an increasing number of families with school-age children (Palasciano, 2013a). As such, Hoboken would be an ideal community for socioeconomic (and, with it, racial) school integration, which would benefit the low-income children of color in the community (Coleman, 1966; Rumberger, 2005) and the children of the gentry, as well (Civil Rights Project, 2006; Mickelson, 2002; Stuart Wells, Jellison Holme, Revilla, & Atanda, 2009). Beginning with the Coleman Report, researchers have consistently found that “all children do better in middle-class schools” (Kahlenberg, 2006, p. 4). There is a large academic achievement gap between children from low-SES backgrounds and those from middle-class backgrounds. However, children from low-SES backgrounds who attend middle-class schools outperform students from middle-class backgrounds in low-SES schools (Kahlenberg, 2006). Racial segregation also has demonstrated detrimental effects on children of color. Condrón (2009) argued that racial segregation is the largest influence on the Black/White achievement gap.

However, low-income children and children of color are not the only ones who benefit from attending desegregated schools. In today’s globalized diverse world, children of the gentry also benefit from experiencing life’s diversity in the school. A statement to the Supreme Court signed by 533 social scientists and researchers maintained the following:

Racially integrated schools prepare students to be effective citizens in our pluralistic society, further social cohesion, and reinforce democratic values. They promote cross-racial understanding, reduce prejudice, improve critical thinking skills and academic achievement, and enhance life opportunities for students of all races. (Civil Rights Project, 2006, p. 2)

Daniel Tatum (2003) argued that in an “increasingly complex and pluralistic society” it is necessary to “interrupt patterns of social isolation” in education (p. 214). Researchers have also found that both Black and White students benefitted academically from desegregation (Mickelson, 2002).

This chapter investigates whether or not the middle-class demographics in Hoboken have created middle-class schools. The chapter analyzes the demographics of the district-run public schools in Hoboken to determine whether they mirror the demographics of the community, who attends which district schools, why both gentry and public housing parents select the schools that they select, inequalities among district schools, and the demographics and reputation of the public preschool program.

District School Choice

Hoboken is a “choice district,” which means parents can choose among the public elementary schools in town; placement is not made based on residency. There are three district-run public elementary schools serving Kindergarten through seventh grade, three charter schools (discussed extensively in Chapter 6), one district-run high school that serves Grades 8-12, and one charter high school. (There is also one school, Joseph F. Brandt Primary School, that serves only preschool students and Kindergartners in the district.) When parents register for the district-run public elementary schools, they designate which school they would like their children to attend. When there are more requests than places available, children are placed chronologically based on when the parents made the request. No school transportation is provided if parents choose a school

that is not the most accessible one to them (however, the whole city measures just 1.28 square miles).

Just 11% of the Hoboken population lives below the poverty level and approximately 27.8% of school-age children (ages 5–17) live below poverty level (U.S. Census Bureau, 2013).⁵ Although travel is sometimes inconvenient, all of the schools in Hoboken are accessible on foot or by public transportation. If the demographics of the district-run public schools even remotely reflected those of the community, the schools could be integrated. However, the reality is that the demographics of the district-run public schools do not match the demographics of the community.

Who Attends Which District-Run Public Schools?

The three district-run public elementary schools serve a population that is majority minority and majority eligible for free/reduced-price lunches. Their standardized test scores are generally below the state average, with Connors exhibiting the lowest scores (State of New Jersey Department of Education, 2010-2011). Demographics for the Hoboken district-run public elementary schools and Hoboken High School are presented in Tables 3 and 4, respectively. The locations of district-run public schools in Hoboken are shown in Figure 13.

Connors, the school that is geographically closest to public housing, serves the highest proportion of free and reduced-price lunch students (94%), the highest percentage of Black or Hispanic students (93%), and the lowest proportion of White students (6%).

⁵ I calculated this using *American Community Survey 3-Year Estimates 2009-2011*. I looked at the category “Poverty Status in the past 12 months by sex and age” and added below-poverty males and females ages 5-18 and then used this number out of the total population 5 to 18 years old to determine the percentage of school-age children below poverty.

Table 3

Demographics of Hoboken District-Run Public K-7 Elementary Schools

School	N	% free lunch	% free/reduced-price lunch	Racial/ethnic background ^a	NJASK 3 LA ^b (2010-2011)	NJASK 3 Math (2010-2011)	Student suspensions	Faculty mobility
Wallace School (Wallace)	680	52%	60%	8% Black 55% Hispanic 30% White	62.1% Proficient or Advanced	74.5% Proficient or Advanced	2%	11%
Salvatore R. Calabro School (Calabro)	137	49%	59%	9% Black 50% Hispanic 36% White	70.6% Proficient or Advanced	94.2% Proficient or Advanced	0	5%
Thomas G. Connors School (Connors)	270	88%	94%	30% Black 63% Hispanic 6% White	50% Proficient or Advanced	72.2% Proficient or Advanced	10%	15%

Note. NJASK = New Jersey Assessment of Skills and Knowledge, LA = Language Arts, Math = Mathematics. Source: *School Report Cards*, by State of New Jersey Department of Education, 2010-2011, retrieved from <http://www.nj.gov/education/data/>

^aSelected categories, percentages do not equal 100. ^bExamples of test scores. I used Grade 3 because this is the grade before a second significant dropoff of gentry families (the first dropoff occurs around age 5).

Connors is deemed unacceptable by the gentry and is segregated; the other two schools⁶ are experiencing a degree of “tipping in” by the gentry, as shown in Table 3. Stillman (2012) defined “tipping in” as “the process of school integration in a gentrifying

⁶ I generally focus on Wallace as the public school of preference for the gentry; for the most part, this seems to be because Calabro is so small (one class per grade) that many gentry do not see it as a realistic choice. In fact, one gentry parent said that she did not want to put Calabro as her first choice because she assumed that she would not get it and was then afraid that her child would then be placed at Connors, so she and her friends requested Wallace.

Table 4

Demographics of Hoboken High School

School	N	% free lunch	% free/reduced-price lunch	Racial/ethnic background ^a	Student suspensions	HSPA LA 2010-2011	Graduated with both parts of HSPA 2010-2011	Average SAT scores 2010-2011
Hoboken High School	674	61%	72%	83% Black or Hispanic 15% White	35% (state average 13%)	27.6% Partial 70.3% Proficient 2.1% Advanced	50.8%	385 Math 380 Critical Reading 386 Writing

Note. NJASK = New Jersey Assessment of Skills and Knowledge, LA = Language Arts, Math = Mathematics. Source: *School Report Cards*, by State of New Jersey Department of Education, 2010-2011, retrieved from <http://www.nj.gov/education/data/>

^aSelected categories, percentages do not equal 100.

neighborhood through the compounding choices of many gentry parents” (p. 11).

According to Stillman’s three stages of tipping in, Wallace is at “Stage 2 Integration: A changing school—a solid, stable presence of gentry children enrolled in the early grades who have GPs [gentry parents] that are very active in outreach to other neighborhood GPs” (2011, p. 30).

Hoboken is already a gentrified community, not a gentrifying community, and this research indicates that many of the gentry deem no public schools as acceptable options, particularly not for the middle school and high school grades. A small group of White residents ardently support the public school system; some were born and raised Hobokenites, some are gentry. These men and women speak at Board of Education

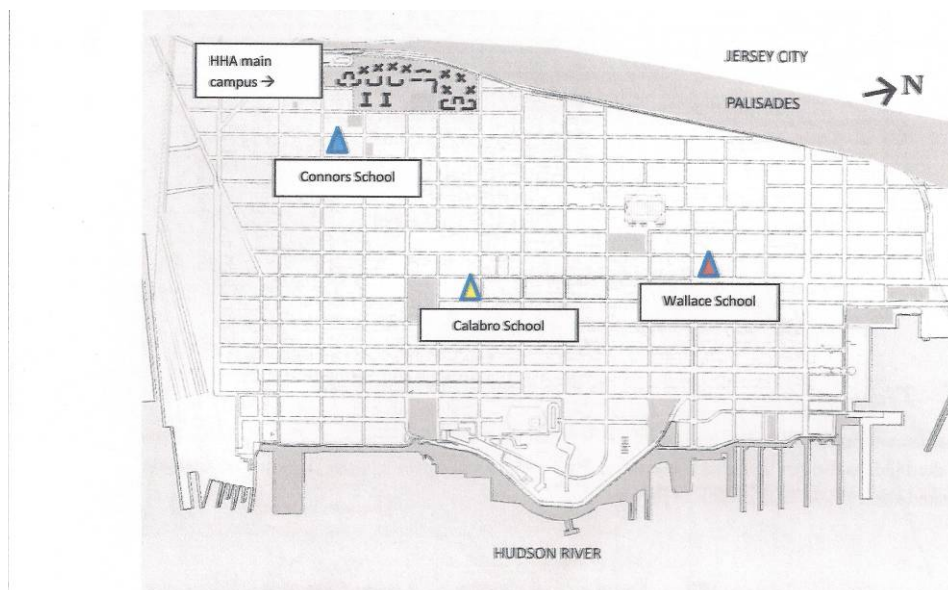


Figure 13. Locations of district-run public elementary schools in Hoboken, 2013.

meetings, serve on the Board of Education, and write on the moms group blog about the positive experiences of their White children at Hoboken High School. Yet, during data collection I did not meet one White gentry parent who had not applied to a charter school at some point and who did not express concern about their educational choices when their children reach middle school and/or high school.⁷ A realtor said, “I don’t know anyone who is not born and raised in Hoboken who has sent their kids to the public high school

⁷ I interviewed one born-and-raised White Hoboken mother and one African American gentry mother who had never applied to the charter schools for their children. These two women were not advocates of charter schools from a philosophical and/or policy perspective and were very committed to public education. Both women were politically involved and their children attend(ed) Wallace and Calabro. One of these parents explained tellingly:

I also know that there are just some children that will never have the benefit of parental choice because for whatever reason their parents aren’t involved. And so that child will never have, you know, that choice, and they have to be educated in a public school system. Therefore every time we pull our children out we’re leaving those children. So I think, you know, for me either I could afford to pay for private school or she was going to public school.

here, of all the families I deal with.” A comment on a public local parenting website in answer to a question about navigating the Hoboken schools gives insight into the opinions of most gentry:

Over the last few years, things have gotten a little better for the younger ages. After about 10 y/o, going to public school in Hoboken is not for parents who wants [sic] to ensure their kids don’t slip through the cracks. (Hoboken Mommies 24/7, 2012, para. 4)

Even gentry parents who are now supporters of the district-run public school Wallace sheepishly admitted having applied to, or planning to continue to apply annually to, charter school lotteries. The mayor, who is aligned with the school board slate that is seen by many charter school advocates as “anti-charter school,” sends her children to Hoboken’s Elysian Charter School, and a Board of Education member aligned with the same slate was a founder of Elysian Charter School.

Despite the presence of other choices, low-income public housing residents overwhelmingly choose district-run public schools for their children. Given the option to send their children to more racially and socioeconomically integrated and higher-performing (as measured by standardized tests) district-run schools (Wallace and Calabro), most HHA residents choose their local school: Connors. In interviews with HHA parents of children in elementary school, all but one had children enrolled at Connors. One parent explained that her child had to attend Wallace because of his special education needs, but when that was no longer required, she moved him back to Connors. Another mother said that her sister works at Wallace and she herself used to work there, but she still chose Connors for her children because the most important thing was “being close, because that way I could keep an eye on them.” The one HHA resident who did not

choose Connors chose Wallace; when asked why, she explained, “I just feel like they would get a better education being away from the projects.”

Yet even Wallace does not represent the demographics of the community. There are several reasons the demographics of the district-run public schools do not match those of the community: the choices of parents in public housing, the economic capital of the community that allows gentry residents to choose options other than the public schools or to move away from Hoboken, the reputation of the district-run public schools, and the perception of the administration of the public schools. Neoliberal school choice policies in Hoboken have allowed school gentrification to be grossly uneven across the district, which has resulted in segregation within the district.

School Choice Decisions by Parents in Public Housing

Responses from HHA residents about choosing Connors for their children came down to issues of location, appreciation of the neighborhood school, a desire for their children to fit in, and then to discipline and administration. When asked why they chose Connors, the answers from HHA parents were most frequently location and so that they (or their neighbors) could keep an eye on their children.

Convenience is a serious consideration for families, when grandparents or busy or overburdened parents have to pick up children and drop them off at school. When asked why her grandson is at Connors, one participant stated, “Because it was closer to Grandma to drop him off and pick him up and help Mama out.” The mother whose child attended Wallace for special education switched him back to Connors when he no longer required the special services because “there was no bus, and I wasn’t able to walk to Wallace, so he’s here.” Wallace is about 0.93 mile from Hoboken Housing, while

Connors is about 0.21 mile. Many of these parents have to contend with children of different ages, and a long commute to school can be a burden especially, in the winter (Palasciano, 2013b).

The majority of mothers from the HHA who were interviewed had grown up there themselves, and many had attended Connors; they saw Connors as a neighborhood institution. Some even said, “I want them to go where I went.” Their HHA community is one in which the residents look out for each other and trust one another, but not necessarily outsiders. This means that attending the school closest to home gives parents a sense of safety and security.

Issues of discipline also came up repeatedly in the interviews, with HHA parents reporting either that they took children out of Connors because of discipline issues or that they were happy with the strict discipline at Connors.

Interviewer: Are you happy with Connors?

Participant: Yes.

Interviewer: What do you like about it?

Participant: The teachers—there’s new teachers, there’s a new principal, so things are more strict.

A father from Connors expressed satisfaction with the discipline now but had been unhappy with the prior school administration.

Interviewer: Are you happy with Connors?

Participant: Not really.

Interviewer: No? How come?

Participant: It’s just like, the kids and the school. Right now they have a new principal but he’s good. I like the way he’s working out because last year was a total disaster. But this year I think he’s got it on point.

An HHA mother explained, “I haven’t had any problems, she’s adjusted very well, and they have a new principal. He’s fair but stern. And so I haven’t had an issue.” These parents seemed to be happier with the discipline of the current principal, an African American man from the Newark Public School system, than with the previous principal, a White woman who had moved on to be the principal of Calabro. (This is particularly interesting, since some in the community were unhappy about the hiring of a principal from a school district, Newark, that they perceived as failing.)

Other parents also concerned with discipline expressed displeasure with Connors. A public housing resident employed by the Board of Education, expressed dissatisfaction with discipline at Connors:

Interviewer: Now, what did you like about Connors, why did you want your kids at Connors?

Participant: At first I liked the convenience because it was so close, and that was about it. Then, I didn’t like it any longer, so I personally took my kids to Wallace School.

....

Interviewer: So you opted for Wallace, you made that your first choice and they got in?

Participant: Yes.

Interviewer: And what did you like better about Wallace?

Participant: I liked the structure and the discipline.

Another HHA parent (whose children now attend a charter school) said that she had requested that her child be transferred out of Connors after a student with special educational needs had sprayed Lysol[®] in her child’s eye. She added that there were “distractions in the learning environment in first grade.” She noted, “I said, ‘Look, I don’t want my kid in this school.’ There was the physical harm, but also the distractions.”

While gentry parents are concerned with how involved they will be allowed to be in their children's school, this was not mentioned in any interviews with HHA residents. One HHA resident explained that she wished that she heard less frequently from her son's school and was less involved. Her son was in special education at Connors and she felt the teacher was too reliant on her.

With my son I've been visiting too much. . . . One Special Ed teacher [at another school] told me that if they call you too much, try to tell them to do their job. because sometimes they are supposed to work with the kid before calling you. Not just because he breathes bad and they want him to breathe this way, you have to go there.

When asked whether they are happy with Connors, HHA parents' responses ranged from simply "yes" to "for the most part" and "not really," with no parents saying effusively that they "loved it" (a very common response from interviewed charter school and private school parents). One new HHA parent speculated about where she would send her children: "I'll send them to Connors. It's a pretty good school." Often, these parents expressed a belief that what happens in the home is more important than school. One HHA mother reflected on Connors, "Unfortunately, it's not a good reputation, but I believe that everything starts at home." When asked about raising children in Hoboken, another HHA mother said, "That goes on the family, too; It's not Hoboken, it's how the family works, too."

Gentry Views on District-Run Public Schools and Opting Out

To understand the educational experiences of public housing residents in a gentrified community, it is necessary to examine the educational choices and experiences of the gentry. Most important to the gentry in when making school decisions is the reputation of the school and whether their children will fit in, given that reputation. The public schools, particularly at the middle and high school levels, have a reputation among

the gentry for serving low-income children of color exclusively. As one gentry parent put it, “The kids that go to the high school are only the kids from the Housing Authority.” Word of mouth and test scores are the two ways that most gentry parents draw conclusions about the district-run public schools. “I hear horror stories about the high school and that the bar’s not high, a lot of bad things . . . education may not be that big of a priority at home.” An African American mother born and raised in Hoboken whose children are in a private school said, “I wish there was a coalition of parents who would band together for a good middle school. Then I would not have my kids at a private school.” Another parent joked knowingly, “I know what you hear on the playground. If you don’t get into a private school or charter, your child is doomed for life.”

Gentry parents do not consider Connors for their children. Some gentry parents were open to the idea of sending their child to Wallace until fourth grade but expressed deep reservations about the quality of public schools beyond fourth or fifth grade. For high school, gentry parents who want to remain in Hoboken see county public schools with selective admissions policies as the best option. One father said, “If you do not want to pay tuition, you have to work your tail off and get into a school [such as High Tech or another selective public school].” He explained his family’s situation: “We’d much rather stay [in Hoboken], and that’s why we bought a three-bedroom. But the whole high school thing is scary, so we don’t know.” Charter school students seem to favor selective schools such as the public school High Tech or the private Hudson School. A list from Elysian Charter School of high school acceptances for school year 2011-2012 (which it said was still in flux/incomplete when compiled) showed no students attending Hoboken High School (although there had been four the year before), 10 students were accepted at High

Tech, 4 at Hudson School, 6 at St. Peter's Prep, and 3 at St. Dominic. Small numbers of students (one or two) selected a variety of other schools. A gentry woman who is a charter school teacher in Hoboken and resident of Hoboken said of the high school,

It should be one of the top high schools in New Jersey because we have this population of college-educated, swanky, Armani-wearing people who get on the PATH train every day and go to Wall Street. And it's true, right? I mean, it's just, it makes no sense to me that we should live in this affluent neighborhood and have the worst high school in the state of New Jersey. I don't get it. It's concerning to me as a taxpayer, as a teacher, and just as a resident.

Gentry parents hear rumors about the public schools, particularly the high school, and have limited experience with the schools on which to base their opinions. One charter school parent explained,

Unfortunately, the high school has several bad apples. We have a friend that did a speech over there. He said that while he was speaking they were cursing, they weren't paying attention, they were fighting, they were doing all this other stuff. And you've got to imagine that, if you're a teacher, day in and day out, of someone ignoring you, eventually you give up on the kids. And then it snowballs out of control. And then you become 280-something on the list [referring to Hoboken High School's ranking].

Gentry parents were not comfortable with their limited experiences with the district-run high school. A mother and father of children in the charter schools described an event that took place after a meeting designed to persuade gentry parents from the charter schools to send their children to Hoboken High School. This story demonstrates the disconnect that gentry parents and their children feel with the public school option.

Mother: We had just had that meeting about the high school and were like, "OK, that's great. We won't put it [Hoboken High School] completely off the list." So then the basketball teacher took them up there to watch a basketball game, and then a massive fight broke out where somebody bit another girl! And she came back going, "I will never go to that school!" That's scary for an 11-year-old to see.

Father: She was 10 at the time. And I had just come home from this meeting. I really drank the Kool-Aid that night. I was like, "Oh, it'll be great. Don't worry about it. We'll go for the others [selective schools] and if we can't [and have to do

Hoboken High School], it'll be fine." There was someone from the Science program, the guy from Social Studies, the lady from English, the principal . . .

Mother: I feel bad. It is sad that they can't get it together.

This mother also explained that her experiences in living very close to Connors had made her uncomfortable with the elementary school; she had never considered it for her children.

From being next to it [living very close by the school] anyway, just the language. I don't want to walk my children to school through that atmosphere, either. And just from other people [who] would say that they'd been in the classes and it's just not nice. Not where you'd want to picture your small children going to school every day.

Gentry parents frequently choose options other than the district public schools.

Charter schools are a popular option. There are private schools in Hoboken, and some parents send children "across the river" to New York City or to private schools in Jersey City or New York State. Parents engage in frequent conversations about how to "get into" private schools in town. One mother who was interviewed had gone back to work after removing her child from Wallace because she had been unhappy with the school and she needed extra income to cover the cost of private school tuition. This parent said that she could provide lists of friends who had moved out of Hoboken because of the schools.

While it is difficult to identify the precise reasons why gentry families choose to move out of Hoboken—a desire to raise their children in suburbia, more space, a yard, and so forth—the school system is a contributing factor for many. I asked a mother who was deciding whether to move now or in a few years if she would ever consider staying, and the first reason she cited for not even considering staying was the schools. The parents with whom I spoke who had children who were not yet 2 years old frequently asked each other, "When will you move?" and "Where?" A local realty group even hosts

monthly (and sometimes bimonthly) “Hoboken to the Burbs” seminars with realtors from the most popular suburbs. The gentry families that choose to stay indefinitely are the exception rather than the rule. Two gentry parents of young children reflected:

Participant 1: Of the families I knew who went to Wallace who [had children who] were in my daughter’s class, like half of her class is not back for first grade.

Participant 2: There definitely seems to be a lot more exodus than I anticipated.

Interviewer: And most of those [kids] go to charter schools [now]?

Participant 1: Charter, charter, private, charter, suburbs, suburbs.

Participant 2 (to Participant 1): You’re almost the only family left that I’d known before we went.

The fact that many families leave Hoboken when their children reach school age is evident in the 2010 Census and American Community Survey data, which show a clear difference between the number of children under 5 and those over 5 in Hoboken, and the number continues to decrease among older youth (Figure 14).

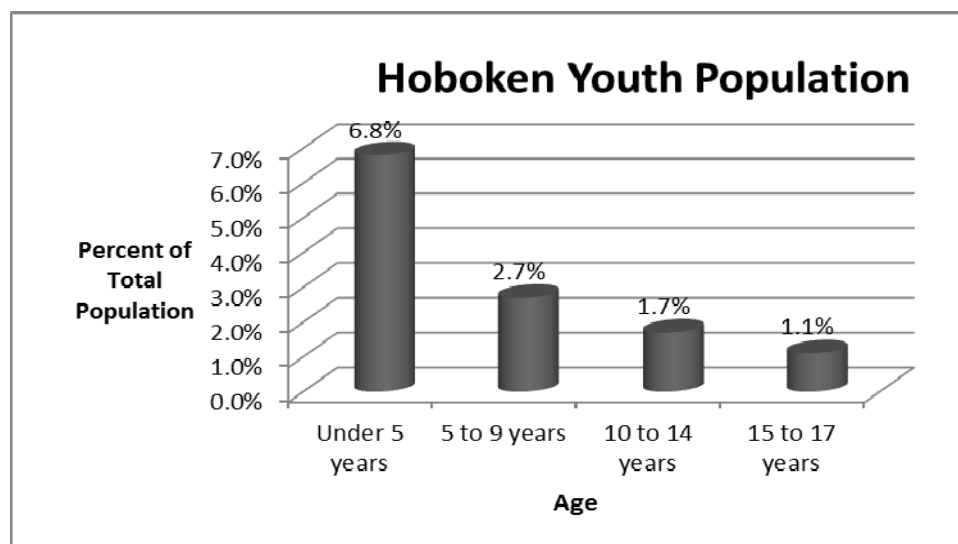


Figure 14. Hoboken youth population as percentages of total population. Source: *Data Dictionary, Census 2010 (Statistics, Hoboken, NJ)*, by . Retrieved from U.S. Census Bureau, 2013, retrieved from <http://www.socialexplorer.com.proxy.libraries.rutgers.edu/pub/reportdata/TableSelection.aspx?Census=2010&Reportid=R10469921>

There is clearly a dip when students start elementary school and then again around fifth grade. I heard repeatedly that families are somewhat comfortable with the schools until middle school. Some gentry mothers told me that it is “not the end of the world” if their children have to go to Wallace for a few years, but they plan to take their children out after elementary school to send them to the prestigious Hudson School for middle school. Parents also sometimes choose to move to the suburbs when their children are little because they want to start their children in a school system with which they are comfortable through high school. The number of students attending district-run public drops off between Grades 1 and 5 in all three of the public schools, as shown in Figure 15. The drop is particularly large at Wallace, the school most popular with the gentry, which is an indication that families who choose Wallace frequently leave the school system before fifth grade.

It is also evident that, among families that do stay in Hoboken when the children are in school, the parents frequently opt for private schools during those years. As shown in Figure 16, 23% of the K–12 students in Hoboken attend private schools (U.S. Census Bureau, 2013). As a point of comparison, Figure 17 shows Hoboken’s K–8 public school opt-out rate, compared to those of two other places. The first is Newark, another Abbott District that is demographically very different from Hoboken, and the other is Montclair, cited by a local realtor as one of the places to which Hoboken gentry frequently move, in part for better schools. Hoboken has a higher opt-out rate than both of these places—one a lower-income city and one a wealthy suburb. Hoboken also has a higher opt-out rate than neighboring New York City, where the rate for K–8 is 18.3% (U.S. Census Bureau, 2013).

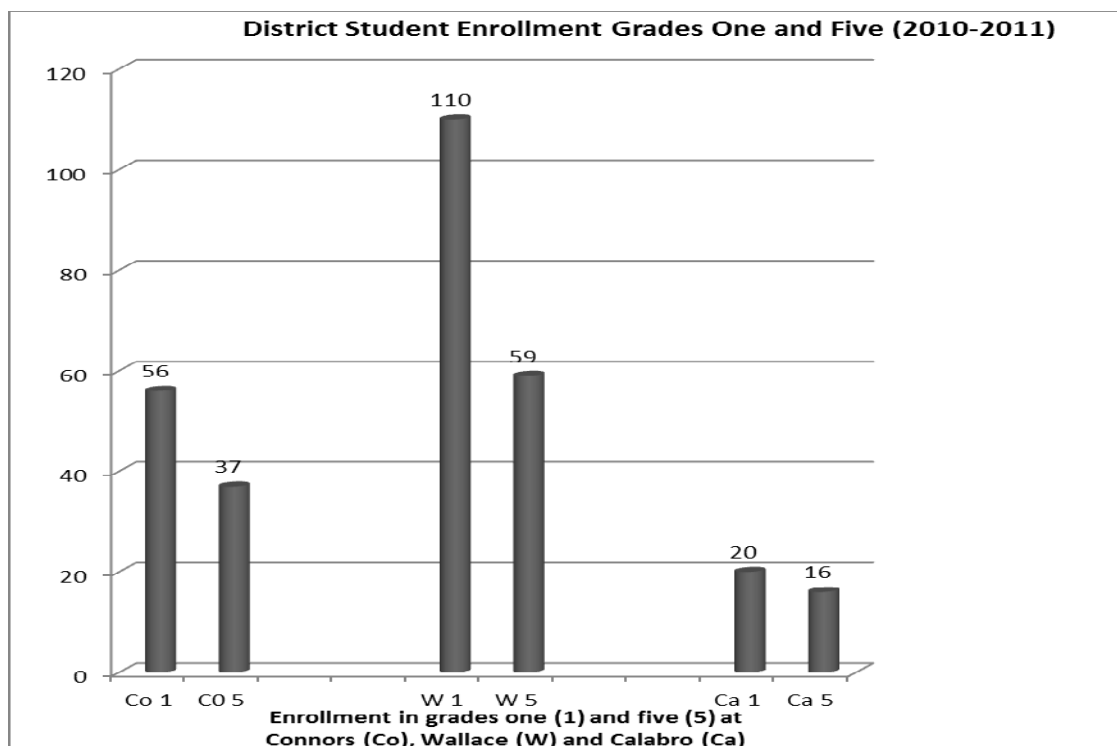


Figure 15. District-run public school student enrollment, Grades 1 and 5. Source: *School Report Cards*, by State of New Jersey Department of Education, 2010-2011, retrieved from <http://www.nj.gov/education/data/>

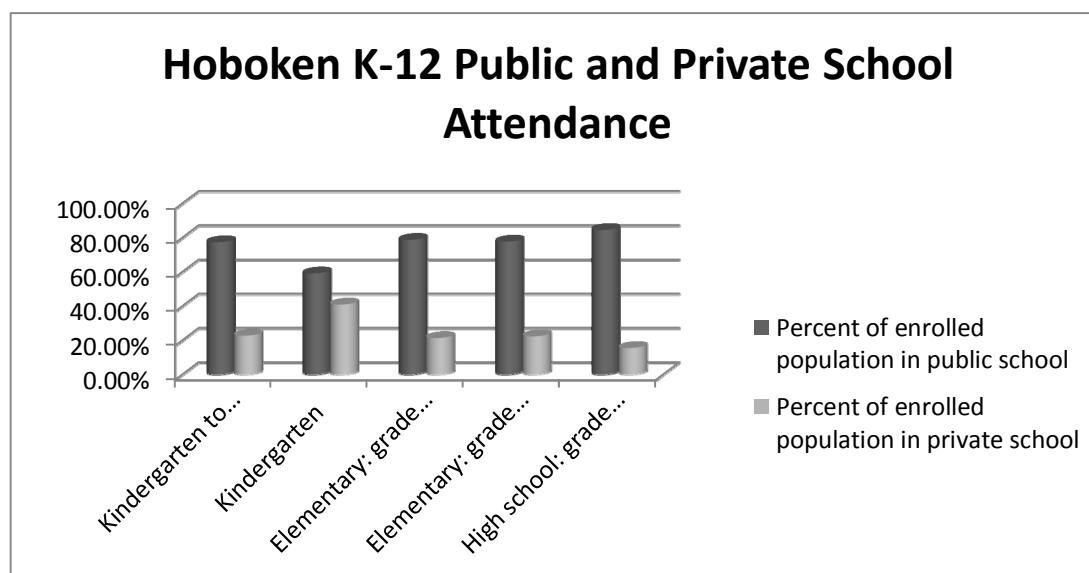


Figure 16. Hoboken K-12 public and private school attendance. Source: *American Community Survey 3-Year Estimate 2009-2011* by U.S. Census Bureau, 2012, retrieved from http://factfinder2.census.gov/faces/tableservices/jsf/pages/productview.xhtml?pid=ACS_11_3YR_B17001&prodType=table.

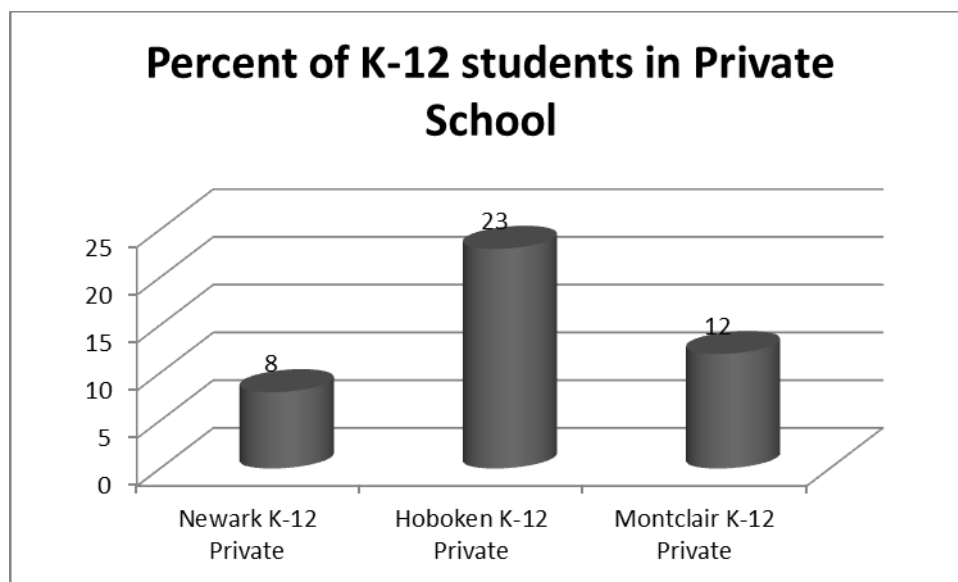


Figure 17. Comparison of Hoboken Public Schools opt-out rate with those of Newark and Montclair. Source: *American Community Survey 3-Year Estimate 2009-2011* by U.S. Census Bureau, 2012, retrieved from http://factfinder2.census.gov/faces/tableservices/jsf/pages/productview.xhtml?pid=ACS_11_3YR_B17001&prodType=table.

School Choice Decisions by Gentry Parents

Gentry parents, like those in public housing, make decisions based on reputation and what they think will be the best fit for their children. In addition, they look carefully at test scores and parent involvement and, to a certain extent, curriculum and less closely at issues of convenience and discipline. It is not a surprise that convenience is less of a pressing concern for gentry than it is for HHA residents, since many gentry have the economic capital to own cars or to afford other means of transportation. They are also more likely to have the job flexibility that allows them to coordinate getting children to and from school, or they can hire babysitters to assist with drop-off and pick-up. One parent detailed how she was able to send her child to HoLa (a dual-language immersion charter school) on the other side of town because she hired a babysitter to come every day to be with her younger child who is napping while she goes to pick up her older child at

HoLa. When looking at issues of their children “fitting in,” they see all of Hoboken, excluding the area around public housing and Connors, as a place where their children will fit in. One charter school parent explained her decision not to request Connors even though it was two blocks from her home: “I didn’t want to go obviously to Connors because I obviously didn’t hear great things about it.”

In terms of school choice among the district-run schools, test scores weigh heavily on the minds of gentry. One foreign-born Asian parent who had recently moved to Hoboken and lived next to Connors explained her decision to request Calabro: “Yes, first choice because of the rating for the school, and the second choice is Wallace. We couldn’t get the first one, so it was Wallace.”

During data collection, *New Jersey Monthly*’s rankings of New Jersey high schools were published, and Hoboken High School was ranked 298 out of 328 schools (in 2010 it was ranked 187)⁸ (Schlager & Staab, 2012). Several gentry participants mentioned this as evidence that their options were not improving. Also, in the *Wall Street Journal*’s online real estate news and development section, an article entitled “Biggest Back-to-School Purchase: A New Home” named the Hoboken schools number one among “America’s least attractive school districts”⁹ (Whelan & Chen, 2012). This type of negative press based on standardized test scores and measures of families with school-age children relocating does not help the district public-school “brand” for the gentry. A

⁸ This ranking was based on three factors: school environment (class size, student/faculty ratio, faculty advanced degrees, and advance placement courses; student performance (standardized test scores); and student outcomes (graduation rates).

⁹ This was determined simply based on a ratio of families with 5- to 9-year-olds and families with 0- to 4-year-olds, using 2010 data.

parent of three charter school students said about Hoboken High School, “I was just on a website today that was talking about the high school, and I saw the ranking of the high school. It went from 178 to like, 287 over the past 2 years. So right now, from elementary school to middle school, I feel really comfortable with it, but after that I don’t.”

Curriculum is another concern when gentry choose a school. One gentry mother told me what elements are most important to her when making school choices: “I’m more of a proponent of curriculum.” Parents who choose charter schools over district-run public schools reported the specialized focus and rigorous curriculum as a reason for the choice. It does not seem to be a *specific* curriculum or pedagogical style that appeals to them, since most choose to apply to all three very different charter schools, and often the private schools as well. Rather, the idea that their child will get something extra or sought after or rigorous appeals to them. One charter school founder explained of HoLa: “The thing is, if you look up bilingual schools, other than the dual-language charter schools that have recently been started, people pay through the nose for language immersion education; I mean the Lycée Français, for example, costs a fortune.” An administrator at HoLa said, “Your child will be receiving a premier education that elsewhere would cost between \$35,000 and \$60,000.” A charter leader involved with Elysian Charter School explained, “Well, Elysian’s kind of unique. It bills itself quite accurately as a progressive charter school. It had a vision of itself addressing the whole child, where it looks at children individually. It addresses individual strengths and needs of children.”

The other issue that gentry parents consider heavily when choosing a school is parental involvement; that is, *how they can be involved*. They want to give their children every benefit and privilege that they can, and they want to be involved with the school

and teachers. One gentry interviewee and parent of charter school students explained, “I think people just want to be more involved in their kids’ lives.” They are frequently dissuaded by what they see as an inability of the public schools to appreciate and utilize their social and cultural capital. I heard repeatedly that parents did not feel that Wallace welcomed parental involvement. In my interviews with gentry parents whose children did attend or had attended Wallace, I heard about lack of outreach to parents, inconvenient or nonexistent PTA meetings, “secret” parent leadership clubs, and cliques that run the school and leave new gentry parents feeling left out and unappreciated. One gentry mother of a student at Wallace said, “There was no PTA meeting until November!” and another said, “I signed up and I wanted to volunteer and be a class parent, and I got nothing. . . . I even went to the office; I said, ‘What’s the schedule of the PTA meetings?’ She said, ‘We don’t have PTA meetings.’” Other parents who were critical of the school system said that it has not adapted to demographic changes and still treats them as if it were a “poor district.” Mothers in the community often talked about the lack of information from the public schools, as well.

Many participants in the study described the district public school administration as unwilling or unable to address adequately (in the minds of the parent) the perceived special talents of their children when those talents were brought to their attention.

Interviewer: Was she tested gifted in the district?

Participant: Oh no, they don’t test you. I took her to Montclair State and she was tested. Which I knew. I didn’t have to get her tested because I cared but because I was like, what can I do to advocate for my kid? I got the cheap test. I was like, “Let me see if the \$200 test will be good enough.”

This parent reported that there were, in her opinion, insufficient programs for gifted and talented students in the district.

Participant: There is no gifted program. OK, in the Kindergarten it's push-in. In third and fourth grade they start to do pull-out, but there's nothing for gifted kids, at all. . . . My daughter was reading at a third-grade level in Kindergarten, and now she's reading at a fifth-grade level. And her current teachers [at a private school] know how to handle that. And there's actually another kid in her class and she's brought home a chapter book which she should be reading, whereas there, I mean they did put together like, a little box of books for her, but she could read the math book and they wouldn't let her turn the page because the other kids had to wait for them to sound out number one. She's doing multiplication. There was nothing for her and she was not only bored, she was miserable. She was bored to tears, she wasn't learning, they weren't nice, and no one cared because she wasn't bringing down test scores. "No child left behind" means no child gets ahead.

Many parents expressed concern about the lack of gifted and talented pull-out programs for young children. Gentry parents told me, as this parent did, that their children were bored quite literally to tears and that they had to send them to private school, or that they were afraid that their children would be bored.

Frequently, there is a disconnect between the way gentry expect to be treated and the established school culture of the district-run public schools. For example, in an interview with two gentry mothers, one said that, in the district-run public school that her child attends, "The security guard alone could scare you." The other, who has already removed her child from the school, agreed: "I was terrified of the security guard, and I'm an adult!" She described her daughter's first day at Wallace:

Some of us went in like, hoping that this would really work for us. After the first day I dropped her off at Kindergarten I came out practically crying, and it wasn't because I was sad to leave her at Kindergarten. She had been going to full-day preschool for a year. It was just because I didn't feel happy with where I'd left her. There was chaos, people were yelling. I've seen gym teachers screaming in the hallways and I know that's what they do in urban schools, but they shouldn't! Like, that's not the atmosphere I want my child to be in. It shouldn't be acceptable.

Gentry parents whom I interviewed claimed to value diversity. They were members of what Florida named the creative class (Florida, 2010) and had what Stillman calls a "gentry mindset"; that is, they are "complex, progressive people, inclined to

embrace diversity as part of their identity” (p. 8). These are people who could easily opt for the suburbs as soon as they have children (and many do), but those who stay expressed to me that they like that Hoboken has more diversity than the suburbs in which they were raised. They tend to be well educated and politically correct. One mother whom I interviewed in her brownstone referred to the projects as “the P word.” When parents on the Yahoo Moms Group write discussion posts that are perceived to be racist or classist (usually with respect to the public schools or parks that are frequented by children from public housing), the majority of the responses from other members of the group express disgust with that position.

However, in Hoboken, an already gentrified community, the gentry are not the original gentrifiers; they are not those who see themselves as urban pioneers moving into areas previously regarded as undesirable by the White middle class (Anderson, 1990; Glass, 1964). The gentry in Hoboken in 2013 have displaced the artists who paved the way for gentrification. These gentry moved into a neighborhood that was already taken over by gentry, and they are less likely to be as open minded as early waves of gentrifiers. They like the diversity and are politically correct, but they also chose Hoboken for an urban lifestyle that provides easy access to New York City while giving them an abundance of coffee shops, parks and playgrounds, and “great restaurants.” They did not move to Hoboken expecting to be in an “edge neighborhood.” Like the super-gentrifiers whom Lees (2003) described, they are likely less committed to diversity and public education than were founding gentrifiers. I have even met gentry who would never consider sending their children to the public schools and whose comments disguise thinly veiled racism and classism.

Despite gentry being generally progressive, there is ample evidence that gentry parents everywhere are not as open minded about their children's education as they are about their living environment. They tend to avoid local public schools and, even when it is in conflict with their values, choose to access segregated schools or gifted and talented programs, or to move to less diverse suburbs in "good school districts" when children reach school age (DeSena, 2006, 2009; Ellen, Schwartz, & Stiefel, 2008; Stillman, 2012).

However, some gentry parents in Hoboken do not feel this way and wanted to give Connors a chance. One parent of children who attended Wallace and now attends a private school explained as follows:

I actually toured Connors because it was closest to us, and I toured with an open mind, and I left with a closed mind. . . . My main concern was the administrator that gave me the tour, who I believe is no longer there. The administrator I spoke to, again who is no longer there, was very unimpressive. He did not seem to have high expectations for the children. I went with a friend, we both went with an open mind, and we both left with a closed mind . . . but he had been someone who had been in the school for a long time, and he basically said to us almost outright, "Well, your kids will probably do fine here because they have you as parents." I'm like, "That's kind of not what I wanted to hear. OK, I'll be putting Wallace as my first choice."

Another gentry mother who visited Connors said, "I met the principal, I was impressed by the principal in the sense that she was forthright in that, 'If you give me 5 years, I can work to turn things around.' But . . . I didn't want my child to be the guinea pig." These parents with a gentry mindset are willing to look at Connors, but none has chosen to send their children there, and the majority of gentry parents with whom I spoke do not even give Connors this much of a chance.

Inequalities Among District Schools

I heard about inequalities among the elementary schools within the district. One African American mother with a child in Wallace and a child in Connors explained,

I prefer Wallace. I feel like they discriminate against the kids that's in the projects honestly. I feel like the kids Uptown have more of a privilege with a lot of things. You have to see their playground compared to the things that they have in Connors, it's like, a slide and that's it. And I'm like, "Gosh, how all the kids Uptown have the nicer schools and you come down here to the kids that's by the projects and look at their school yard, like, they don't have anything?"

Pictures taken from the street show the play equipment that passersby and parents see at the two schools (Photographs 28 and 29). A former administrator of Connors joked about how many times she chose playground equipment for the children but never received it (the Connors playground was eventually built in 2011). Wallace (680 students) is larger than Connors (270 students; State of New Jersey Department of Education, 2010-2011).

These differences are not lost on the students either. A few teenagers reflected on the academic differences between the schools. One youth participant from public housing remarked,

If you come from Connors, you are supposed to be a bad kid as well according the stereotypes in our school [HHS], and Connors is a pretty bad school. When I went there I felt like the teachers, they didn't really care and the students didn't really care. We had really, really bad teachers, especially math teachers. I remember that during seventh grade our math teacher left because she was pregnant and throughout the whole seventh grade we had substitute teachers, and all of them kept leaving because the kids were really, really bad. I remember this teacher that was from somewhere in Europe, the kids were throwing crayons at her and then she even started crying. I remember her walking out and I felt really bad. I don't know why they hated her. I guess because she wanted them to do work and stuff, and I guess the kids there never took it seriously. There was only a little group of us because none of the kids actually wanted to go to Connors. Like, I wished I went to Wallace and the other schools that are in Hoboken. We were a pretty small group.

Another youth participant explained that he had switched from Wallace to Connors and preferred Connors "because you had to worry about being stressed at Wallace. . . . Connors is type easy."

In addition, Hoboken is a school choice district, something that concerns many gentry parents, so students can come from out of district into the Hoboken schools. I was



Photograph 28. The playground at Wallace School (January 2013).



Photograph 29. The playground at Connors School (January 2013).

told that, for school year 2012-2013, no students from out of district were sent to Wallace; rather, they were all sent to Connors because that school “had the space.” The feeling in town among those who were interviewed is that these schools are separate but not equal.

Abbott Preschool in a Gentrified Community

The public preschool program in Hoboken has a decidedly different reputation than the district-run public K–12 schools. Hoboken, as a former Abbott District, still has free, all-day, early childhood education for children ages 3 and 4 years.

New Jersey was the first state to mandate early education, starting at age 3, for children “at risk” of entering Kindergarten or primary school cognitively and socially behind their more advantaged peers. The Court’s “needs-based” approach to providing supplementary programs and reforms was an unprecedented effort to target funds to initiatives designed to improve educational outcomes of low-income schoolchildren. (Education Law Center, 2013, para. 15)

Despite its intentions to serve children “at risk” in Hoboken, it also serves the children of the gentry. Each year the Hoboken gentry worry that this will be the year that Hoboken does not receive the funding for Abbott preschool. This has yet to happen and, according to the administration, they will continue to plan for the program under the assumption that it will continue to receive funding.

There are 47 tuition-free preschool classes located at six locations in Hoboken administered by three providers. All classes are limited to 15 students, with one certified teacher and one paraprofessional. In addition, there are school psychologists, a preschool intervention and referral team, master teachers, and family advocates (one for every three classrooms). The school day is from 8:30 to 2:30 five days a week, with before and after care options available. All of the programs follow the Tools of the Mind Curriculum.

In Hoboken, *Abbott v. Burke*, the most progressive school equity reform legislation in American history, has turned into a real estate boon for the gentry. A realtor who works with many gentry in town said, “People love it because it is—it’s free day care. I mean that’s what they perceive it as. . . . It’s all my customers’ kids who go to the Abbott School, absolutely.” The gentry overwhelmingly use and are happy with the preschools (there are exceptions, such as some stay-at-home parents who choose not to do a full-day option for their children and some gentry who have concerns about the food that is served by some of the providers). But when I asked the gentry about the Abbott preschools, I heard comments such as, “Preschool here is bursting at the seams . . . really nice that we have the option of public preschool . . . we love it!” One gentry parent told me of the free preschool, “I tell my friends in the suburbs, ‘Just move here for these 2 years.’” Another gentry parent called the preschools a “huge attraction.” The gentry, even those whose children have attended it, often do not know why Hoboken has free preschool—several asked me to explain it to them.

With their positive reputation, Hoboken preschools have the potential to be socioeconomically and racially integrated middle-class schools; however, the gentry parents whom I interviewed did not perceive them that way. One parent, who understood the history of the *Abbott* legislation (a school teacher in another district), was reflective about this:

Because of where we live you get it, it’s designed for lower SES families, we have a child advocate that came to visit us, this is a service not provided for my kid, it always made me feel a little uncomfortable. I just hope more people use it that it’s designed for, it doesn’t seem to be the case. It is not the kids it was intended for, it is very obvious, you can tell, you would think it was any private preschool.

The idea that the preschools are not serving the children for whom they were intended was a frequent theme in the interviews. One publicly elected official stated that the preschool system is “serving everyone except the people it is supposed to serve [who are] opting out; it is a cultural thing, [they are] not attending in numbers we would want.”

One parent described her daughter’s experience at Abbott preschool:

It was less diverse than I expected. One of the reasons I did it was because I thought it would be nice for her to have the diversity, and then I’m like, “Oh, these are all the kids she went to Kaplan [a private preschool that is part of the United Synagogue of Hoboken] with.” Then we thought, “Oh, this is cheaper.” But you know, it’s probably somewhere in between [in terms of diversity].

A gentry father said, “Now that you ask, it was not very diverse, the kids from the projects go to Connors. In a way, it felt private.” Other gentry parents were careful to point out that their children’s preschool classrooms were very racially/ethnically diverse but not at all socioeconomically diverse.

Employees of the preschool programs stated that they actively recruit families in public housing and that they “absolutely” participate in the program, although they admitted that they face a struggle to meet enrollment deadlines. This research did not examine actual demographics of the preschools quantitatively due to data limitations¹⁰ and the researcher cannot draw any conclusions about HHA families opting out of preschool. However, it was apparent from the research that the classes do not appear to be integrated and socioeconomically diverse.

If the preschool program is appealing to the gentry and low-income residents of color are also enrolling, why do gentry parents perceive their children’s classes to be

¹⁰ The publicly available data from the New Jersey Department of Education for preschools in Hoboken was incomplete and the provider did not have demographic data publicly available. This is a limitation of this study and an area that calls for further research

made up primarily of other gentry children? The preschool classrooms observed appeared to be segregated. My field notes from an open house read:

Classroom 1. All White^{11,12}

Classroom 2. All White

Classroom 3. All non-Asian children of color except 1

Classroom 4. All White

Classroom 5. All White

Classroom 6. All White

Classroom 7. All White

Classroom 8. White, 1 Black student

Classroom 9. All White

Classroom 10. All White

Classroom 11. White, 2 Black students

Classroom 12. All White

Classroom 13. All White

One gentry mother said about the preschools, “I think certain classes look more like that [serving lower SES families] than others. Sometimes, you think, maybe the classes aren’t as balanced as they could be. But you don’t know somebody’s background, so you are judging them.”

¹¹ These are not actual classroom numbers.

¹² I viewed the classrooms after Super Storm Sandy; one preschool location in Hoboken was temporarily closed and those students were placed at this location, so some of the classes that I observed could have been there temporarily from another school; I had no way to distinguish that.

District preschool placement procedures, which are not overly transparent, certainly play a role. It is unclear exactly how students are placed into their preschool building locations. The placement procedures emailed to parents stated the following:

The following criteria are considered to determine a child's placement for the 2013-2104 school year: (a) Special Needs/IEP Driven, (b) Existing Sibling Placements, (c) School Proximity, (d) Age (Birthday in relation to the cut-off date), (e) Allowable Demographic Factors, and (f) Parental input.

Parents are not allowed to choose their preschool site outright, but many gentry engage in conversations on local discussion boards about whether or not one can still make requests and what one should request. There are preschools at six locations in Hoboken (among them Wallace and Connors). I heard several times about gentry families asking to be placed somewhere other than Connors and going all the way to the superintendent with concerns about placement at Connors. One gentry interviewee said,

I also happen to have heard from a friend who has a child who is 3; she and all the other families she knows in way southwest Hoboken, their kids were all assigned to Connors, and she's more of a yuppie parent. And they all went running and screaming, and they all got moved to St. Francis [a different Abbott preschool site]. . . . She was like, "I am NOT sending my kid there!"

One mother of a 16-month-old, still over a year and a half away from preschool, told me that she will request a change and "raise a stink" if her child is placed at Connors instead of the nearby Abbott preschool location at St. Francis Church.

These stories reflect concerns about the reputation of Connors as a school, but they also imply concerns about the racial and socioeconomic make-up of the student body. In the preschool programs, because of Abbott requirements, the three providers are the same across the sites, as are the curricula, schedules, and requirements for staffing. Thus, behind these concerns are likely fears about gentry children being minorities in a school building known for serving predominantly low-income children of color. Hidden

issues with race and class usually become apparent when schooling is discussed. One gentry parent said in passing, “The free pre-school is the reason we will stay here for a while—it is the best perk of Hoboken, and, I mean, who cares who your kid is in preschool with? What are they gonna do, stab each other in pre-K?”

One of the preschool providers, HOPES CAP, is a Head Start provider of Abbott and so some of the preschool classrooms are designated Head Start. Three classes are designated strictly Head Start, meaning that the child’s family must be below poverty level (\$19,090 a year for a family of three). These classrooms have some out-of-district students as well (I was told that this is necessary to fill these seats). Head Start, a program that is aimed at giving needed services to the most at-risk children, may as an unintended consequence be segregating the most at-risk preschoolers and undermining socioeconomic integration in Hoboken preschools. As a result of this and the placement procedures, many of the gentry are sending their children to free all-day preschool, thanks to Abbott. Yet their children are not necessarily in integrated classrooms with the most at-risk children for whom the preschool program was designed. One gentry parent remarked, “It is really nice that Head Start provides *those* children with the same services the other children get through Abbott,” as if the Head Start children were not the ones for whom Abbott was created.

The Abbott preschool program encourages gentrifiers to remain in Hoboken (at least temporarily). Thus, education affects gentrification just as gentrification influences education. Yet, social capital and cultural capital do not seem to be shared among groups in the preschool program to the extent that they could be, considering that it is a program

that the gentry use in large numbers, and it is a program designed for youth from low-income families.

Implications for Research and Theory

The segregation between district-run public schools is no secret in Hoboken, and it is not just a local issue—it is occurring in cities nationwide. This is simply the continuation of the same issue that the Supreme Court grappled with more than a half-century ago in *Brown v. Board of Education*. However, school resegregation is no longer a pressing local or national concern. Rather than continuing the desegregation that was ordered after *Brown* in 1954, neoliberal policies are allowing schools to resegregate, and the courts are making racial/ethnic integration increasingly challenging and unlikely (Reardon, Yun, & Kurlaender, 2006).

At a time when cities are appealing to wealthy families instead of working to integrate their children and their social and cultural capital into the segregated urban public schools, school choice options allow them to maintain segregated schools. As a result, urban schools are not integrating despite re-urbanization. One African American gentry mother pointed out,

That's one thing, I think, that's not just here, I think our country is battling with, now we're starting to see some real integration right as it relates to gentrification, and our towns and people, community members—are they going to attempt to bridge the gaps of understanding and send our kids to school together? . . . It's almost like it's not important, that there's no value in having a diversified classroom. And there's a lot of value in having a diversified classroom.

School integration would benefit both the low-income children of color and the children of the gentry, as well as everyone between. I disagree with scholars who argue that a push for integrated schools is dangerous because “lower-income students will benefit from proximity to middle-class students evokes cultural deficit theories” (Lipman,

2011, p. 80). I do not hold that a culture of poverty among children of color necessitates integration with White children who are innately academically and culturally superior because their superiority might rub off on low-income children of color. Instead, I believe that the cultural and social capital of *both* groups will benefit all children and that separate *is* inherently unequal and harmful for *all* children. This way of thinking—that economic integration is inherently racist—is also deeply problematic because it fails to look at the bigger picture, which is how gentry children will learn from and benefit from going to school with low-income children of color (see Stuart Wells et al., 2009). Education reformers and leaders have lost sight of the need for school integration. Yet, scholars such as Lipman, who push back against social and cultural capital theory and economic school integration and point to larger structural problems, are absolutely correct. Poverty, unemployment, and racism are the larger, more pressing concerns.

Current neoliberal policies encourage the expansion of gentrification (Hackworth, 2007; Lipman, 2011), but this gentrification does not benefit the education of low-income children of color. Neoliberal school choice policies allow parents to choose to send their children to certain schools rather than to schools seen as less desirable. Gentry parents can also utilize their social and cultural capital and the threat of their ability to relocate against any efforts to desegregate the school system.

This system has not created more choice for low-income children of color on a macro level. On a micro level, certain low-income families have made the same choices as the gentry—in Hoboken, Wallace or Calabro instead of Connors—but for the most part, at-risk public housing residents are sending their children to Connors. Far from creating competition and “lifting all boats” (i.e., public schools) as neoliberals argue, in

this free-market-style education system, Connors remains a segregated school that did not have a playground until 2011 and has a reputation for getting the worst teachers and administrators and having the lowest test scores in the district. I did not meet any gentry who seriously considered Connors as an option for their children.

It would be easy to interpret these findings on low-income parents choosing Connors, or even foregoing pre-school, as typical to the “culture of poverty” (Lewis, O., 1965), but I argue that low-income parents, despite often living in public housing their entire lives and often having attended subpar schools themselves, care deeply about the education and future of their children. The decisions that they make are different from those made by the gentry, but not necessarily for different reasons. Just like the gentry, they make decisions in what they believe are the best interests of their children and their families. They want to get their children to school quickly and easily, to keep them safe by keeping an eye on them, and, like the gentry, they do not want their children to be guinea pigs in schools where they will not fit in. Their cultural and social capital means that, within the public housing neighborhood and the Connors School community, their children are known and they feel that they are protected. Just like the gentry, they are also making their school choices based in large part on what those in their social networks are doing and what they experienced themselves. As a Latina gentry mother explained, these parents choose Connors because they want their children to have what they had. She noted, “This is not unique to low-income people. Why do people leave Hoboken? Because they want what they had [a suburban experience].”

These findings should not be viewed through the lens of middle-class values only. There are points of difference about making school selection decisions: Among parents in

public housing, there is far less focus on curriculum, parental involvement in the school, and overall test scores. Of more pressing concern for HHA parents are issues of convenience, discipline, and administration. To view these findings as reinforcing negative stereotypes about low-income minority families is to impose middle-class values on the findings (see Delpit, 1995; Lareau, 2003).

Policy Implications

Hoboken and other cities that are struggling with gentrification and school choice segregating their populations can attempt to counteract this situation within the current neoliberal model. The Hoboken superintendent has had several Middle School Plans in 2012-2013 for the district. The first of these plans involved changing Brandt to an early childhood program for the whole district, Wallace to an elementary school, and Connors to a middle school. While I agree pedagogically with the need for a middle school, this plan has the potential to further stigmatize Connors and public middle-school education for youth in Hoboken. Gentry parents who were already conflicted about sending their children to public schools might very likely never consider sending their children to a middle school at Connors, and the pipeline of public schools for the gentry could unofficially end at elementary school. In addition, there would likely be resistance from gentry parents of small children about the schools integrating further and from public housing residents who value a convenient neighborhood school. The second version of the plan involves moving seventh graders into Hoboken High School to create a middle school within the high school. This plan seems to be more appealing to the gentry, as it removes older children from the elementary schools and does not involve altering their elementary school options. Since gentry residents do, can, and will exercise their option

to leave Hoboken or opt out of the public schools, a forced integration plan is not a realistic option.

The gentry needs a convincing reason to send their children to the district-run public schools. The benefits that the Hoboken Board of Education commonly cite, such as more advanced placement (AP) classes, a winning athletic program, a cosmetology program, a laptop program, and a variety of clubs (MomCondoLiving, 2012), will not be enough to attract the gentry in the numbers needed to create majority middle-class schools. Laptop programs are simply not going to attract gentry families who live in million-dollar condominiums and whose children ask for, and receive, iPads as holiday gifts when they are 3 years old. Gentry families expect a wide selection of AP classes and clubs. Vocational programs, such as cosmetology, will not draw them into a school. One gentry mother said,

The people who are Hoboken school boosters are always saying the same things: “We have a drama program, Red Wings go!” I’m like, “That’s not what school is about. It’s nice that you have a drama program and a band, and your football team won. But it’s about our kids learning in a classroom where they feel cared for and motivated to learn. It’s about all these things that no one’s talking about.” Like the Johns Hopkins Program,¹³ OK that’s bullshit. It’s a computer program.

Gentry parents want additional innovative, cutting-edge, premier education programs that they feel will give their children an advantage in applying to the most selective colleges and competing in a globalized world. These programs can be offered side-by-side with programs that will attract families from public housing. They do not need to be mutually exclusive. It is possible for a large high school to meet the needs of

¹³ This is a computer-based learning program, often touted by the Board of Education and district parents; students test in and then stay after school for an hour to participate.

both populations, but the district-run public schools need programs and marketing that will appeal to the gentry in order to serve both populations.

It is good that HHA families value Connors. Neighborhood schools are an asset to the community, and it should be seen as positive that families in public housing value their neighborhood school. However, it would benefit all students in Hoboken if that neighborhood school represented the entire neighborhood, not just the low-income housing community.

Schools are a place where meaningful social mixing between the gentry and the non-gentry population (both children and adults) *could* occur. Schools provide structured, purposeful activities where the awkwardness of interacting with a culturally unfamiliar group can be ameliorated. Schools provide a meeting space, a pointed goal, and a reason to get to know one another on common ground. (Stillman, 2011, p. 8)

The best option, locally and nationally, is to create magnet programs within the current public schools that will appeal to gentry (as well as HHA residents) and to create a culture in the schools that utilizes, values, and supports all parents (with a deliberate focus on gentry parents where needed), whose presence will benefit all children. If a competitive gifted and talented program¹⁴ or a competitive audition-based arts program, or a Montessori program were developed at Connors and an innovative program in science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM) at Wallace, gentry parents might choose different options for their children based on their philosophy and the talents of their individual children, and the stigma of Connors would be reduced. One charter

¹⁴ These solutions are not perfect, and gifted and talented programs in particular might create within-school segregation, an “apartheid school” (Stillman, 2012) and should be implemented with extreme caution. They might be valued enough by the gentry to draw them into a school that they would not otherwise consider. Later, as the overall school system is more integrated, measures could be taken to remove within-school segregation.

school advocate said of the public schools in town, when proposing a similar idea of programs to draw in different families to different schools,

You have to do something to get those parents excited and then create a program that will draw in those parents while also drawing in the lower income families so they can both benefit from that and be integrated, and then you build that up.

In addition, the district should focus on preschool parents who value the public schools. Preschools are a place where integration and neighborhood schooling can happen simultaneously, if gentry parents are given a voice and feel that they are not alone. If Connors is to be an integrated neighborhood school, then parents from different socioeconomic backgrounds should have their children in the preschool there and the district should form a coalition of parents in support of Connors School, with gentry parents actively involved in keeping gentry students there and dissuading parents from requesting transfers. If the gentry become involved with and comfortable with the school for preschool, they could help to improve the entire school. The district should build the entire system from preschool up with a focus on retaining gentry families and diversifying preschool classrooms.

At the very least, the district should make a special effort to give public housing residents who choose Wallace or Calabro placement at these schools. Of the public housing residents who currently have school-age children whom I interviewed, 36% said that they had tried to get their children into Wallace or Calabro but the children had not been accepted there because the schools were full. I struggled to find out how, exactly, placement in the schools is determined when there are more requests for spots than are available. I have been told that it is on a first-come, first-served basis and I have also been told it is “loosely based on geography.” One father of a daughter in HHA who attends Connors said,

I tried to get her in Wallace, and they told me that they didn't want any kids from down here over there, when there was a bunch of kids there already. . . . They told me to call Doctor Hernandez because he's the head supervisor or something, and I called every day. I even got tired of going to the office.

The need for convenience among HHA residents could be addressed to a certain extent through scheduling and routing of the HOP shuttle. A \$1 HOP shuttle bus (\$.50 for students and free for children under 12) runs throughout town. These buses should have schedules and routes that would easily allow public housing residents access to all of the district-run schools in Hoboken at the appropriate times for drop-off and dismissal.

The district-run public schools could take lessons from the charter schools (see Chapter 6) to learn how to incorporate the capital of the gentry. Many opportunities should be created for parents to come together to work in support of the district-run public schools. The school's parent leaders should not give the impression that they are a closed clique. New gentry parents want to be heard and should be able to be active in the school through the Parent-Teacher Association and other opportunities. One charter school founder and mother explained the problem:

So many people who have come to this charter school have bailed out because they were so frustrated. They were smart, innovative, forward-thinking people who wanted to change 'x' thing and found that they would just bump up against a brick wall. The administration is so rigid and so unyielding; I mean, one example that I gave already was the lunch program. A bunch of parents apparently got together—at Brandt, I think it was, either Brandt or Wallace—and told the administration, "Look, the food that you're serving here is unhealthy, we don't want our kids eating it. Why don't we go out and investigate some alternative lunch programs, and we'll just present you with our findings and you can take that information and do with it what you will?" "No, we don't want it. We don't want it." . . . They were willing to do the research! They were willing to do all of the work that would go into finding a decent lunch program. Other parents wanted to start some kind of club, I think a Great Books program, something that another group of parents wanted to start and got a "no" for no good reason.

As difficult as it might be for administrators to admit, and as difficult as it might be for teachers to have to contend with, these gentry residents have something to offer to

the district and all of its students¹⁵. If no one embraces their capital, they will go elsewhere. These parents want to and feel that they need to be invested in the schools. This same phenomenon has been observed in other communities where gentry parents opt out of local schools because the schools are “too rigid” and do not accommodate parents or even hold tours (DeSena, 2009). Wallace appears to be making an effort to reach out to gentry parents, with open houses being instituted to create, according to one parent, an “atmosphere of exclusivity like the charter schools.” However, if that is done only at Wallace, it will just deepen the within-district segregation.

Providing desirable specialized education programs at Connors will benefit low-income public housing residents who choose to remain in their local school, as well. They can opt for these programs and/or still attend their neighborhood school with the benefits that come with integration. While focusing on the gentry, plans to increase integration must not ignore the preferences, needs, and desires of other parents in the district.

¹⁵ It does seem that the Board of Education and Superintendent Toback are making some efforts at these types of changes. A survey was sent to district parents and an open house is scheduled at Connors School.

Chapter 6: The “Golden Ticket”: Gentrification, Charter Schools, and a Parallel School System

You rely on word of mouth . . . all the other moms were like, “Oh my god, the world is going to end if we don’t get into a charter school!” (Interview, White gentry mother)

It’s not about being afraid to put your kid in public school, it’s like being the only one in your group that didn’t get the lottery, didn’t get the Golden Ticket. (Interview, publicly elected official)

These charter schools act like private schools . . . they kick the African Americans and Hispanics out . . . they are re-languaging *Brown v. Board* . . . use the free and reduced kids—use their names and criteria then treat like animals . . . they used my son to cut the ribbon and then harassed him. (Field Notes, Black mother)

They are opening a new charter, it’s just segregation! They don’t want the kids from the projects. That’s not who they want in their school. They don’t recruit them. (Field Notes, Black mother who works with children in HHA)

Hoboken is a choice district. Parents can choose one of the three district-run public elementary schools in the district. This has allowed one of the elementary schools in particular to “gentrify” faster than the others, while the one geographically closest to public housing, Connors, lags far behind in terms of racial and socioeconomic integration. Yet all of the district-run public elementary schools are majority minority, with more than half of the student body qualifying for either free or reduced-price lunches. So, if the gentry are not sending their children to the traditional public schools, where *are* they sending them?

A growing number of White, middle class families are raising children in Hoboken (Palasciano, 2013a; Ritchey, 2010) and many of them are choosing the charter schools. There are three charter schools¹⁶ in Hoboken, and many of the gentry seem to

¹⁶ For the purpose of this study I also examine the proposed fourth charter school that was not granted a charter but was in the application phase while this research was conducted.

view the charter schools, in addition to private schools and moving to the suburbs, as preferred alternatives to the district's public schools. This chapter identifies who chooses charter schools in Hoboken, who does not, why, and how charter schools are influencing the education of low-income children of color in public housing.

Who Attends Charter Schools in Hoboken?

The charter schools in Hoboken look very different from most charter schools in New Jersey, where the majority are in low-income, high-minority, urban districts with a majority minority student population and twice the state average of students are eligible for free or reduced-price lunches. White, middle-class gentry Hoboken parents founded the charter schools and they are largely used by gentry children in Hoboken. As one founder said, "Someone from one of the charter advocacy agencies came to a meeting I went to; it was like all the charter schools. He was like, 'This is first group of White charter parents I've ever been to.'"

In the 2012-2013 school year, 606 students were enrolled in charter schools in Hoboken (noncharter district enrollment was 1,613). There are three charter schools: (a) Elysian Charter School, a progressive school, opened in 1997; (b) Hoboken Charter School, opened in 1998, presenting a service learning theme; and (c) HoLa Hoboken Dual Language Charter School, opened in 2010, a dual-language school with content imparted in both Spanish and English. Locations of the charter schools are shown in Figure 18 and information about the schools is summarized in Table 5. Figure 19 presents the percentages of students eligible for free or reduced-price lunches at the public Hoboken elementary schools and Figure 20 presents the percentages of White students at each of the public elementary schools in Hoboken.

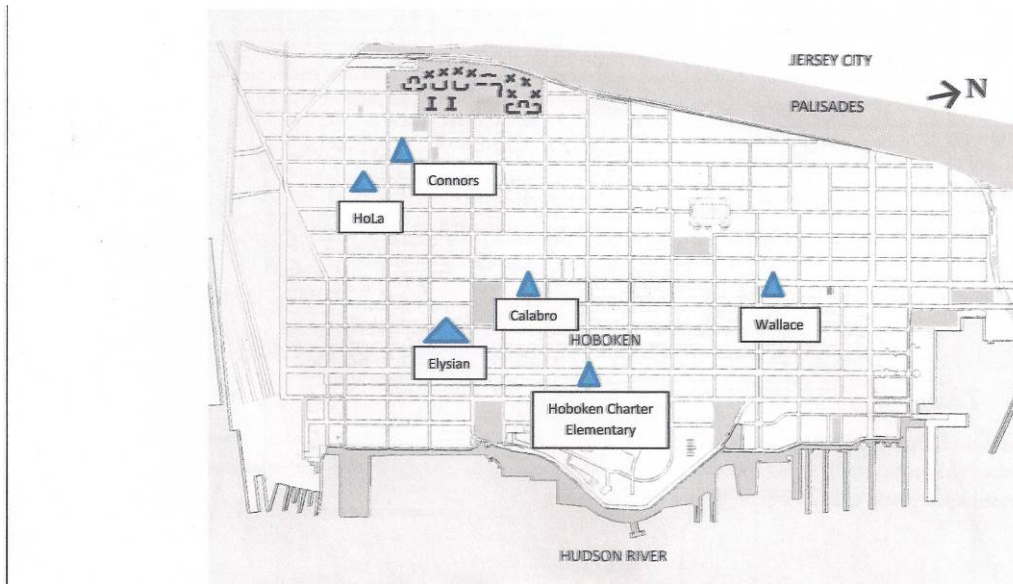


Figure 18. Location of charter elementary schools and district elementary schools in Hoboken. Source: *Vision 20/20: A Sustainable Plan for Public Housing in Hoboken, NJ*, by Hoboken Housing Authority & Marchetto Higgins Stieve PC, 2010), Hoboken, NJ: Author. In the 2012-2013 school year Elysian Charter School held classes in two buildings one block part, denoted by the larger arrow. There was a fire at Hoboken Charter Elementary School and for most of the year students were attending school in Jersey City (bus pickup took place about four blocks away from the school).

Each charter school has an extensive waiting list. For example, HoLa has 171 students on the waiting list for kindergarten. During data collection, a fourth charter school, DaVinci Charter School of Hoboken, applied to be a STEM school but did not receive a charter from the state. DaVinci is included in this chapter because it is a recent example of who attempts to establish charter schools and who is interested in accessing them. During the time of this research, this charter school was a hotly contested issue.

It is apparent, not only in the hard data below and in my observations but also to all residents of Hoboken, that these charter schools are attracting significantly different populations in terms of race and ethnicity and socioeconomic status than the district-run public schools. One new mother in Hoboken said, “I walked by that charter school the

Table 5

Information About Charter Schools in Hoboken

School	Philosophy	Opened	Grades	Free or reduced-price lunches	Race/ethnicity
Elysian	Progressive	1997	K-8	20%	66% White/Asian
Hoboken ^a	Service Learning	1998	K-12	11.67%	43% white/Asian
HoLa	Dual Language (Spanish/English)	2010	K-4	16%	61.24% White/Asian

Source: *School Report Cards*, by State of New Jersey Department of Education, 2010-2011, retrieved from <http://www.nj.gov/education/data/>

^aHoboken Charter School is an interesting case. The school is the only charter school in Hoboken with a high school. However, the high school serves a completely different population than the elementary school. The elementary school serves a very White/gentry population. The high school, according to one participant, serves two White students and the majority of students are from out of district (Jersey City, Newark) and qualify for free/reduced-price lunch. Gentry parents were often unaware of the high school or said that it was not an option for their children. It was rumored that that the funding that Hoboken Charter School receives for the free and reduced-price lunch high school students is put into resources for the predominantly gentry elementary school students. When I asked one person involved with the elementary school about this, she said that she was not the one to ask. In reference to the inequalities in resources between the elementary and high school, one person from the high school said, “The kids do joke about it, and the teachers know it for sure. . . . My biggest issue as an educator is that it [Hoboken Charter Elementary School] had so many more educational materials. There were so many more books and workbooks and things, and it just seemed so much more like a school whereas one of my colleagues called our school [Hoboken Charter High School] a shell. And she was right. It’s a school that we bring students into every day and there are walls and there are floors, but there are no facilities. There’s no library, there’s no cafeteria, there’s no computer lab.”

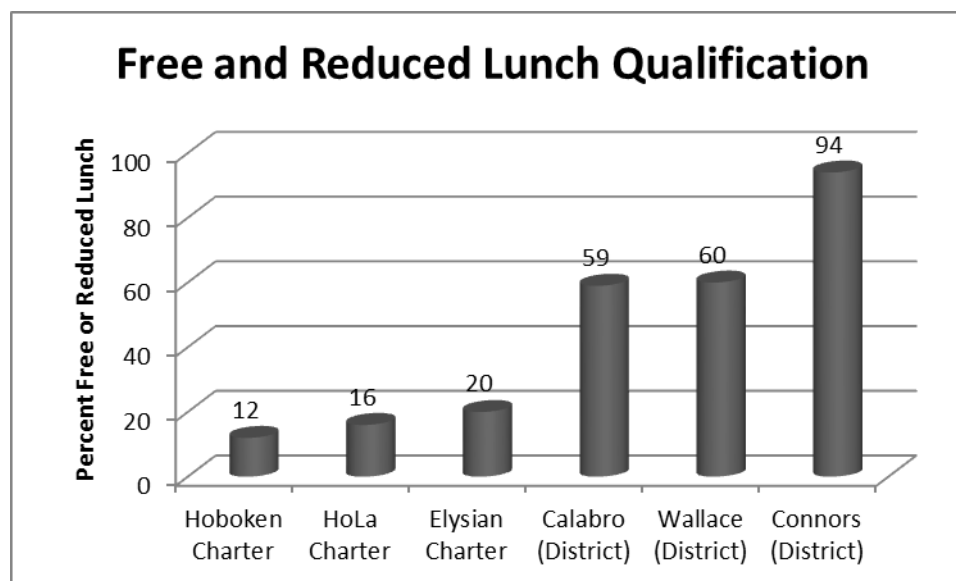


Figure 19. Percentages of students eligible for free or reduced-price lunches in Hoboken charter schools and district schools. Source: *School Report Cards*, by State of New Jersey Department of Education, 2010-2011, retrieved from <http://www.nj.gov/education/data/>

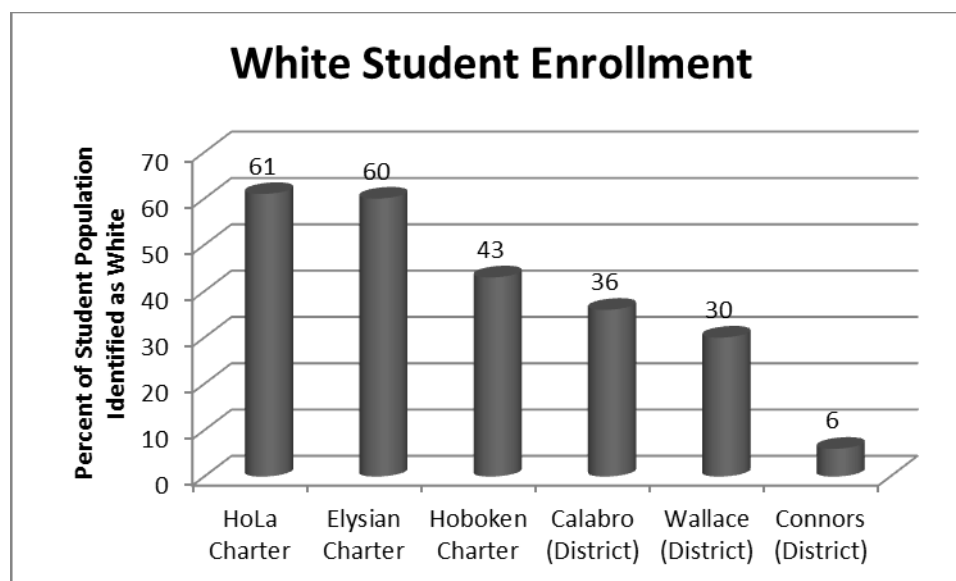


Figure 20. Percentages of students identified as White in Hoboken charter schools and district schools. Source: *School Report Cards*, by State of New Jersey Department of Education, 2010-2011, retrieved from <http://www.nj.gov/education/data/>

other day—it was all White parents wearing Luis Vuitton.” Of another charter school in town, a young man, who is not a parent, said, “I walk my dog by that school during drop-off in the morning; the street is lined with Mercedes.” One woman who grew up in public housing and now works with a charter school in Hoboken said that the school has only one child from the “projects.”

These are not the charter schools of Harlem and Newark, and they have very little in common with schools such as KIPP and North Star. They do not have a mission, as these other urban charter schools do, to serve low-income children of color, to close the achievement gap, or to bring children out of their family and neighborhood circumstances (KIPP, 2013; Uncommon Schools, n.d.). The charter schools in Hoboken are oriented to their particular themes and missions (bilingual education, progressive education, service learning). These types of charter schools are at times criticized by opponents as “boutique charter schools” and are becoming increasingly popular and the center of debate in New Jersey suburbs (Mooney, 2011).

All of the charter school administrators and advocates with whom I spoke freely reported that they were actively working on diversifying their student population. Yet charter school advocates argue that their population reflects more accurately the current demographics of Hoboken than do the district-run public schools. However, an analysis of American Community Survey data shows that approximately 27.8% of the school-age population in Hoboken is below poverty level. Charter schools underrepresent this demographic, since they have between 20% and 11.67% of students who qualify for free or reduced-price lunches. On the other hand, in Hoboken overall, only 11% of the residents live below poverty level. Charter school advocates could argue that they are

retaining families that would otherwise relocate, helping to make schools more reflective of the overall population, and that, if there were more charter schools, more gentry school-age children would live in Hoboken.

Gentry's View of Charter Schools

Interviews and direct observations indicate that, for most gentry parents, applying to charter schools to avoid the traditional public schools is just what one does. One parent who is a teacher outside the district said,

We did apply to all three. . . . Quite honestly, in hindsight, I wish I had gone to their open houses, but I didn't physically go into any of the schools. We applied to all three because once one is in, all three of our kids would be in. . . . But I felt like that's what you do, you apply to charter schools.

Having one's child accepted at a charter school is seen as the "golden ticket" (or, as one parent/charter school founder said, "all the chocolate you want"). Once one child from a family is admitted, siblings are given preference. Many families perceived this to be the "only" option, and if their children are not selected in the lottery, they see a move to the suburbs as inevitable. Even parents who are frustrated with the lottery system, or in their heart want to support the district schools, apply to the charter schools. During one observation gentry parents of young children expressed frustration with the charter schools and how they have influenced the district schools financially and demographically. They made such comments as, "They should just shut them down." A few minutes later, when I asked whether they were applying or had applied to the charter schools, they said that they had done so. The charter schools, like the Abbott preschools (Chapter 5) *are* appealing to the gentry, who appreciate that they are free (as gentry often cite their high taxes as a source of frustration) and of high quality, and their children "fit in" and do not feel like guinea pigs.

As one publicly elected official pointed out, the fact that parents apply to all three charter schools, with such distinctly different themes, signifies a desire simply to avoid the public schools rather than a passion for a particular pedagogical style. One charter school teacher (at a similar charter school in Jersey City) who had lived in Hoboken explained this phenomenon:

But what I find now as a parent talking to other first-grade parents, they only know of the reputation, they don't really understand. I guess as a parent if you're an architect or a finance person, you're not that motivated necessarily to understand the philosophy, but you just know: You don't pay, the reputation's great, these kids go to great high schools out of Elysian and here, so you just know it's better.

Gentry parents are also drawn to the specific pedagogical drives of all three charter schools. A gentry parent and charter school advocate explained that all three charter schools are "mission driven; they're very intentional. It's not even the theme. It's that they're very intentional about what they're doing and why they're doing it and they're all very self-reflective." One gentry parent raved about the progressive style of her children's charter school, then laughed as she told me of her middle school daughter's newest elective class. "She picked genocide. I hope that's not first thing in the morning."

An attraction to the charter schools, as opposed to district-run schools, for the gentry is the way they encourage parent involvement. One charter school father explained,

That's the beauty of Elysian School, and that's why we like it. As much as the faculty takes care of the school and the teachers take care of the school, there's a great involvement from the parents where all the parents know each other and they have a great way of finding what can each parent do for us. And parents are always raising their hand[s]. The PTA meetings are always full. . . . For example, my friend just did all the wiring there to do wireless Internet. So I got the keys to the school, I went in over the weekend, him and I [sic] went and did all the wiring, they gave me the keys to all the rooms, and I checked everything out. Other parents do things like I do by participating in all these things.

Another charter school mother reported that she comes into classes to teach jewelry making to the younger children and the stock market to the older students.

The charter schools and the district-run public schools are clearly different. At Elysian and Hoboken Charter teachers are called by their first names, while at Wallace the principal is greeted with a harmonious, “Good morning Mr. X” when he walks into the room. While at an Elysian open house the director boasts that little children sit on older children’s laps at community meetings, at Wallace parents are told not to worry that there is a “very, very minimal amount” of interaction between middle schoolers and younger students and they even have separate assemblies for them.

Charter School Founders

The résumés of the men and women who have started, or were interested in starting charter schools in Hoboken show that they are highly educated (often from Ivy League universities) and have experience in education and working with diverse populations. The biographies of the founding teams from the DaVinci Charter School of Hoboken and HoLa can serve as recent examples. The lead founder of DaVinci has experience teaching in diverse New York City public schools and holds degrees from Yale, Harvard, Northwestern, and Columbia. Of the other seven members of the founding team at the time the application was submitted, three were teachers (two in the Bronx and one in Jersey City), two were lawyers (one lawyer is also a teacher), and three held doctoral degrees (DaVinci Charter School, 2012). The founders of HoLa have similar biographies. One is a professor, two have MBAs, one has an MEd., and another is a staff reporter with the *Wall Street Journal* (HoLa Hoboken Dual Language Charter School, 2013).

Charter school founding team members in Hoboken are clearly members of the gentry. When I inquired about this, founders and advocates were quick to point out that the application process to begin a charter school necessitates that those founding it be people with the economic, social, and cultural capital to devote to the process. One founder explained,

They [the founding team] were all professionals, all upper middle class. I don't know how anybody could start a charter school if they weren't. It's so time-consuming I don't know how anybody could do it. . . . I wasn't working full-time, I was freelancing and I kept scaling back and scaling back until finally I said, "You know what, I have to take a hiatus." And I couldn't have done that unless I had a husband who worked full-time and could support me during that, and the same thing with the other founders. But I don't know how otherwise anybody could do it . . . they definitely skew the system so that it makes it very difficult for anybody to do it.

A founder of another charter school said of the founders who did the majority of the work, "They're both stay-at-home moms, but still it was 50 hours of work a week for months on end."

Social capital and cultural capital allow these parents to find one another and to come together to form charter schools. A charter school founder noted,

There were two Hoboken moms who really got the ball rolling in thinking about and in proposing the existence of such a program in Hoboken. I met them because I was at the park with my daughter, and we were next to a dad pushing his daughter on a swing. I was pushing my daughter and she was counting in Spanish, and so he turned to me and asked, "Do you know Spanish?" And I said, "As a matter of fact, I do." And he said, "Wow, you should know that there's a proposal for a new charter school, a new dual-language charter school to be housed in Hoboken." And I said "Wow, that's great." And he said, "Would you like to get involved?" . . . Apparently, after that happened, the founder told her husband, "Go out to the park and find me an accountant!" because he had found the lawyer who's on our board through similar means.

Despite the demographic differences between the district-run public schools and the charter schools—and the fact that this demographic difference is something that appeals to the gentry—the founders of these charter schools said that this had not been

their intention. These founders clearly stated that they had not intended to create parallel public schools for gentry children; they had been simply unhappy with the public school education and felt that they needed to provide an alternative for their children and for other children in Hoboken, as well. They repeatedly stated that socioeconomic diversity and racial/ethnic diversity were goals of the school. One openly expressed disappointment about the lack of diversity.

Participant: I saw it [the charter school] as a means of achieving social justice, as cheesy as that might sound. To me that's very important, that this effort be something that benefits underprivileged kids, that it be a way of mixing the components of the community together and that that mix would benefit everybody, including my kid.

Interviewer: Has it gotten where you were hoping it would?

Participant: No. It has not.

One charter school representative said that the school has a parent group devoted to increasing diversity, and another founder pointed out that their goal was economic integration, "He [Kahlenberg] does all this research on economic integration, so that's our goal. . . . It's in the application. . . . That's really our goal." Founders from one charter school even pointed out that its location (on the Southwest side of Hoboken, about four blocks from public housing) was a problem for some gentry parents who expressed concern about sending their children to that neighborhood and they, in turn, hoped that this location would appeal to those in public housing. A founder of this charter school explained that they attempted to recruit families from public housing:

Participant: We did open houses. We tried to hold them at all of the public pre-schools, because they do a good job between Hopes and Miles Square [Abbott preschool provides] of having a pretty good mix of demographics. We got a lot of resistance from the public schools. They wouldn't let us do it. But Hopes; which has its own building, as well, let us do it with them, so we did open houses for the parents. But it was a very self-selected group that came to it in the evenings. . . . We . . . offered Pizza Night and information sessions at the Housing Authority

and Applied Housing, which is low-income. It was such a low turnout it was abysmal. We have the Director of the Hoboken Housing Authority as a parent here, and he promoted it, and his wife promoted it, and that kind of outreach just didn't work.

Interviewer: Could you give me an estimated number of how many people attended?

Participant: Well for one of them it was zero; it was just us. And for another one there were probably, I don't know, six people. But none of them had school-age children; they all just came because they were curious.

An administrator from another charter school said,

There is a real concern on the part of our enrollment committee and on the part of the school in general, to reach out to all aspects of our community. So now we do a lot of outreach. We do a number of things. Traditional stuff, so we have some open houses here and invite people, but we also have people who go to various parts of the community including some of the projects at various events there we have a table, we have flyers on it. Some of the people who work in the school, we have one of the people who works here she actually has an open house in her apartment where she invites people in. So, outreach in that part of town, basically the poorer side of town. . . . There's a day where we have kids at 8 o'clock in the morning going out to the PATH train and around town giving out flyers for the school where we blanket everybody in the town.

A founding parent from another charter school said that, in the year they opened, they distributed applications in English and Spanish but received only one in Spanish.

Founders and advocates of HoLa seemed to believe that the bilingual Spanish-English focus and location just blocks from HHA would be a draw to the HHA community and would create a socioeconomically diverse school:

We thought this would be a great place to locate the school among other things because of the demographics of Hoboken, where you have a school-age population that's 60% Latino. So we thought that our student body would reflect the demographics of Hoboken. As far as I'm concerned that's great—among other things because dual-language schools have been shown to be the most effective programs for raising the academic achievement of Spanish speakers in particular. And, of course, not all of the Latino students in Hoboken are Spanish speakers but many of them are so I think it would be a great place to house such a school. . . . Also, I see a dual-language school as a way of presenting bilingualism in a positive light, which is the way that I think that it should be presented and that it hasn't been historically presented in the U.S.

It seems that every person who was born in Spain who has a child in Hoboken has tried to get the child into HoLa. We have lots of Spaniards. That's one interesting paradox to me. The higher SES Spanish-speaking families have been very drawn to this school. Whereas the lower SES families who would benefit the most from this kind of program—whose kids would do the best—have not come in the numbers that we had hoped and expected

An African American woman who works with children in public housing said that the problem with the plan to attract HHA residents to a dual-language immersion school is that Hispanic residents in public housing “are not those kind of Hispanics.” According to the State of New Jersey Department of Education (2010-2011), there are no students who speak Spanish as their primary language enrolled at HoLa, while at Connors 1.1% of students do, at Calabro none, and at Wallace 3.8%.

Charter school founders and administrators often seemed perplexed by the lack of interest in their schools on the part of the public housing community. One asked me for advice on recruitment. Others seemed to think that, since recruitment efforts had not been as fruitful as they had hoped, over time word would spread and the numbers of low-income children of color would increase. One expressed frustration that there is no legal way for them to try to create a more diverse student body. These observations confirm research that shows that there is a “lack of a charter school policy framework that would support those charter school operators who want to create more diverse schools” (Stuart Wells, 2002, pp. 16-17).

Charter School Parents and Diversity

Charter school parents do not readily say that they chose charter schools because they prefer a Whiter, more middle class student body. However, they admit that their children fit in at charter schools more easily than at Connors, where they would be “guinea pigs.” One charter school parent stated, “I did visit Connors. I did not think it

was horrible. Some people I was with did. Everyone feels the same way about it: they do not want to send their kids there. They want their kids to stay with their friends and feel comfortable.” This kind of statement about “everyone” shows that below the surface-level valuing of diversity, gentry parents feel a clear discomfort with the demographics and feeling of Connors and are concerned about whether their children will feel comfortable there.

A founder of one of the charter schools explained how she faced concerns from parents over the possibility of having too many children from HHA:

Professionally employed people, upper income people, whatever you want to call them, some of them were concerned that there would be too many kids from the Housing Authority or from the West Side of Hoboken who would enroll and so they were apprehensive and they were asking us how many of these kids are going to be in this program. . . . I had a parent ask me if the area [southwest Hoboken] was safe to walk by in the daytime. And you know I just thought, “What planet do you live on, woman?” I mean, my God!

Two leaders from a charter school reflected on parents’ opinions on diversity:

Interviewer: Do you face resistance from the more gentrified parents, as we would call them, to recruiting kids from public housing or in this neighborhood?

Participant 1: I think there are examples of them sometimes resisting. I don’t think it’s so explicit, but I think sometimes there is resistance to some of the accommodations we make.

Participant 2: I think sometimes there are preconceived notions.

Participant 1: Yes, maybe that’s what it is. Or assumptions made. There’s not always an understanding of the nuances in the classroom, the subtleties in the classroom, and that everybody can’t afford the same things.

Participant 2: There are differences in cultural frames of reference, and the power of majority does not perceive. It doesn’t understand how that frame of reference functions, and therefore perceives it as, “If it’s not acting like us, then it’s not right.” I’ve seen that happen, but not often. I think there’s some cross-cultural communication straining and things like that, and it becomes lesser.

Participant 1: And I do think that people who bring their kids here are open to that, in the intellectual sense, anyway. A lot of parents I think are coming here hoping that they're coming for an experience that is broader.

Participant 2: Yeah, but what is interesting is that you don't see that within the communication of the children. It's much less palpable. It's in the communication of the parents.

Two gentry charter school parents reflected tellingly on diversity at their school:

Participant 2: I think our school would like to be more diverse.

Participant 1: They say they would, but I think it's really diverse.

Participant 2: They meet once a month to talk about that kind of stuff and how to outreach to other families. I feel it's fine, though. People are applying for it. You can't force people to come to your school, either.

Many of these gentry parents do have a "gentry mindset" (as discussed in Chapter 5) and appreciate diversity. Many gentry residents name "diversity" as one of their favorite aspects of Hoboken. When asked whether she wished Hoboken did not have public housing, one charter school parent replied,

That doesn't bother me. The other night I was saying I love the diversity my children grow up in. It's great. I think it only stands to help them when they're older, and be better human beings when they're older. I couldn't imagine living in a place where everybody's the same and we all have the same jobs. I would hate [for] my kids to be in that kind of atmosphere. I think it's good for them. Having that [public housing] there doesn't affect our life.

Yet, most gentry parents feel more comfortable with their children being in a charter school. The charter schools fit their pedagogical preferences and have a student body with plenty of children who look like their children. The open houses felt like private school open houses. When I attended an open house at HoLa, all of the attendees appeared to be gentry parents. I described the open house in my field notes:

The presentation and question-and-answer portion went on for an hour. There were 12 sets of parents in the room. They all appeared to be yuppies and were quite well dressed. . . . About 40 minutes was devoted to discussing pedagogy, schedules, immersion, and neuroscience. We were given two handouts on the

science of dual-language immersion education. . . . A number of parents in the room knew each other and I heard two discussing yesterday's open house at a local private school.

The director discussed how they use Singapore Math because that is the premier textbook. The afterschool programs were a big concern, and she touted swimming, knitting, and a lot of others. She said, "Your child will be receiving a premier education that elsewhere would cost between \$35,000 and \$60,000." She answered questions about parents who don't speak Spanish and said they should not be doing "what their parents do" and going on Google translator so they can check their children's homework. A teacher then made recommendations for what parents *can* do to help. . . . The program was described as progressive and academically rigorous. The director also drops how graduates of programs like this go to places like Yale and Princeton together and are more likely than their competition to land jobs against the other Harvard M.B.A.s for the \$250,000-a-year position. The parents by me sort of chuckle when she says \$250,000. The director mentions 95% of families in the school are English dominant, with about 5% heritage learners and no ELLs, 1.5% have some bilingualism. The director speaks to the staff members in Spanish.

I had a similar experience at an open house for Elysian:

The room is bursting. At 10 o'clock another wave enters, and the teachers and parents and administrator rush to provide more seating in the room. There must be at least 40 visitors packed into one classroom. The vast majority (all but two couples) appear to be yuppies—many seem to know each other, children are fashionably dressed, and the parents wear expensive clothes. By the time it gets underway there is a crowd sitting in the hallway, as well. The principal, enrollment coordinator, parent/board of trustee member, and three teachers (including a music teacher) are there. They are all white. The principal starts by saying, "We are all very, very available because we love talking about Elysian."

The first 20 minutes are spent discussing the lottery. They currently have no openings for Grades 1-8 but will fill them as they become available. In Kindergarten there are 32 possible spots for 2013-2014 but 16 siblings, so if they all attend there will only be 16 available spots. They are expecting 200 applicants (that's how many they had last year). After the discussion of the lottery, the principal gives a PowerPoint presentation on Elysian and on progressive education for about an hour. He begins with quotes from President Jefferson and Alfie Kohn. He discusses how he "fortunately does not very often have to discipline a student, but when necessary he cannot tell you how many times a sixth or seventh grader waiting outside his office for him has pulled out a book to read. They just love to learn!" He discusses character development, social justice, intrinsic motivation, collaboration based on a business model, and community meetings where seventh or eighth graders have 5- and 6-year-olds on their laps. He shows pictures of simple machine projects where the sixth graders built things such as a pooper scooper and dog entertainer. One young boy in attendance says, "Cool!" and the

principal says, “That right there is the whole point.” The children in the pictures are well dressed White children. He shows a picture of a “typical” report card and chuckles as he contrasts it with a sample report card from Elysian. These average four to five typed pages of assessment, beginning with personal and social development and including personalized assessments from each teacher. There is a “narrative for every subject.” The teachers he says spend weeks and weeks on them. He said parents say repeatedly, “I can’t believe how well the teachers know the kids.”

When asked about parental involvement he says, “You will be asked as much as you possibly can to be involved. We love having parents here.” A parent explains that “parents are welcome and can easily observe how well the teachers are doing.” This parent says that for years she has been coming in to teach jewelry making to the younger children and the stock market to the older kids, since those are “her things” and she just loves the “open and transparent learning environment.”

These are climates in which the gentry feel comfortable, and what is described at these open houses is the sort of experience they desire for their children. Those whose children are accepted feel that they have quite literally won the lottery, that elusive “golden ticket,” because the school is free but feels like a private school and their siblings will get priority. Charter school climates in Hoboken are also in distinct contrast to the ones at the district public schools. A parent who was interviewed said that, when she visited Connors, she was basically told, “Well, your kids will probably do fine here because they have you as parents.” Gentry parents feel that they fit in and that their children fit in better at the elementary charter schools.

Why HHA Residents Do Not Apply to Charter Schools

The reasons that HHA residents give for not applying to charter schools are in three categories: (a) a preference for the neighborhood school, (b) confusion about charter schools, and (c) a desire to fit in.

Preference for Neighborhood School

HHA residents gave many reasons for choosing their neighborhood school, Connors. Almost every parent from public housing who was interviewed had grown up in public housing, and many had attended Connors. Although I never heard any of these parents say that they had a great experience there, it is an institution that is known to the family. As is the case with many neighborhood schools throughout the country, the community values its local public school (Lipman, 2011). When asked why HHA residents are not applying to charter schools, a gentry Hoboken mother who has worked with public housing residents in neighboring Jersey City, reflected,

I think that in just doing the work there, and I spent a lot of time in a lot of problem projects around the city [Jersey City] people are just automatically mistrustful of anything having to do with public dollars. I mean, they want help. But they're just very mistrustful because the other thing is you're talking about, in a lot of places, two, three, four generations of the same family that lived in public housing, and this is the only way of life that they know. . . . That's the way it is, they don't really deviate from the plan.

The location in their neighborhood is another major factor, as Connors is the school most convenient to public housing. When I asked the focus group why so many of the children from public housing attend Connors, they answered in unison, "It's closer."

An HHA mother of a son at Connors explained why she sent her son to Connors:

"Convenience for us. You know, it's hard for a child to be further from their home for school, even though other people may think different." However, HoLa Charter School is located just 2.5 blocks from Connors and shares facilities with the Boys and Girls Club (used by many HHA resident youth), so this is clearly not the entire explanation. The next closest charter school is less than half a mile from HHA, and the third is approximately three quarters of a mile away.

Another factor in school choice is that HHA residents, like the gentry, want their children to have friends and peers like themselves. This is not true for all HHA residents, however. Some with whom I spoke, particularly those holding working-class or middle-class jobs, pointed out that they wanted their children away from the children in the projects. For many others, “fitting in” is a concern. As one charter school founder put it,

Many [public housing residents] express a desire to be with their friends and neighbors. I have found that within the school—like, for example, last year I remember at the beginning of the year there were a couple of parents who came in with their kids, they were specifically from the Housing Authority. And I remember they actually pulled them out within a week or two, and some of the reasons they gave were that they didn’t know all the kids, so they said, “Well, she feels uncomfortable because she doesn’t know everybody.”

One teenager pointed out that the teachers at Connors “understood where they were from and what they were dealing with”—something that she found to be positive. One young man from HHA whose sister attends HoLa said, “She goes to HoLa right here, and a lot of her friends live uptown, and they’ll be trying to have play dates, and they’re like, ‘She never wants to come to my sister’s house, to my house. She always has to go to her house.’” One teenage participant explained her transfer from a Catholic school to Connors:

It was a lot more comfortable because like, in the Catholic School, literally only me and two other people lived in the projects. But in Connors, most of them were from the projects, so, like, you knew everybody, so it was okay. . . . The teachers understood, like, if you were in a bad mood about something that happened at home. Because they understood where you lived and how everything would probably stress you out.

One Latina founding parent from a charter school explained the struggle that she faced in recruiting families from HHA: “They want tradition, they want the known, they want what they had.”

HHA residents also have social capital within their own community, providing a feeling of safety and comfort, just as the gentry do within their community. One HHA resident said,

Parents look after each others' kids really here. I've had a couple of moms who knew my daughter and when she would play with their kids and I never had to worry about anything happening to them because they all watch each others' children. When it comes to the kids, we're like a family, but with the other things, no. But when it comes to the kids, they bond. No one messes with our kids.

Confusion About Charter Schools

Parents in public housing are confused about what charter schools are and how to access them. I asked HHA parents to name the charter schools in town and asked what each one was like or its style or theme. Not one parent from public housing (except the one I purposely found to interview because her children attend a charter school) was able to identify all of them by name. A large number included private schools in their listing, particularly Mustard Seed School, indicating the confusion about what a charter school is. They were described as costing money and hard to get into, and HHA parents expressed hopelessness about their children being accepted. Even those parents who said that they had heard that the charter schools are better than public schools did not seem to think that it was a realistic option for their children and they had not visited them or applied.

Of the 12 randomly selected HHA parents, half could not name any of the charter schools or their locations, none had ever applied to a charter school, and only one said that she had been given an application. Three seemed to express some interest in charter schools when asked whether they would or had ever considered applying, and none could name the themes or philosophies of all three. Only one parent correctly identified any of the themes or philosophies and that was of only one of the schools. Table 6 lists the views and experiences of HHA parents who were interviewed about Hoboken charter schools.

Table 6

Hoboken Housing Authority (HHA) Residents' Experiences With and Knowledge of Charter Schools

Parent race/ ethnicity	What do you know about charter schools?	How many can you name or reference?	Ever been recruited or given an application?	Ever considered applying?	Knowledge of school's philosophy	Schools children attend
Hispanic	"Supposed to be a very good school."	2 by name, reference 3	No	No	Knows HoLa is "Spanish one"	Connors Mustard Seed, HHS
Hispanic	Nothing	Familiar with names after being told them	No	No	None	Connors
African American	"They're like really good schools." "Really tough to get into because go by lottery. So I never tried."	Named one and one in application phase	No	Never applied, but would consider it	None	Connors
African American	Not really	0	No	No	None	Wallace HHS
Hispanic and White	"My kids can't go because they need speech, and they don't offer that in charters."	HoLa	No	No, wanted HoLa but "my son needed speech so he couldn't"	"I don't really like the charter schools. . . . the children are always in the park playing, they get away with more than public school children can"	Connors
African American	Familiar with them but not interested	Said familiar but did not name	No	No		Connors Wallace HHS
Latina	"Not much," "heard of them but I have not got information yet."	No	No	No	none	Connors Wallace (speech)
Puerto Rican	No. "I was going to try to put her in Mustard Seed ^a , but she would have to repeat fourth grade"	No	No	No	none	Connors

Table 6 (continued)

Parent race/ ethnicity	What do you know about charter schools?	How many can you name or reference?	Ever been recruited or given an application?	Ever considered applying?	Knowledge of school's philosophy	Schools children attend
Hispanic	"I haven't applied, I don't know why, honestly. But I've heard about them and I really am interested in them, but I haven't had the time to go and find out. I wish you could apply online, but I heard there was a waiting list for charter schools. But I heard they're much better and I really, really want that for her."	"No, not at all. I thought it was just called charter schools."	No	No but "really am interested in them"	None	Connors
Mother and father, both Hispanic	"I heard about one charter school in the same building as Rue School."	Heard about one charter school in same building as Rue School	Rue school gave her application when graduated	No	None	Brandt
Black and Hispanic	"My cousin goes to it, had to apply for financial aid for him to go there."	"I think they have one in Demarest."	NA	NA	None	Child not in school yet
Black and Puerto Rican	"I probably would send her to Connors. There's another school, I think Elysian Charter? Charter schools? I never went to any of the charter schools but I had a friend who did, and it's just different groups that go to different schools and it's like, you want her to be with the positive one. I never went there, so I really wouldn't know but there's nothing wrong with taking a chance and trying to send her over there. Aren't they private schools?"	"I just know Elysian. I believe there's one in Demarest; there was one when I was going there, and Mustard Seed. It's right across the street from the 4th Street Park, there's one right there."	NA	NA	"Those type of people are more into the school. They have more activities or something. The people that I went to school with, everyone has babies now. I don't know how to explain it."	Child not in school yet

Table 6 (continued)

Parent race/ ethnicity	What do you know about charter schools?	How many can you name or reference?	Ever been recruited or given an application?	Ever considered applying?	Knowledge of school's philosophy	Schools children attend
African American ^b	"I knew one parent of a child at Elysian. I toured and did open houses for both Hoboken Charter and Elysian. We put in the lottery for all my kids for both."	All three	"I am a very online kind of person. I Google things and research and can print and fax."	Applied to two	Very knowledgeable about all of them	Connors Wallace All Saints Elysian Charter Hoboken Charter

^aMustard Seed School is not a charter school; it is a private Christian progressive school with a mission to serve students from all backgrounds (Mustard Seed School, 2009). ^bI purposely sought this interview to hear the experiences of a parent from Hoboken Housing Authority with children in charter schools.

Some parents and HHA community members do not know that the charter schools are tuition-free public schools. One member of the focus group explained,

Yeah, but most of the parents choose for their child to go to Connors, not only because it's closer, but to bring your child to a charter school for most parents from down here feel like it's going to be too expensive. So, once you hear, "Oh, it's too expensive, I can't afford it."

Another HHA resident said, "Most of my cousins actually go to All Saints charter school, and they go there because they got scholarships there." When asked, "Have you ever thought about the charter schools in Town?" a father of a daughter who lives in HHA responded, "No. I was going to try and put her in Mustard Seed, but then she would have to repeat the fourth grade again." All Saints and Mustard Seed are both private schools, which demonstrates the confusion about what a charter school is and whether or not there is a charge to attend.

Parents seemed confused or disheartened by the lottery process. One African American born-and-raised Hobokenite, when asked whether she had ever applied to the charter schools, responded as follows.

Participant: No. Basically because I heard it was like a raffle. Like, somebody picks the raffle and if they win they get into the school. But I heard that a lot of parents is also pulling their kids out of the charter school system as well. I guess because they don't have sports and stuff . . .

Interviewer: Interesting. Do you know the names of the charter schools in town or anything about them?

Participant: No, I just know Mustard Seed. I heard Mustard Seed was a good school though. I never heard anything else. Though Hoboken Charter I heard was not all of that. Like, a lot of parents was complaining. But some people do bring their kids there but not a lot, they don't have a lot of students like the public schools do.

Another said, "I just know that they're like, really good schools, nothing other than that. . . . I also hear that it's really tough to get into the charter schools because they go by lottery. So I never tried."

Others mentioned that charters have a good reputation but said that they had never applied. When asked what she knows about charter schools, one HHA mother of two said, "Not very much, but I heard it's supposed to be a very good school." When asked whether she had ever thought about charter schools, a mother from HHA with a daughter in Connors replied,

I haven't applied, I don't know why honestly. But I've heard about them and I really am interested in them, but I haven't had, I guess, yet the time to go and find out. I wish you could apply online, but I heard there was a waiting list for charter schools. But I heard they're much better and I really, really want that for her. Like, I personally don't want to leave her in Connors for eighth grade, so that's definitely something I want to look into.

The one parent who was deliberately sought out to interview because she lives in public housing and has children at a charter school said that she had found out about

charter schools online after her children had already attended Connors (with which she was unhappy), Wallace, and the private All Saints School (on a scholarship).

I am a very online kind of person. I Google things and research and print and fax. . . . I have those resources, I sit in front of a computer all day [at work at a university], but we have that at home, too. I provide access to computers, printers, Internet for my children. I have a school bin with supplies and ink. I refill it—Lord knows we go through glue sticks.

This HHA mother seemed to have a significant amount of middle-class social and cultural capital. She was currently working on her second master's degree and was employed by a university as a business manager.

The confusion about what a charter school is cuts across socioeconomic status. Gentry who do not have school-age children are similarly confused. However, when gentry parents begin the school search and selection process, they learn about the “golden ticket” through their social networks; because families in public housing do not access charter schools in any significant numbers, they cannot inform each other about the process.

The application process can be an additional obstacle. Although the application asks parents for only basic information such as name, address, phone number, email address, and the school that the child currently attends, the word “application” alone suggests something intimidating. One member of the gentry who is not yet a parent commented that the son of someone he knows did not get into the charter school because he was not “smart enough.” This is impossible and against the law, but the comment indicates confusion across the SES spectrum about the admissions process to a charter school and the use of the word “application.”

Having to complete and submit an application early in the year for a January lottery is an additional obstacle. One teenager said that his family had missed the

deadline. Two women who work with Hoboken Abbott preschool admissions told me that they often see low-income families miss the deadline for preschool. Morrison (2011) found that the early deadlines for charter school applications adversely affected low-income and less-educated parents and thus influenced the demographics of a progressive charter school in neighboring Jersey City. Parents who applied to the charters reported that they had got the applications at the schools themselves, online, or at the Art and Music Festival in town. The application process, from acquiring one to submitting it, may prove to be an obstacle for parents who are not familiar with the intricacies of the school system, are not connected to others in the community who are applying to or attending these schools, or have limited English language or literacy skills. DeLuca (2007) found that, with the Moving to Opportunity Program, a lack of knowledge about schools and school choice may have contributed to the lack of improvement in education outcomes when low-income public housing residents moved “to opportunity.”

HHA parents also have misgivings about these schools that are unknown to them and new to the community. Because the founders who initially led the recruitment effort are not from the same background as them, they have difficulty in overcoming these concerns, more so than gentry parents. Since their social networks, for the most part, do not include many charter school parents, they may question who is running these new schools and where they will be housed (always an issue in a community with a tight real estate market). HHA residents are distrustful when charter schools first open because they are new and there are always unknowns. In the case of Hoboken Charter School, when it started, they had no building and the founders had to tell parents whom they recruited for the lottery that they were not sure where the school would be housed. One founding

parent recalled, “It was very hard to sell a school that didn’t have a building.” Another charter founder explained that they had attempted to recruit families from public housing, and the parents made comments such as, “Where is it located?” “Oh it seems a little bit far,” and “I don’t know anything about that.” There was resistance to something different, and many parents did not want to be a part of something new. “So we knew that the newness was definitely an issue we found.” The HHA parent who was interviewed and whose children attended a charter school presented one possible reason that more HHA parents do not apply to charters:

I’m not sure, scared of change but scared of the perception of change. “They’re gonna treat my kids different, live in a different area.” But this creates a horrible circle. HHA is a close-knit community of families that have been there for decades, they have seen Hoboken change around them without their input. It makes them wary and concerned.

Desire to Fit In

Another reason HHA families do not apply to charter schools is that they recognize an insider/outsider dynamic at play in the charter schools, with gentry as insiders and low-income people of color as outsiders. This is evident at HoLa, where the gentry families use the school during the day for HoLa. Then, because they share a building with the Boys and Girls Club, a predominantly different group of children come into the building for the Boys and Girls Club after school.

HHA residents may feel that their children do not belong in the charter schools because few other children are like their children. One Latina charter parent explained, “It’s because they don’t see a lot of people like them in the schools.” As I walked by the

students from Hoboken Charter School as they wait for the school bus¹⁷ to their temporary school building in Jersey City, I observed only one non-Asian minority family; the rest of the parents appear to be typical gentry. A group of parents from HoLa hired a private bus that stops at the Shipyard and at Maxwell Place, which are high-end luxury riverfront buildings in uptown Hoboken—three-bedroom apartment rentals at the Shipyard average about \$5,000 a month—and then takes students across town to HoLa, located just blocks from public housing. There are also after-school activities and class trips that parents pay for that can make HHA parents feel that their children do not fit in. Although all of the school administrators consider this and attempt to mitigate the issue with free options, it is still something with which the parents who are not gentry must contend. One charter administrator spoke of a parent from HHA who transferred her children out of the school:

Another thing she [HHA mother] said that was interesting was that, I think we had an enrichment program. There were lots of free classes, but there were also paid classes. I think the mix of demographics was intimidating because they had come from Connors, which is not at all mixed demographically. And I think it felt like, with a bigger socio-economic mix, I think they felt . . . I think they were intimidated by it. . . . I think the parents felt intimidated by it because she said, “Well, there’s this after-school program and” But I think [for] the parents it was a very intimidating culture clash.

However, one of the administrators of another charter school explained how the administration harnesses the economic capital of the wealthier parents to try to avoid children feeling or being left out.

There’s a cost attached to the trip, we also on the trip form we ask if the parent feels they can give a little extra support for kids who can’t do it, and so many

¹⁷ During data collection, their elementary school building burned down, and the students have been attending school at a former Catholic School in Jersey City, going by bus. Their buses board outside my daughter’s day care center at the same time I drop her off.

parents give a little extra. I had a parent call me up the other day. I sent out the school supplies [list], and the parent called me; it was a new Kindergarten parent. And he said, “We want to give extra for anyone who can’t afford it.” It’s sort of the culture of this place. Everyone’s always giving, so a lot of parents pay the cost for other kids. But they never know who, it’s always anonymous. So there’s never a kid who can’t go, there’s never any embarrassment. And that’s just part of the culture of the school.

Two gentry parents from that charter school confirmed this:

She’s got a trip next week, she just told me it’s \$274. I’m like, “Thanks for the notice.” But she says that the teachers are like, “I want everybody to come, if you don’t have the money don’t worry about it, we’ll sort it out. You’re all coming.” They all go home with a form that says \$274, but he makes a point of saying “You’re all coming.” Those kids, they certainly know who they are. They’ll get help.

A related issue is parent fundraising, which alienates lower-income parents (Morrison, 2011). One charter school founder in Hoboken explained, “Parent fundraising makes [charter schools] feel like more of a suburban school.” For example, at a fundraiser for HoLa tickets cost \$65 to \$80 per person, and the event featured an auction with such items as organic dairy products (\$420), summer camp (\$550), Jets tickets package (\$825), Long Beach vacation (\$2500), Porsche for a weekend (\$1,300), boat slip (\$1,000), complete party (\$1,900). A participant said that a benefit for the Hoboken Charter School at the W Hotel (tickets were \$90) was so fancy that she thought “Queen Elizabeth was going to walk through the door.” Auction items included a golf threesome and a cocktail party for 24 guests at your home (each valued at \$1,600) and a visit to the set of “Blue Bloods” and lunch with Donnie Wahlberg (valued “priceless”). These schools are clearly benefitting from the economic, social, and cultural capital of the parents who access them but it makes low-income parents feel that they do not fit in.

The founders and administrators appear conflicted about the fundraising issue. Because of their limited funding, they feel that they must embrace parents’ desire to

contribute; at the same time, they seem concerned about how it appears for a public school and how it affects school dynamics for those from lower socioeconomic backgrounds.

Participant 1: So we have to fundraise. Especially with the quality of programming we offer. . . . We have to raise funds, but it's always a challenge to figure out how to tap into the fact that we know a lot of parents can afford—they pulled their kids out of private schools to come here and we know they can afford to support this school—how to tap into that. And they want to. They're very eager to. They're saying, "What can we do? How can we help?"

Participant 2: Well, they're saving. When you look at a private school that would offer this, \$35,000 easily.

Participant 1: . . . without alienating the parents who can't. So tonight's our PTO meeting, in fact, and we had a whole meeting about how to address that because it's delicate. They don't want to be nickled and dimed. A lot of parents say, "I'd rather just give a fat donation and leave it at that, just ask me for it." So we have to ask for it. But we don't want the people who can't afford to, to feel like it's mandatory. So it's a very, very delicate process.

However, a charter school parent reflected on the issue of socioeconomic diversity at fundraisers and school events, with less concern about some parents and children feeling left out than school leaders expressed:

That's life. There are functions that are free, and there are functions that cost money and more money. Like that Mardi Gras dance they have to raise money for the school, the ticket is \$100 a ticket. That must eliminate a certain number of families. But then you have the Halloween Day, and it's free, and the holidays we celebrate, those don't cost money, so . . . to raise money for the school, you have to have a \$100 ticket. You can't get away from it, as much as it does eliminate some people.

A more controversial feeling, expressed by some, is that families from the HHA do not feel wanted, or are not wanted, in charter schools. One African American mother (not from HHA) who is a visible and outspoken opponent of charter schools said publically at a Hoboken School Board meeting (televised locally),

These charter schools act like private schools . . . they kick the African Americans and Hispanics out. . . . They are re-languaging *Brown v. Board* . . . use the free and

reduced [-price lunch] kids—use their names and criteria. Then treat [them] like animals. . . . They used my son to cut the ribbon and then harassed him.”

She went on to describe abuse that she said her child had suffered at the charter schools.

Only one of the HHA parents whom I interviewed said that she had received a charter school application and that from only one charter school. So, although charter school founders and administrators claim that they make extensive efforts to recruit low-income children, the recruitment efforts have not adequately reached low-income families. One founder said, “In my experience as a long-time charter school teacher, the outreach doesn’t always reach all of those places . . . outreach and access isn’t as clear as intended in charter applications.”

Frequently cited as evidence that it is the intention of the charter schools to serve a middle-class population is the application for the new charter school, DaVinci. The application says, “Many of our students would probably come from within a half-mile of our location, given that the bulk of new three-bedroom construction is in the Northwest area of Hoboken.” Here, the founders point out the accessibility for families who can afford three-bedroom apartments (likely about \$1 million) that are being constructed around public housing but not the very close location (within two blocks) of public housing and the children who reside there (Toback, 2012). When asked about this, the DaVinci founder who wrote this paragraph said that this was simply an oversight and pointed to the emphasis in the application on economic integration.

A former district administrator reflected on what happens when children from HHA attend charter schools:

What happens is, at the charters, the kids who come in from housing with discipline problems, etc., are made to feel weird. They make the families uncomfortable until they pull their children out. I’ve seen that happen where kids, who are bratty, leave and go to a charter and then they come back.

It should be noted that the African American HHA mother whom I interviewed whose children attend a charter school was very clear:

The families are very welcoming. My kids get invited to play dates and birthday parties—they are absolutely included. I love the school and family dynamic. I work with one father at the University and after the school fire, parents would email that they were free and could babysit if needed.

She went on to explain that in the aftermath of Super Storm Sandy parents from school texted her—because HHA was one of the last areas to have power restored—“Do you need anything, want to come to shower, want the kids to come sleep over?” When I asked whether gentry parents are concerned about their children visiting HHA for play dates, she said that her son’s best friend lives on Washington Street and visits frequently to play, and that his father picks him up.

Not the Reasons HHA Residents Do Not to Apply to Charter Schools

Some potential explanations were categorized as “not the reasons HHA residents do not apply to charter schools.” That is, I found no empirical evidence to support these possible reasons why low-income housing residents do not apply to charter schools, although some gentry speculated that these might be reasons or literature on the topic suggested that they might be valid reasons. These “nonreasons” include that HHA residents do not care about the education of their children, that they are turned off by the philosophy of charter schools, that they are opposed to charter schools, or that the lottery is fixed.

As shown in Chapter 5, public housing residents care very much about their children’s education and make school choices based on the same desires as gentry parents—they want the best for their children and families and they want their children to

fit in the school that they attend. There is no evidence for the ideas of a culture of poverty or an urban underclass who do not care about their children's education.

The parents with whom I spoke expressed high aspirations for their children and cared very much about them. As one HHA mother explained,

I say to my son, "There's a lot of kids in Africa that have no opportunity to go to school." I say to my son, "You're not going to be an exception—many kids wish to have your potential, the opportunity you have. Your father is one example; he didn't finish school. He went to third-grade level, I don't know, maybe lower than that, because he never finished. He had to work since he was 10 years old. Someone took him from the family and put him to work."

Another mother from HHA reflected on how her son could benefit from the gentrification of Hoboken:

I teach him to strive for better and for more. Some people are more fortunate than others, and I feel like he's more fortunate because I'm a good mom. Not to say that my mom wasn't, but I open his mind and I keep an open mind and I let him know, "Reach for the stars—anything is possible." So I have talks with him that my mom didn't have with me. I let him know that there [are] other opportunities out there; this is not it. Like, Hoboken is not the world—there's a whole world out there that you can see and that you should want to see, and never settle for less. So me telling him these things, I do believe that he can benefit from the changes going on here.

One night I observed a father come back to the Center with his young son long after he had picked him up from the after-school program. He was still wearing his work uniform, and his son could not find a homework assignment that was due the next day.

The father went through the trashcans, walked all over the Center, and directed his son to look through the shelves for it. When he had no luck, he spoke with a staff member who located another student from the class, copied the homework assignment, and gave it to the father so that his son could complete it. This is only one of many examples that I observed of hard-working parents working diligently to help their children to succeed in school.

Certainly low-income families have to contend with many circumstances that can influence school decisions. Families may have language barriers, have received subpar educations themselves, have multiple work commitments, lack access or ability to use the Internet for school research, have a history of poor relationships with institutions, or have other personal issues. In addition, lack of access to a car, little disposable income for child care, and inflexible work situations could influence school choices. Although participating parents were frequently uninformed or confused about charter schools, this does not indicate a lack of commitment to their children's education. Rather, it points to situations that charter school founders and administrators must understand in trying to create diverse student bodies.

I also found no evidence that the pedagogical philosophy or theme was a significant barrier to HHA families applying to charter schools. This was an explanation that I expected to find, and one that would have fit nicely into education literature about different types of parents' pedagogical preferences (Delpit, 1995; Ravitch, 2010). Although some charter school administrators and founders cited this as a possible reason for difficulty in recruiting families from HHA to apply, I did not find any support for this explanation. None of the HHA parents whom I interviewed knew anything about the teaching style of the schools. None described it as being "too laid back" or progressive.¹⁸ Some said that they had heard that charter schools were, in fact, good schools or even better than the other options, and a few knew of and spoke highly of a private school in town with a pedagogical model similar to those of the progressive charter schools. One

¹⁸ The only exception was the only HHA parent whose children attended charter schools. She had transferred two of her children from one of the charter schools to another because she thought that the first school was not a good pedagogical match for her son.

young man from HHA told me that his sister was attending HoLa because “they wanted my sister to learn Spanish.” HHA parents would have to know more about these charter schools to be able to make choices based of their pedagogical philosophy.

I also did not find that HHA parents were anti-choice or anti-charter school. As described earlier, there was great confusion about what a charter school is, but no HHA parent expressed a problem with the school’s philosophy or with the idea of school choice.

A few people with whom I spoke, who were clearly anti-charter school, cited the possibility that charter school lotteries are rigged to keep out low-income children of color and to favor children of the gentry as a potential explanation for the demographic differences between charter schools and district-run schools. Although investigating these claims was not a focus of this research, the interviews showed that families in public housing are not applying to charter schools in the first place, so the lottery is not excluding them. The only HHA mother with whom I spoke who had applied to charter schools for her children actually had all of her children accepted into charter schools explained,

We got lucky all the way around. My fifth grader got into both [charter schools we applied to] and we then had sibling status. Then two kids got into one of them and three into the other. So we prayed on it and split them up two and two. We knew we had sibling status if spots opened up at the other.

Because of sibling preference, she eventually got all of her children into the charter school that she preferred. In interviews, charter school leaders adamantly denied the possibility of any kind of cheating, cited the transparency of their process, and invited me to observe their lotteries.

Implications for Research and Theory

Even though it was not the intention of the founders of charter schools, it is clear that, because of charter school choice, the gentry can avoid the traditional district-run public schools. Other researchers have found that, over time, the parents who choose charter schools founded on inclusionary principles care less about inclusion and philosophy and more about finding a “good school” for their children (DeSena, 2009; Morrison, 2011). As a result, they do not share their cultural and social capital with young people from low-income backgrounds, and the children of the gentry do not benefit from Hoboken’s socioeconomic and racial diversity. It is also clear that charter schools utilized by the gentry do not appeal to the same student population as the district-run public schools. HHA parents do not choose to apply for charter schools for several reasons: They prefer their neighborhood school, they are confused about what a charter school is, and/or they are concerned that their children will feel like outsiders at the charter schools. Meanwhile, gentry parents choose charter schools because they see them as superior to the district-run public schools and as places where they and their children will fit in.

Neoliberal policies that assume that everything, including education, benefits from a market-based strategy have helped to escalate the winner-take-all society. In Hoboken parents are given a choice among public schools, as well as the option to apply for charter schools. Theoretically, neoliberal school choice should allow all parents to choose the best fit for their children while creating productive competition with the public schools to improve all options. Instead, in Hoboken school choice has allowed for the creation of a parallel school system wherein parents *are* choosing what they see as the

best fit but this is not serving all schools well and is preventing school integration and its benefits.

Gentrification has affected education, and in turn education affects gentrification. Creating charter schools as an educational alternative to the district-run public schools has allowed upper-middle-class residents to stay in Hoboken, thereby increasing the overall SES of the community and home values—which, in turn, forces out more and more residents who cannot afford this expensive lifestyle. The upper-middle-class residents see the free preschool system, a tolerable district-run public elementary school, and most of all, the charter schools in town as real estate benefits. These tuition-free programs allow them to upgrade to million-dollar, three-bedroom apartments (while often leasing out their previous two-bedroom apartments for high rents) so they can maintain this urban lifestyle longer than previous waves of gentrifiers had even contemplated. If these gentry decide at any point that these options are no longer acceptable—usually around the time their children reach fifth grade, they can choose private schools or move to the suburbs.

In many cities the segregative effects of charter schools have been examined, but the case in Hoboken is rare in that the gentry is creating the charter schools and they serve the gentry primarily, not low-income children of color. In Hoboken school choice is increasing gentrification and increasing the income divide in the city. If charter schools are a way for middle-class families to move into and remain in gentrifying or gentrified neighborhoods and avoid the district-run public schools by creating their own schools, the implications are serious. This circumstance encourages the expansion of gentrification, while having segregative effects on the district-run schools—or at the very

least preventing them from diversifying—and may allow families that might have left for the suburbs to stay in cities and increase re-urbanization. If charter schools do not appeal to or do not recruit from low-income populations they will only continue—as one parent noted—“the re-languaging of *Brown v. Board.*” Children of color from low-income backgrounds will continue to attend segregated schools despite living in communities where they are in fact socioeconomic and racial minorities.

The founding of charter schools in Hoboken is representative of neoliberal education reform policies that favor the elite. Charter school founders are well-educated people who have the economic, social, and cultural capital to take time away from their careers to devote time to being unpaid founders, who often are heavily involved in the day-to-day running of the school in some capacity. The only people who can do this easily are the wealthiest people, who can harness this capital with ease (and in other locales, large charter management organizations that can rely on large networks and extensive philanthropy from similar types of people; Scott & Holme, 2002). These well-educated, intelligent, talented people can use their connections to start charter schools and to make charter schools function efficiently. This was evident during data collection. When one charter school in town burned down and when another was flooded during Super Storm Sandy, the leadership and parents of these schools found new buildings and supplies swiftly and relatively seamlessly and got the schools up and running again impressively quickly.

Thus, neoliberal school reform policy is reliant on the wealthy to “reform” schools by starting and leading new ones in places such as Hoboken (or in cities where charter schools serve a different demographic by financing charter management

organizations that start new ones)—and in some places closing schools that are run by paid Department of Education employees (who are often from more diverse backgrounds), giving more power to the gentry in places like Hoboken. In addition, this “free”-market school choice inherently favors those with extensive social, economic, and cultural capital that can be used to garner philanthropic contributions and community support, while others who attempt to open charter schools will face large and at times insurmountable hurdles (Scott & Holme, 2002). One founder said,

I think it’s really important for people to be integrated and if I were making national policy, which I’m not, or state policy, charter schools are not the way I would go. But it’s the tool we have. That’s what’s available. As parents and educators who want to make a difference, that’s the lever that we can move. So we’re using the tool that’s available, not necessarily because that’s the best nationwide policy.

Gentry parents in Hoboken will continue to be willing to take on the task of starting new schools. As one gentry mother explained,

Hoboken High School is several years away from being where it needs to be. It’s on its way, but it’s not there yet, and you don’t have enough people that are willing to take the chance with their children to send them there. I would be willing to do it [start a magnet high school] because I’m an educator and I . . . you could do stuff at home. Should I have to do that? No, but it’s like, because I’m aware of it, I could be more involved and really push the envelope.

These gentry founders of charter schools, with even the best intentions to foster diversity, are White upper-middle-class people who will struggle to create socioeconomic and racial diversity among applicants and keep the best interests of low-income children of color in mind at all times.

Given the experiences described by the gentry interviewees, it is clear from an education standpoint why gentry parents make the school choices that they make. There are certainly issues of unacknowledged racism and classism that influence decisions, as well. Yet, it would be too easy to point only to racism and classism, which historically

underlie so much of education and race relations in the United States and are certainly a factor in Hoboken, but the open houses alone demonstrate a clear difference in school atmosphere and student and parent expectations among the schools: (a) At Connors, when gentry parents visited, the administrator told them that their children will be alright because they have them for parents; (b) at HoLa the administration anticipated the parents' stress about helping their children with homework that is in Spanish with a lecture on how they could help in a productive way and a discussion of neurological science; and (c) at Elysian the principal presented a detailed PowerPoint® presentation on progressivism.

There are certainly also issues of racism and classism at play in school selection in Hoboken. Critical race theory in education stems from critical race theory in law, which argues that laws and policies in this country always favor Whites. Critical race theory argues that this is a “racialized society in which discussions of race and racism continue to be muted and marginalized” (Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995). Neoliberal school choice policies favor White families in Hoboken, where Connors, the school serving the public housing population, has a long history of underperforming and receiving lesser resources.

Gentry parents can use school choice policy to avoid school integration. Gentry parents express fears about students being stabbed in public schools and about older children (likely low-income minorities) interacting with their children at Wallace (which serves up to seventh grade) but do not mention any concern and see these types of interactions as a selling point at Elysian (which serves up to eighth grade and is heavily made up of gentry children). Similarly, gentry parents are often unwilling even to

consider Connors for their children. This confirms what other researchers have found: White parents avoid “Black” schools or schools with high poverty rates (Hankins, 2007; Saporito, 2003; Saporito & Lareau, 1999). This attitude has its roots in historical fears of minorities. The only way to combat this type of underlying racism and classism is through integration and exposure. However, like so much of this study, it is complicated. Gentry parents and others can point to events that justify their fears such as the child of one participant who was sprayed with Lysol in class at Connors, the fight at the Hoboken High School girls basketball game, the suspension rates at Connors and Hoboken High School, and the guest speaker who witnessed students behaving badly at Hoboken High School.

Gentry parents find charter schools to be the right fit for their families. After climbing four flights of stairs to get to one open house, hearing that the school rents one floor of a clearly not-state-of-the-art building and six rooms in another building and yet there will be 200 applicants for approximately 16 openings in the charter school kindergarten, it becomes apparent that facilities are not a pressing concern for gentry parents. More important to them is what is happening within the school, particularly the curriculum/philosophy, student body, and parental involvement. When I started to collect data, I found it interesting that gentry parents applied to three very different charter schools just to avoid the district-run schools, yet I discovered in my research that these schools share a clear mission that drives the curriculum, faculty, and administration and in which the faculty and parents can invest, and that these three public schools harness the capital of gentry parents—something that these parents desire. Parents also appreciate that these schools do not seem to simply “teach to the test” or drill students for tests. The

curriculum and philosophy of these schools make gentry parents feel that their children are getting a more demanding and intellectually stimulating education.

The case of charter schools in Hoboken is an important one. It is different from many other cities because, as one charter school founder put it,

Everywhere else is all poor kids. Someone from one of the charter advocacy agencies came to a meeting I went to; it was like all the charter schools. He was like, “This is the first group of White charter parents I’ve ever been to.”

However, what has happened in Hoboken will not be an isolated case. Gentry in other areas, even in wealthy suburbs, are already using the same school choice policies to circumvent majority minority schools or to create schools that appeal to their pedagogical tastes and, as this continues, the consequences will be far reaching.

Policy Implications

To end the parallel public school system in Hoboken, the most important piece would be to make the district-run public schools, including Connors, appeal to gentry families and to find ways to draw children from Connors into other schools, including charter schools, in the district. As discussed in Chapter 5, magnet programs are needed to appeal to gentry parents in the district-run public schools. The founders of both HoLa and DaVinci charter schools would have preferred their models be incorporated into the district-run schools instead of having to start charter schools, but they faced resistance from the district. The next time a group of gentry parents with a solid plan expresses a similar interest, the district should give them an opportunity to enact it *in Connors School*.

Neoliberal school choice is here to stay, and the district should learn from the charter schools and embrace one of the original ideas behind charter schools: that they can be laboratories to discover best practices. I spoke to at least two gentry parents who

expressed an interest in starting a magnet school or another charter high school (that appeals to the gentry). There will certainly be other groups of parents in the future who step forward to try this, and the Hoboken Board of Education should find ways to work with them. One charter school founder from HoLa said,

One thing that everybody remarks on that I know is kind of the rigidity of the public school system here, the fact that when there are problems it's impossible to address them. The administration is very, very unresponsive. One huge selling point for HoLa, believe it or not, is the food program. There are people who say that they came to HoLa because we have Revolution Foods[®], which is an organic, environmentally sustainable food service. Not because their children would be learning everything in Spanish.

DeSena (2009) found in her study of Greenpoint, Brooklyn, that gentry parents often found it easier to start their own schools than to work within the bureaucracy and red tape of the New York City Department of Education. This is where Hoboken, a mile-square city, has an opportunity to be less rigid and show more flexibility in meeting the needs of the population.

More active efforts must also be made on the part of charter school administrators to recruit those from various backgrounds to join the founding teams and become actively involved in the school. Otherwise, they will continue to have difficulty in appealing to families from low-income public housing. Charter school staff should not give up on recruitment efforts because they have waiting lists and sibling preference that limits available spots. The only way that established charter schools will diversify is through purposeful outreach and recruitment of applicants; they could take cues from charter management organizations in other cities that go door-to-door to recruit in public housing. They should also form real collaborations with trusted institutions that work with residents of public housing, not simply list them as supporters. Charter school parents could volunteer and get to know the children and families who live in public

housing and establish relationships of trust with them if they truly want to create diverse schools.

In addition, the charter school founders who have expressed interest in diverse schools should not end their involvement at the elementary level; they should use their talents and their reputations in town to try to improve Hoboken High School and to attract large groups of gentry parents to enroll their children in it. Some are doing this already, but not in the numbers necessary to create a “tipping in” (Stillman, 2012).

Hoboken is a small enough city with enough economic capital to have improved integrated middle-class schools that still feel like neighborhood schools with the same benefits that come with local neighborhood schooling. No more charter schools need be established in Hoboken at this point. The three that exist have shown that gentry parents will stay in Hoboken and be committed to their children’s schools if they are happy with them. In the future, every effort should be made to involve these parents in the district-run public schools and to recruit a diverse range of applicants for the charter schools.

Chapter 7: “The Best Place to Get a Mocha”: Issues of Access for Youth in Public Housing in a Gentrified Community

Though the Villa’s [public housing community] isolation from the surrounding South End is not unimaginably extreme, it is unmistakable. A walk along Tremont Street will reveal the presence of Latinos only between the corners of the two streets that bracket the Villa. The hair salons, cafes, restaurants, theaters, bakeries, flower shops, boutiques, and other establishments in the surrounding South End rarely, if ever, see Latino clients, even though there are 3,000 of them within walking distance . . . most . . . adolescents spend nearly all of their time at the Villa [Division in Boston’s South End between the gentry and residents of public housing]. (Small, 2004, pp. 99-100)

This is Starbucks, the best place to get a mocha, and it’s so relaxing in there. (HHA youth participant, 2012)

When I began this research, I expected to find that young people in public housing in Hoboken lived in an isolated environment (in the public housing campus) and rarely frequented the amenities that the gentry frequent. I expected to tell a tale of public housing residents who, although they can go to such amenities as charter schools, riverside parks, supermarkets, and free cultural events—all valued by the gentry—do not do so. Thus, it would be easy to tie the education and environment findings together. This version would have been a simpler story to tell, one not of access but of not accessing because of feelings of difference and discomfort. However, the data yield a far more complicated and nuanced tale that cannot be tied together as clearly, but there is value in this complexity.

This chapter examines the importance of environment to the health and well-being of youth in public housing, the extent to which youth in public housing in Hoboken have access to and actually enjoy amenities in their town, the obstacles that they face in frequenting amenities, and how athletic fields and sports have become a battleground in the community.

Environmental Concerns of Youth in Public Housing

Like everyone else, young people are greatly affected by their physical environment. A person's physical environment significantly affects his or her quality of life and health. Researchers such as Loukaitou-Sideris (2003), Bronfenbrenner (1979), Ward (1978), and Lynch (1977) have demonstrated the importance of the physical environment to the lives of children.

Studies of low-income public housing residents have shown that, on average, they experience poorer health, get less exercise, and have less access to supermarkets and fresh healthy food than people who do not live in public housing. Murray, Kulkami, and Michaud (2006) found that in 2001 there was a life expectancy gap between the 3.4 million urban Black males in high-risk areas and the 5.5 million Asian females in the United States of 20.7 years. For 15- to 64-year-old Blacks living in high-risk urban areas, the mortality risks are similar to those of sub-Saharan Africa. A Black 15-year-old living in a high-risk urban area is 3.8 (males) or 3.4 (females) times as likely as an Asian in America to die before the age of 60. Income inequality is also associated with mortality in the United States and, compared with other developed countries, there are large income differences and significantly lower life expectancies in the United States (Wilkinson & Pickett, 2008).

Youth in public housing in particular are susceptible to certain health risks. For example, low-income, minority, public housing residents have an elevated risk of obesity. Obesity can lead to heart disease, diabetes, arthritis, and premature death. Factors such as the safety of the neighborhood, access to physical activity resources, the availability of unhealthful food and unavailability of healthful food all can lead to an increased risk of

obesity. Lack of physical activity can result in chronic diseases, while physical activity can assist in preventing and treating diseases. According to Bennett et al. (2007), “Physical inactivity is pervasive, particularly among those living in lower income urban communities” (para. 1). Socioeconomic status is also linked to leisure-time exercise (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 2004).

Walking is a form of exercise that is affordable and seemingly possible for most people, but researchers have found minimal amounts of walking among public housing residents—even among those who live in walkable urban areas. In a study of 452 low-income public housing residents, researchers found that almost one third of the sample reported that they had done no walking in the previous 2 weeks, 62% had not done any vigorous physical activity in the previous week, and only 21% had met recommendations for moderate physical activity (Heinrich et al., 2007). In a survey of public housing residents in Birmingham, researchers examined physical activity levels and found that 30% of those surveyed reported no participation in any of 13 physical activities during the previous year (Lewis, C., et al., 1993).

In addition, in low-income neighborhoods, where public housing projects are prevalent, there are few healthful eating options. According to Sturm (2008), “Disparities in the type and density of food retail outlets have been hypothesized as a possible cause of differential obesity rates across racial/ethnic lines” (p. 681). Many studies have found that low-income families lack supermarket access, which results in higher prices for lesser-quality goods (Powell, Slate, Mincheva, Bao, & Chaloupka, 2007). Moore and Diaz Roux (2006) concluded that low-income neighborhoods had half as many supermarkets and four times the number of grocery stores as wealthy areas.

Another problem that urban public housing dwellers face with regard to health and leisure-time activity is that urban parks in disadvantaged areas can be sites of drug dealing, gangs, vandalism, and litter. Loukaitou-Sideris (2003) argued that urban parks frequently “reinforce divisions based upon class, race, age, or ethnicity” (p. 131).

Public housing residents in Hoboken do not face many of these problems. They do not live in a food desert. In addition to (expensive) farmers markets and organic groceries, there is a large ShopRite™ and an A & P® store. Depending on where someone lives in the public housing campus, ShopRite is between 0.3 and 0.7 miles away, and A & P is between 0.25 and 0.5 miles away (Figure 21). For public housing residents in Hoboken, fresh fruits and vegetables are accessible. There are also ample parks and playgrounds; Hoboken is a small, safe, walkable city. While this study does not measure the effects of gentrification on health, it does examine whether young people from public housing are accessing the amenities that could potentially lead to improved health and well-being. The research reported in this dissertation was designed to determine whether youth in public housing and their families take advantage of the supermarkets, accessible parks, and other amenities that should have positive effects on their health and quality of life.

Accessing Amenities

This study adopted multiple strategies to determine whether youth in public housing in Hoboken are isolated and whether they access amenities throughout Hoboken. In addition to being interviewed, the teenage youth participants were given disposable cameras and asked to take pictures of their daily lives in Hoboken and their favorite and least favorite places, which they then captioned.

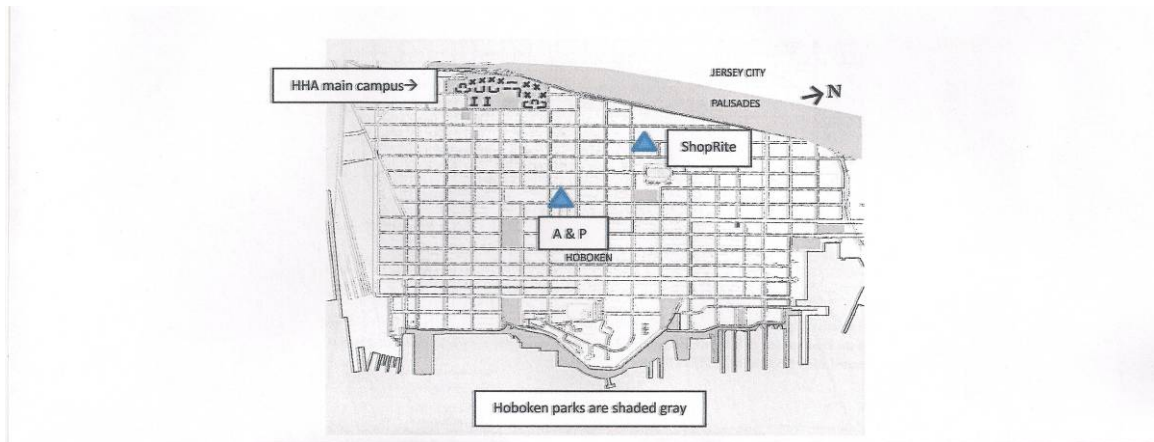


Figure 21. Map of Hoboken parks and supermarkets. Source: *Vision 20/20: A Sustainable Plan for Public Housing in Hoboken, NJ*, by Hoboken Housing Authority & Marchetto Higgins Stieve PC, 2010), Hoboken, NJ: Author.

The findings show that the amenities in Hoboken are more diverse than a visitor might notice at first glance. Youth in public housing are not isolated in the public housing neighborhood. These young people frequent and appreciate the parks in Hoboken; their families go to Washington Street; they love to be near the water; they shop at large supermarkets; they attend the free festivals and events in town; and they utilize the library and public transportation.

Research in the field of gentrification and neighborhood effects leads one to conclude that, when gentrification comes to a community, old-timers, natives, and low-income people of color begin to feel out of place as their establishments are replaced by those of the gentry. Scholars such as Zukin (2010) have argued that Starbucks, specifically, and other such upscale retail establishments, represent how the gentry “imposes its own tastes on urban space” (p. 3). She explained, “The tastes behind these new spaces of consumption are powerful because they move long-time residents outside their comfort zone, gradually shifting the places that support their way of life to life

supports for a different cultural community” (p. 4). The findings in this study suggest just the opposite, supporting the conclusion that young people of color from public housing in Hoboken in fact enjoy the same cultural commodities (such as Starbucks) that the gentry enjoy. In fact, these young people cite Starbucks specifically as an amenity in their community that they enjoy. One teenager from public housing captioned his picture of Starbucks, “the best place to get a mocha.”

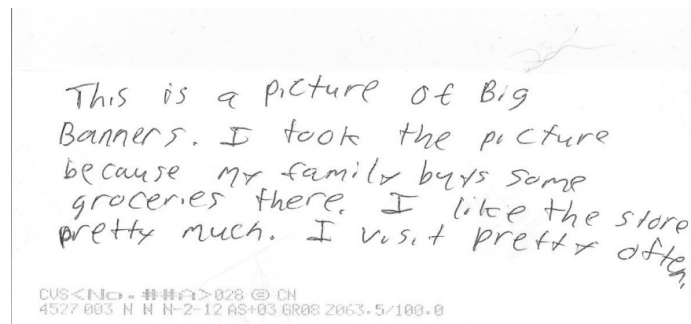
Environmental Advantages of Gentrification

It became evident through observations made in this study and through the youth participant interviews and their photographs, captions, and maps that living in a gentrified community has several advantages for youth in public housing: supermarkets, parks, free sociocultural events, transportation options, the library, stores, restaurants, and cafes.

Grocery Shopping

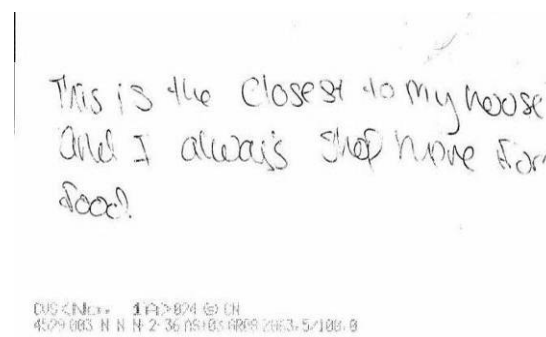
Across the street from the HHA main campus is the Big Banner Super Market, the type of small local market (with check cashing services) that is frequently criticized in public health research for being overpriced and less healthful than a large supermarket. Although HHA families and the youth themselves often shop at Big Banner, all interviewed HHA residents reported that they did the majority of their shopping at large supermarkets such as ShopRite or A & P in Hoboken or even BJ’s in Jersey City. There was no evidence that public housing residents feel uncomfortable shopping where the gentry shop. They utilize the Big Banner between supermarket shopping trips in the same way that many gentry utilize their expensive corner organic store between supermarket shopping trips. HHA residents often sheepishly admit to buying milk at Big Banner in the same way that the gentry admit to buying these items at expensive local organic stores.

The teenagers who took pictures and wrote captions for them are designated in this section as Teenagers A through F for purposes of anonymity. Teenager B's photograph and caption (Photograph 30) indicate the role that Big Banner plays in his family and his community; his family buys "some groceries there."



Photograph 30. Big Banner Restaurant and Super Market (Teenager B).

Teenager F's photographs and captions (Photograph 31) show that her family uses both types of stores, although she likes the convenience of Big Banner her mother shops at A & P. Large supermarkets are frequently unavailable for public housing residents in highly disadvantaged neighborhoods, but they are available and used by public housing residents in Hoboken.



Photograph 31. Supermarkets frequented by the family of Teenager F.

Parks

Hoboken has four large parks (Figure 21), as well as several other small parks, public walkways, and piers along the Hudson River. These parks are safe and clean and utilized with great frequency by the gentry. Many of these parks are being renovated, either directly or indirectly, as a result of being part of a gentrified community. During data collection, a renovation of Church Square Park was financed through a city bond and \$50,000 from the Project Play Initiative, which was launched by the Hoboken Family Alliance, a group of gentry parents (offshoots of an earlier version of this group was responsible for starting the town's first two charter schools, discussed in Chapter 6). A description of the founding of this organization demonstrates the role of the gentry in the

upkeep of the parks and playgrounds and the political economy of place in a gentrified community.

It's a beautiful spring day at Liberty State Park in May 2009. Zabrina Stoffel and Regina Gannon watched with delight as their young children played safely together. They liked the state-of-the-art equipment and the areas that encouraged creative thinking. . . . An idea was formed . . . why not bring this type of park to Hoboken? The two women approached the city of Hoboken with their concept. . . . They learned about the latest in playground design which included environmentally sustainable building materials. The City Council's Parks and Recreation subcommittee was impressed with all their work and encouraged them to keep moving forward. (Hoboken Family Alliance, 2013, para. 1-2)

When the renovations to Church Square Park did not satisfy all parents in the community, a group of preschool parents petitioned the mayor and city council to add equipment for preschool aged children. Within a matter of weeks they were given notice that the additions would be made to the newly renovated playground.

Despite the gentry's prominent role in the building, upkeep, and use of parks and playgrounds, these spaces are utilized frequently by youth in public housing. All of the youth from HHA who were interviewed reported that they utilized these parks and many cited them as their favorite locations in town.

My favorite place, I guess that would be the park on the Hudson River because, I don't know why, I just feel so relaxed there. I just look at the water, and sometimes there's not a lot of people around. So it's a good place to think.

Another teenager said, "Yeah, the one near the Hudson River. My friends just like to go there just to look at the skater boys because they're so hot. But not me, I just go there just to see them skate."

Youth from public housing also enjoy the public piers. One told me about a favorite spot:

The piers. They're very tranquil when it's just a quiet sunny day, because then you get that kind of ocean breeze, you get to see the boats and the helicopters.

You can see New York, and during the sunset it's really beautiful. So it's pretty nice.

Another young person described how she and her friends like to “lay on the grass.” One teenager said, “I like Pier C by the water. I usually play there all the time, even though I'm like, 17, I feel like a little girl.” As one father of a daughter who lives in HHA explained, “I go by the river with her. It's better than over here.” An HHA mother shared, “We try to go to all the parks that they have here.” When asked whether she sees benefits to gentrification and the changes that have come to Hoboken, she said,

Definitely beneficial. I see a lot of condos coming up around a lot of old buildings or places I remember [were] knocked down and condos replaced, which I'm OK with that. But also they've put up a lot of parks so it's not all about condominiums, they've done a lot of things for kids too. So I'm OK with that.

Young people from different backgrounds and schools interact in these spaces. I encountered many examples of this during observations.

Today when I was at the park on Jackson Street with my daughter there were only about six families present. Two young Latino boys are accompanied by either an older sibling, babysitter, or very young parent who sits with a girl on a bench, cuddling and listening to music. There is a strong smell of marijuana surrounding them. At one point they get in a fight, yell at each other, the young woman storms off, then comes back and they begin kissing. The two boys with them, about 8 and 10, play with three gentry toddlers and a gentry mother and father. One of the boys brings some of the communal sidewalk chalk over to my daughter and shows her how to use it. She laughs and tries to eat it; his caregiver and the young woman he is with laugh and talk to my daughter. The other young boy shares his ball with her. The two young boys start to play soccer with one of the gentry fathers of a toddler and another gentry mother. (Field Notes, January 2013)

As these field notes demonstrate, the parks are a place for children and families from different backgrounds to play and interact. Many gentry parents described the parks as diverse places where their children play with children from different backgrounds. Issues sometimes arise. Gentry parents have commented about the parks being filled with “ghetto” children at certain times or have expressed annoyance about “their language” or

use of water balloons in the summer (which break and gentry parents worry about their little children choking on the balloons). In all observations, however, diverse groups interacted smoothly in these spaces.

The photographs that the teenagers took of their daily lives demonstrate the importance of parks to them. All six teenagers who completed the photography project took pictures of two or more parks in Hoboken that are not located on the public housing campus. These findings are also significant because youth from public housing are not only going to the parks and playgrounds and fields around public housing, and the park right next to their high school; they are also frequently going to Church Square Park,¹⁹ centrally located in Hoboken and the parks on the waterfront—far from public housing. These are the same public spaces that the gentry told me they frequent in Hoboken.

Teenager A took photographs of two parks in Hoboken: one a centrally located park (Church Square Park) and the other a pier over the Hudson. One of his pictures and the caption are shown as Photograph 32. Teenager B took photographs of two parks in Hoboken, as well as a war memorial on the waterfront. Teenager B's Fourth Street park picture is Photograph 33. Teenager C took photographs of two parks and the Hudson River. Teenager C's picture of Columbus Park is shown as Photograph 34. Teenager D took pictures of two parks in town and commented that he enjoys being able to swing at the park. His picture of Fourth Street Park is shown as Photograph 35. Teenager E took pictures of two parks and the walkway along the Hudson River, which she described as "the most relaxing place in Hoboken. Anytime I can, I go there." Her picture of the park

¹⁹ Gentry families who participated in this study called this park by its official name, Church Square Park, while public housing residents referred to it as Fourth Street Park.



This is my favorite place in this world. I go there
always the time, I love sitting there, to think
about everything.

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Photograph 32. A favorite place: A pier on the Hudson River (Teenager A).



This is a picture of fourth
street park. I took the picture
because I have gone here since
childhood. I love the park very
much, I do visit the park
regularly.

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4527 003 N N N 2 28 03 03 0008 2003 5/100 0

Photograph 33. Fourth Street Park in Hoboken (Teenager B).



Columbus Park

I think Columbus is a fun place
to go to.

CUS<No. 25A>001 © CN
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Photograph 34. Columbus Park, Hoboken (Teenager C).



4th street is one of the places that I hang out because
it's the only park that has a lot of swings and I like
to play on the swings.

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Photograph 35. Fourth Street Park in Hoboken (Teenager D).

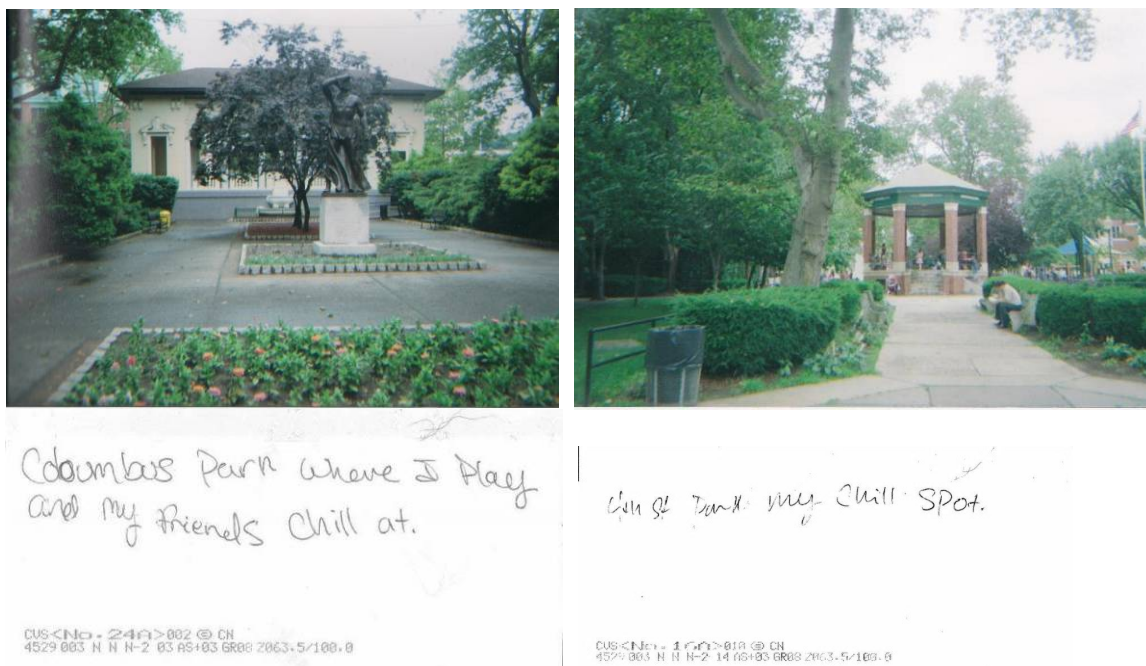
near the Hudson River is shown as Photograph 36. Teenager F took pictures of two parks and a playground within public housing where she takes her sisters “all the time;” she was the only teenager to take a picture of recreational space within the public housing campus. She also took pictures of Columbus Park and Fourth Street Park (labeled “4th Street Park, my chill spot”) outside the public housing campus (Photograph 37).



This is a picture of a park that is nearby the Hudson River. I have good memories of it and it has a lot of trees. I feel so refresh when I sit at a bench and I just think. It is really a special place. I have also hunged there with my friends and just had a great time.

Photograph 36. Park in Hoboken near the Hudson River (Teenager E).

The visual data demonstrate that the parks and piers in Hoboken are enjoyed by youth from public housing. They clearly have regular access to clean, safe parks—something that far too many young people from public housing in isolated urban locales do not have (Loukaitou-Sideris, 2003). This access to parks and to clean and safe recreational areas should contribute to the health of young people and combat obesity and related health problems while allowing youth from different backgrounds to interact.



Photograph 37. Columbus Park and Fourth Street Park (Teenager F).

Events

The Arts and Music Festival is crowded as it is a beautiful day in Hoboken. The street is full of people drinking mango and blueberry flavored lemonade, eating fried Oreos, gyros, pizza, and corn. The smell of basil from a pizza oven nearby fills the air. The festival is full of children and dogs. It is very diverse with people from a wide variety of ethnic, cultural, age, and socioeconomic backgrounds. Behind my table is a huge slide and children's band. Young attractive White women walk by with painted signs to hang on their apartment walls that say "Hoboken."

While most of the people who stop by to sign up for the run to benefit the Center fit the typical yuppie profile, a few do not. One Black teenage male in a du-rag takes a signup sheet, along with an older Black man wearing a NY Waterways uniform and a middle-aged Black mother of a teenage boy. The atmosphere is festive, and everyone seems to get along well on the crowded streets. I notice in just a few minutes a labradoodle, poodle, and cockapoo walk by. One woman is carrying her small white dog in what appears to be a baby carrier. (Field Notes, May 2011)

The many free and safe sociocultural events that take place in town are another advantage to living in a gentrified community. There are movie nights under the stars,

exercise classes on the pier, concerts, Shakespeare in the park, harvest festivals with petting zoos, Italian festivals, and Arts and Music festivals. Most of these events take place on Washington Street or along the waterfront. These types of events are not as feasible or common in isolated predominantly low-income communities as they are in a gentrified community, with its level of public safety and economic, social, and cultural capital.

When I first conducted field observations at these events, I found them to be decidedly geared toward, and dominated by, the gentry. However, as I got to know the HHA community, I began to notice residents from public housing at these events. I came to realize that, because Hoboken is a gentrified community with only 11% of residents below poverty level, the gentry must necessarily dominate most events in town. But that did not mean that low-income public housing residents were not in attendance. Interviews with both youth and parents in public housing confirmed these observations. The teenagers and many of the parents take advantage of the variety of free cultural and educational opportunities in Hoboken.

When asked about attending the Arts and Music festival on Washington Street, one teenager said,

I do because they usually have a lot of interesting things there, like food from Argentina, which I saw at this Music and Art festival. And bands that no one's probably ever heard of. So it's interesting to actually hear that at the Music and Art Festival in Hoboken, because you wouldn't expect that from a small area like this.

One teenager remarked, "Oh yeah, usually I participate in them [arts and music festivals] and like to volunteer for like little face painting and tattoos and stuff." Another teenager commented about summer movies and concerts in the park: "I've been to those, those are really, really fun." The fireworks made an impression on another teenage

participant, who said, “I went to the fireworks; it was beautiful. This year I’m going to go to like one of the movies or the concerts.” The food at these events was a common positive theme for several of the teens: “The foods are good, good food,” said one teen, describing her best memories. Another commented specifically, “Usually I go for the food. They have zeppoles, I think they’re called? The little buns and powder?” Parents from the HHA were appreciative of these events too: “Oh [my son] loves that [free movie nights outside]. Oh yes, the concerts are very good for the summer. Thank goodness they have all these little programs free. Sometimes I go and observe the exercise.”

These events in Hoboken provide another space for co-presence and common experience. They are another opportunity for young people from public housing to leave their immediate neighborhood and encounter cultural experiences alongside the gentry. As one of the teenagers put it, “Like, everybody comes together.”

Restaurants, Cafes, Stores, and the Library

Based on the literature about gentrification, I anticipated that the youth from public housing would feel uncomfortable in and around many of the retail establishments on the main thoroughfare, Washington Street. I asked all interviewees about favorite and least favorite places in Hoboken and about any places that they did not like or where they did not feel comfortable—and why. All said that they enjoyed the amenities on or near Washington Street and frequently walked on Washington Street. They are teenagers, and they tend to favor such establishments as Johnny Rockets[®], McDonald’s[®], Ben and Jerry’s, 7-Eleven[®], and Benny Tudino’s Pizzeria, but they also frequent Carlo’s Bakery (and love the red velvet cupcakes), Cold Stone Creamery[™], Hoboken Bar and Grill,

Starbucks, Rita's, American Apparel, Ricky's NYC, and other establishments frequented by the gentry. One teenager said,

[When I] just, like, need to air out and, like, take a deep breath and just walk around, I would just walk around Hoboken. Like me and my friends would just go by the water maybe, just go into a store and look around; like, just calm ourselves down. It's a place that you can just get out and walk because it's not far from your house. Everything is just there.

Another teenager said, "Washington Street is always fun." One teenager articulated the difference in dining options on Washington Street as opposed to those in the plaza near public housing: "I love to go eat there; a lot of interesting food besides Chinese food and pizza." During the photography research, all six teenagers with cameras took photographs of restaurants, cafes, or stores on or near Washington Street.

When I asked one participant about feeling uncomfortable in any restaurants, the participant said, "Not restaurants, because I'm pretty sure the employees and the owners want to keep a friendly business. So they'd want you to feel as comfortable as possible." One of the teenage participants said that she sometimes feels like people stare at her, which is uncomfortable, but she claimed not to care. She said, "I go everywhere in Hoboken." When I probed and asked her about places where she would not go or might feel particularly uncomfortable, she said, "Probably sushi stores, because I don't like sushi. I really don't like sushi." This indicates the level of comfort that the young people from public housing feel as they move within the culture of commodity frequented by the gentry and the cultural capital attained living in a gentrified community. Although she did not like sushi, it was clearly not exclusively the realm of the gentry. These findings differed from those reported by Perez (2004), who found that young male public housing residents felt discriminated against and stigmatized by business owners.

The teenagers also took photographs of the library, which is located on Church Square Park in central Hoboken. Although one participant took a picture of the library and captioned it, “I do not like this public library because it’s kind of small and the employes [sic] are always mean,” the others expressed positive feelings about it. Convenient access to a library, reading materials, computers, and the Internet are very important to urban, low-income students in light of the achievement gap and the digital divide.

The youth participants’ photographs demonstrate that they frequented commercial outlets on or near Washington Street. Teenager A took seven photographs of amenities on Washington Street—six restaurants or cafes and one convenience store. Two examples are shown in Photograph 38. Teenager B took pictures of nine amenities on Washington Street: six restaurants or cafes, one convenience store, and two shops (Photographs 39 and 40). Teenager C took pictures of two shops on Washington Street and the library (Photograph 41). Teenager D took pictures of eight amenities that he frequents on or near Washington Street: seven restaurants or cafes, one shop, and one convenience store. His picture of Starbucks is shown as Photograph 42. Teenager E took photographs of three restaurants or cafes and a convenience store on Washington, as well as the public library that she utilizes (Photograph 43). Teenager F also took a photograph of the library, as well as four restaurants or cafes and a store on or near Washington Street (Photograph 44). Washington Street, the main thoroughfare in town, is clearly a place where youth from public housing feel at ease, not just hanging out but also shopping and consuming alongside the gentry.



the best cupcake ever,

CUSCINCo 1 3A>813 @ CH
4528 883 N N H-2-10 AS+83 8888 2853-5/100-0



There was the first restaurant my family
thru here. The food is soo good.

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4528 883 N N H-2-10 AS+83 8888 2853-5/100-0

Photograph 38. Amenities on Washington Street, Hoboken (Teenager A).



The picture is the Guitar Bar Jr.
which sells guitars, bass guitars, and
other musical instruments. I chose to
take a picture of it because I bought
both of my guitars from there.
I really enjoy this place, especially
when I take lessons
there. I visit this place every
week once to take lessons.

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4528 883 N N H-2-10 AS+83 8888 2853-5/100-0

Photograph 39. Guitar Bar, Washington Street, Hoboken (Teenager B).



The picture is of Johnny
Rockets. I took the picture
because I love to eat there.
I like this restaurant very
much. I visit maybe 3 times
a month.

CUS<No. 6A>826 © CN
4527 003 N N N-2-19 AS+83 GR08 2063-5/100-0

Photograph 40. Johnny Rockets, Washington Street, Hoboken (Teenager B).



I walk there all the
time to smell the
flowers.

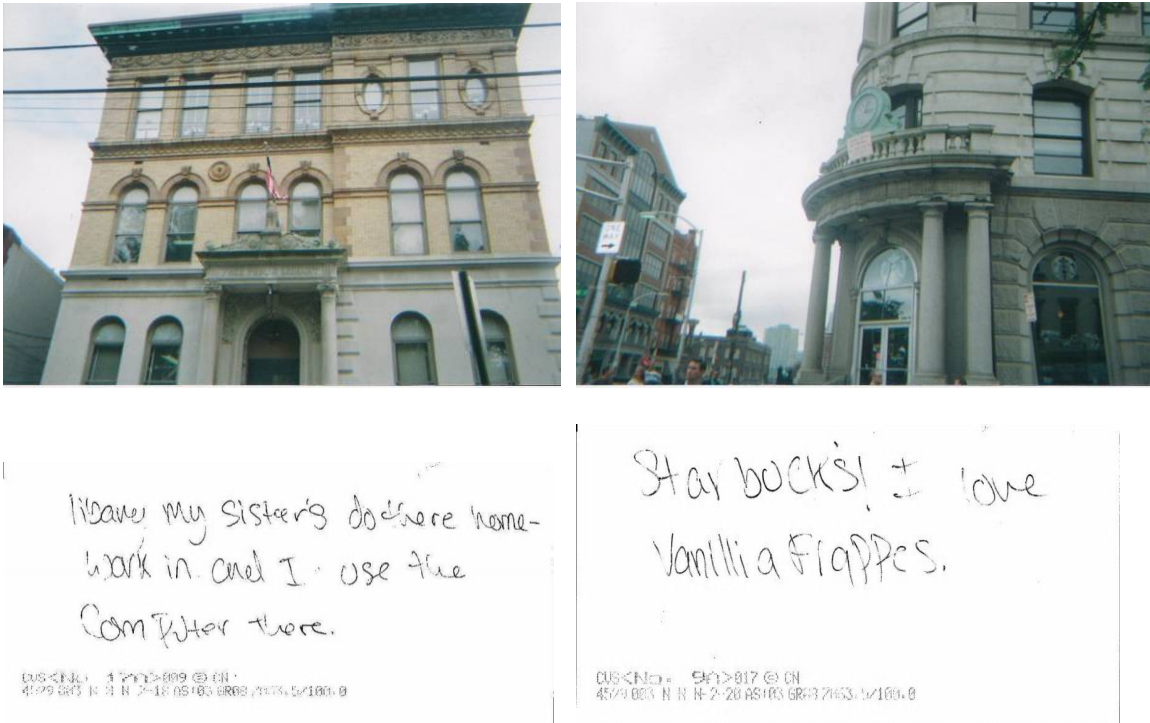
CUS<No. 4A>809 © CN
4527 003 N N N-2-19 AS+83 GR08 2063-5/100-0



Library
I go here all the time
to study.

CUS<No. 9A>817 © CN
4527 003 N N N-2-19 AS+83 GR08 2063-5/100-0

Photograph 41. Shops on Washington Street and the library, Hoboken (Teenager C).



Photograph 44. Library and Starbucks, Hoboken (Teenager F).

Transportation

Public housing residents frequently cite the Hudson-Bergen light rail and the Hop shuttles that serve Hoboken as positive changes that have come to Hoboken with gentrification. Youth use the light rail to get to and from the mall in Jersey City or Central Avenue, and parents use it to get to stores in other cities for shopping. As one HHA mother explained, the light rail is “closer for me to go to the mall” (the Newport Centre Mall in neighboring Jersey City is just one light rail stop away).

The light rail stops are adjacent to the western side of public housing at Second Street and Ninth Street in southwest Hoboken (as well as the main transportation terminal by the Hudson River), and public housing runs from Second Street to Sixth Street. Both are convenient for residents of public housing. Residents in public housing can use the

light rail to get to their destinations or take the light rail to the Hoboken terminal, where they can take PATH trains, ferries, and New Jersey Transit trains. The light rail in southwest Hoboken also brings foot traffic to this area of Hoboken, decreasing its physical isolation. As one HHA resident in the focus group noted, Hoboken is “improving. Since I’ve been here, it has improved, like, the baseball fields, got better. There’s less violence and stuff, which is great. And even better transportation because of the light rail.” Another HHA mother said, “The light rail is fine, it’s great. . . . immensely [happy when the light rail came]. My son is like a fan of the light rail.”

The Hop (\$1 shuttle buses that run throughout Hoboken, with routes as shown in Figure 22), which began in 2010, has opened access to all of Hoboken for public housing residents who are unable to walk everywhere or prefer not to do so. The Hop is part of

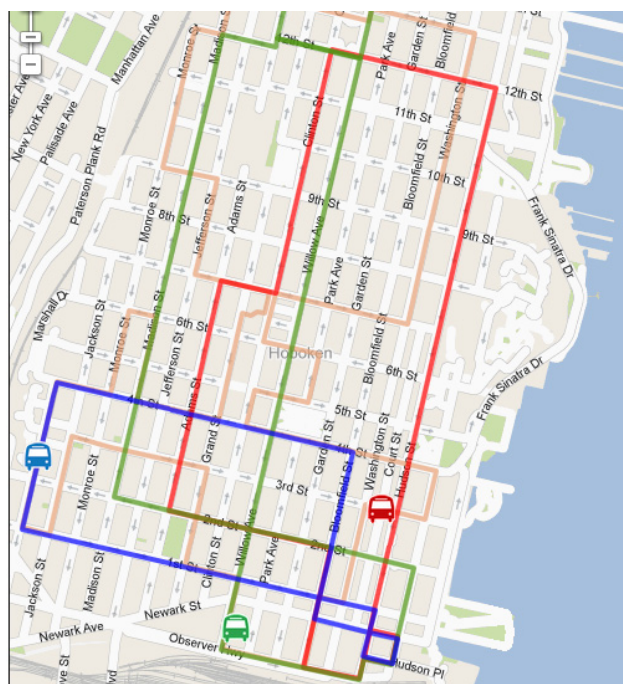


Figure 22. The Hop and Senior Shuttle routes, Hoboken. Source: *The Hop*, by Hoboken, 2013, retrieved from <http://www.hobokennj.org/departments/transportation-parking/the-hop>

the move toward environmental sustainability and is intended to reduce the density of cars on the streets of Hoboken. Along with more bike lanes and car-sharing programs, the Hop is meant to discourage residents from owning cars (Motavalli, 2010). The program, which is directed toward improving the environment and reducing the parking problems in Hoboken, benefits public housing residents. Aside from increasing access to nearby amenities, it provides access to additional transportation to places of employment, which is important to low-income workers. Lack of transportation is often cited as a reason that many urban public housing residents in isolated areas are unable to seek and maintain employment (Wilson, 1997).

One HHA mother said,

I constantly have to walk through Washington Street most of the time I try. Thank goodness that they have the Hop. . . . That's a major change. It's simple for me just to grab and we have the way to locate it, where is the bus. I think it's marvelous what the mayor has done.

Problems With Access

Despite these advantages, young people in public housing in Hoboken still face challenges to enjoying amenities in town. The stores, restaurants, and cafes are expensive and frequently geared toward higher-income gentry clientele. When asked whether they shop for clothing in Hoboken, almost all of the young adults in the focus group replied that they do not. As one young woman said vehemently, “No! They don’t have my size in Hoboken.” Her friend concurred, “They be having the cutest things on Washington Street but they don’t have my size.” And someone else in the focus group said, “That happens a lot, they don’t have plus sizes. Y’all people [gentry] are skinny, I’m sorry.”

When asked where their families like to go for sit-down dinners, most public housing residents reported going to Jersey City, Elizabeth, Newark, West New York,

Weehawken, or other neighboring communities because of the better prices and greater selection. They also shop for home goods and children's clothes outside of Hoboken. An HHA mother explained,

Hoboken really has not been known for, like, clothes. I mean, they're starting to put more stores up on Washington or whatever, but they're expensive. Like, a baby sweater might be \$40. Like, seriously, they're going to grow out of that, and I'm not paying 40 bucks.

Another HHA mother reflected on changes in Hoboken: "I think with them tearing down them department stores and everything up there I think that was, like, not a good thing, because now people have to go outside of Hoboken to shop." A mother from HHA said, when asked about going out to eat, said, "Not really. I mean, Hoboken is so little, depending where you go it could be a little pricey, so if it's not Dominoes or like the Chinese spot around the corner, we don't go."

One teenage participant who said that she enjoys the festivals in town pointed out, however, "Sometimes it's pretty pricey, though. I saw like the prices and was like, 'Whoa you're charging that much for a painting?'" One mother in public housing, when asked whether the public housing community was separate from the rest of Hoboken, replied,

In some sense it is, because, like, if there's activities going on on Washington, you never see any posters down here, there are only posters up there. Say, like, for the art and music festivals, there's never any posters about that down here. You'll see it maybe by the train station or by City Hall, like, on the glass door of my work place or whatever, but you'll never see any posters about anything that's going on up there, so in a sense, yeah, it is.

The Invasion of Mama Johnson Field

They are taking basketball time for indoor soccer. It is not even soccer season. . . . The mayor's son plays soccer. (Interview, October 2012)

In addition to problems related to affordability and advertising of events to the HHA community, access to athletic fields and recreational spaces has become a

battleground for both the youth and the adults in Hoboken, largely because space is at a premium. Hoboken is a small city with not enough athletic fields, and two were under construction during data collection. So when any one group is using a ball field, another group is likely without one, leading to tensions between the gentry and youth from public housing.

Mama Johnson Field (Photograph 45) is an example of a contested area between the gentry and public housing residents. The field is located on the public housing campus and is flanked on three sides by public housing buildings. In 2004 the field was named for an HHA matriarch, the late Mary Elizabeth Johnson, who was a resident, softball player, and housing activist. She was passionate about ensuring that the children



Photograph 45. Mama Johnson Field (January 2013).

of Hoboken had opportunities for safe recreation. At the ribbon cutting for the newly renovated Mama Johnson Field in October 2012, “Johnson’s son, Vinny Johnson, speaking on behalf of the family, recalled his mother keeping a watchful eye from her

third-floor window on everything that went on the playing field” (Hack, 2012, para. 10).

According to former Commissioner of the Hoboken Housing Authority, Orlando Addeo,

The life of Mary Elizabeth Johnson, known to so many of us as Mary, or better yet, as “Momma Johnson” as she was looked upon to so many of us here in the Hoboken Housing Projects. You would call the Housing Projects, some sort of a village, where to many of us, life was indeed a hardship. Good or bad, it was home to all, and Momma Johnson made you feel like it was. She was always there for everyone! Although her children and family were many, Momma kept check on each one of them. (Addeo, 2005, para. 1-2)

In addition to being used by the city and school athletic teams, the field is rented out to Zog Sports and ABL Sports. These coed social sports leagues attract yuppies who play softball, dodge ball, kickball, or other sports. These groups are highly recognizable, walking around Hoboken in large groups with matching T-shirts and frequenting their sponsoring bars or taverns. They are also highly recognizable to the youth in public housing. One young man said of the recent renovations to the field,

The [redevelopment of Mama Johnson Field] baseball field, that’s good. They’re doing that; I don’t want to say 100% for the kids of the projects, 50%. The other 50% is for them [yuppies], so they can have somewhere to play, because I’m pretty sure they didn’t like the way it was looking or how it was going when they were playing kickball down here.

HHA residents, particularly young men of color, expressed resentment that the police “hassle” them for trespassing in public housing, while yuppies are allowed to walk freely there. One young man commented,

Yeah, you get knocked for trespassing for everything you do. If I walk from my building to another one, then that’s trespassing because I have to be signed in to that building. . . . I see yuppies walking through, and they don’t get harassed.

Another focus group participant agreed, “If you see a Black guy, forget about it. They’ll get pulled over quick.” One Latino father whose daughter lives in HHA said that the police give him a “hard time” for trespassing when he is picking up his daughter. A few public housing residents also complained about hypocrisy, citing that yuppies come into

public housing for drugs and “intimacy.” These findings are in line with research about gentrification in other cities, such as that by Perez (2004), who found that police harassed Puerto Rican long-time residents in a gentrified community in Chicago.

Young adults in Hoboken public housing consider the way residents are treated with respect to Mama Johnson Field to be similarly hypocritical. One young adult male said, “I don’t like the fact that we’ve actually got to get permission to use that. I don’t like that. . . . Not always. Not until the “yuppie” leagues started [playing there].” Another public housing resident in the focus group disagreed with him, saying, “Well, I agree with them locking it up because how some of them act it needs to get locked up. . . . They just cut the ribbon, and now one part of the gate is already ripped open so you can climb under and go inside.” The young man quickly countered, “Maybe if it was open, they wouldn’t have to make another passageway for them to get inside. So none of the gates would have been ripped.” Adults who work with youth in public housing concurred, “They [HHA youth] aren’t allowed to play on their own fields anymore.” Yet, the executive director of the HHA maintained that he rents Mama Johnson field to pay for resident services that are no longer government funded.

There is a distinct sense from HHA residents that the yuppies have taken over many of “their” spaces in the city. When I asked the young adults in the focus group where they would hang out when they were in middle school and high school, the following discussion ensued:

Participant 6: The Boys & Girls Club.

Participant 7: Yeah, but then they kicked us out of there.

Participant 7: We would play basketball and then the yuppie squads would come and play dodge ball or use the gym when we’re playing basketball. And then they

wonder why we go out on the streets and start trouble, when we had a place to go before, you understand?

Participant 2: That makes no sense.

Participant 5: But that's no reason to start trouble.

Participant 7: Not start trouble, but, you know . . .

Participant 5: They're bored, they want to do something.

Participant 2: You bored and you want to do something, go play basketball on the basketball court out here.

Participant 7: Then they kick us out when we do that. "Oh, you got a curfew." We grown.

Tensions related to athletics and spaces are most evident when the sports are segregated. One sport in which the segregation between gentry youth and public housing youth is particularly visible is soccer. Gentry youth often participate in soccer. One African American mother said,

The sports are segregated, too. Sports are all segregated. Soccer is White, only five kids of color. You have to sign up online, no massive advertising, there are traveling teams, etc. Football, you sign up manually, but it is all Black. Baseball is not as yuppie as soccer, more born-and-raised Hoboken Whites. For basketball, the charters play with privates, so they don't have to compete against public school students.

On the other hand, a gentry charter school father who coaches soccer said that the soccer teams are "totally diverse because they're so cheap." But then he gave an indication of the underlying issue when he said that, when the newly renovated Mama Johnson field (on the public housing campus) opens,²⁰

I think they're about to get more diverse, too, once we start using that field. Then the kids that don't leave the area will say, "Oh, I want to play that." As a matter of fact, the other coach I coach with was like, "You know, we don't do enough of

²⁰ This interview took place while Mama Johnson Field was closed for renovations (it reopened in Fall 2012 and was then damaged by SuperStorm Sandy).

tapping into the community back there. They deserve to play, and they're probably really good athletes." So with that field there, I think that we'll probably get all those kids to participate.

An African American gentry mother said that her daughter is "playing soccer, and there's nobody, there are very few kids, if at all, there are very few kids of color playing soccer in this Hoboken soccer league. And they're like, 'Well, Black kids don't play soccer,' and I was like, 'I did, I was an All American in high school.'" Mayor Dawn Zimmer, considered a yuppie, and her administration are alleged to favor soccer over other sports. DeSena (2009) reported that soccer in gentrified communities is a segregated sport: In Greenpoint, Brooklyn, the children of the gentry do not participate in community-sponsored sports and their parents instead formed a separate youth soccer league. Although youth from public housing experience advantages in terms of amenities because of gentrification, they also feel that they have lost space in their community.

Implications for Research and Theory

In contrast to most of the gentrification literature, which presents gentrification in an almost wholly negative way (Zukin, 2010) and argues that gentrifiers and old-timers inhabit different spaces in cities (Small, 2004), the empirical evidence from this study shows that public housing residents in Hoboken feel comfortable and entitled to utilize the spaces of consumption used by the gentry. For them, Starbucks does not represent gentrification and exclusion; it is just a place where they can get a great mocha or frappe. Unlike Small (2004), who found that middle-class residents had distinctly separate public spaces, restaurants, and shopping from public housing residents, public housing residents and the gentry in Hoboken share many of these spaces. Parks, playgrounds, cultural events, the library, and modes of transportation are all readily available and accessed by youth in public housing in Hoboken.

The environment findings in this study contrast in a way with the findings about education. Regarding education, HHA residents make choices very differently from the gentry and, as a result, the schools are largely segregated. Gentrification has not benefitted the education of low-income children of color because in school they are not valued customers. Low-income children of color suffer from historically subpar educational experiences and suffer from an achievement gap. Their parents' social and cultural capital and even parenting styles are not rewarded by the school system (Lareau, 2003). Thus, a school system based on the free market puts them at a disadvantage. However, in terms of environment, neoliberalism, and with it corporatized government-backed gentrification, has led to the establishment of consumer outlets in their community that HHA residents want to access and that they enjoy. If they have the money to buy a mocha, their money is as good as the money of the gentry, and they are welcomed as consumers of expensive coffee (or ice cream, sushi, or red velvet cupcakes). In this way, low-income youth of color benefit from gentrification because they have access to and enjoy amenities of their choice, which they have the right to enjoy, as well as the social capital that comes with this exposure. Yet their money is going back into the corporatization of American cities, and their cost of living will continue to increase. As Freeman (2006) explained in his study of gentrification in Harlem, "It is the Starbucks owner who reaps the financial rewards" (p. 208). For youth in public housing, their residency in Hoboken is secure because of their affordable public housing; however, if their families are pushed out of public housing for any reason, or when they grow up and are ready to move out on their own, they may not be able to afford to live in Hoboken as the cost of living continues to increase.

Political economy of place demonstrates that with the gentrification of communities come improved services and public amenities. For public housing residents, the middle-class cultural and social capital of their neighbors, who fight to improve parks and playgrounds and transportation options and to have free cultural and seasonal events in Hoboken, provides real advantages. These parks are public, located throughout Hoboken, and fully accessible to public housing residents, who take advantage of them. In addition, as the neighborhoods gentrify, crime decreases, making all of these amenities more accessible to youth in public housing. However, with these changes comes the loss of spaces that they see as “their own,” such as Mama Johnson Field and the Boys & Girls Club. The gentry can harness their power to benefit their own children (and the sports that they choose to play) at the expense of youth from public housing. In addition, neoliberal policies that shrink the social safety net for low-income residents necessitates actions such as renting out athletic fields to fund resident services in public housing.

Scholars frequently stereotype “the other” and thereby do a disservice to their own agendas. Arguing that gentrification brings amenities that appeal only to the gentry is stereotyping. Many low-income residents of color will appreciate these new amenities and have the same tastes as gentrifiers. With gentrification come benefits for those low-income residents who remain (if public housing remains). However, political economy of place and the harnessing of economic, social, and cultural capital also allow the gentry to dominate athletic fields and other spaces for their interests. In addition, neoliberal policies reduce funding for public housing, making it necessary for the HHA to find ways to earn income, such as renting their athletic fields to the gentry.

Policy Implications

It is essential that housing policy maintain socioeconomic diversity in gentrifying communities. Rather than demolishing public housing to create better health and social environments for low-income public housing residents, public housing policy should allow them to stay, and allow them to stay in the significant numbers that traditional public housing projects provide. If these residents can remain in neighborhoods that are gentrifying, the social and cultural capital of the gentry will improve their living situations in the same way that deliberately created mixed-income developments would.

When large public housing projects are torn down, many residents are displaced and cannot reap the benefits of gentrification; thus, gentrification continues unchecked. If public housing residents are given housing vouchers to “improve their living situations,” they will be forced to leave gentrifying communities and will end up living in majority minority neighborhoods without the amenities that they would have had in a gentrified community. If they are housed in mixed-income developments alongside the gentry, without large numbers of public housing residents, more affordable places such as the Big Banner Restaurant, the “Chinese store,” and other local amenities that they still frequent will likely not survive; instead the residents will be faced with more expensive stores. Mixed-income communities displace the most at-risk members of the community and reduce the diversity of the city. They also make it more difficult for public housing residents to come together in support of the services and amenities that they desire or need. The Vision 20/20 Plan in Hoboken calls for the creation of a mixed-income neighborhood that would in part increase access to shops, healthy food, and employment

and be transit oriented, yet the findings of this research show that the neighborhood already fits this description.

Instead of bemoaning the opening of Starbucks in gentrified communities as the death of authentic urban places (Zukin, 2010), it is important to fight to maintain the diversity of urban residents. In a gentrifying community, there are few ways to stop the free market and the high-end corporate amenities that it brings. However, federal housing policy does not have to support gentrification by tearing down public housing and allowing unbridled gentrification. Public housing in places such as Hoboken and New York City is the only thing standing in the way of a complete realization of the neoliberal urban agenda.

If low-income youth in Hoboken are left without space to play sports, which causes friction in the community, space for youth sports should be prioritized. Along with requirements for open space and low-income housing set-asides, perhaps developers should be required to include recreational space for the community. Residents of Hoboken have long clamored for an outdoor swimming pool, which would be an additional way to integrate the youth of Hoboken through recreational, healthful play and could be required of developers who are eager to build in Hoboken (similar to the givebacks provided to developers in New York City who include privately owned public space in their construction).

Fair and equitable answers to questions of who plays soccer and who has access to recreational space and when can be answered only through school integration. Youth in Hoboken must learn from one another and form meaningful relationships with one another, which will be achieved only if they are not segregated for the majority of their

days. Co-presence of gentry youth and HHA youth now occurs in parks, which function as healthy common spaces, but the young people who were interviewed for this study said that they meet most of their friends in school. To achieve integration across groups, integrated schools are needed, in addition to integrated parks and amenities.

Chapter 8: Separate, Different, But Not Isolated: How Youth in Public Housing Relate to Their Gentrified Community

For some reason there's this stereotype that "Oh, it's bad in there [Hoboken public housing]," and "Nobody wants to go near that place." I sort of feel like there's a wall between the projects and then the other people. It's sort of funny, don't you think? Because here's the projects and then all of a sudden there's nice houses, and so I guess I pretty much feel they don't want to go there and it's a bad place and they don't want their kids to hang out there. (Youth participant, June 2012)

There is a separation between residents of Hoboken public housing and the rest of the community. This chapter investigates the extent of this separation and how youth in low-income public housing, who are part of a socioeconomic and racial minority in the city, feel about the public housing community and its relationship to the rest of Hoboken. It also explores how role modeling and/or proximity to middle class capital influences the lives of youth in public housing and bridges the separation between public housing and the rest of the city.

Separate and Different

Although gentrification has moved "west of Willow" and expensive homes now border public housing on three sides, the public housing neighborhood is still an area that many Hobokenites fear. Derogatory comments about the neighborhood appear on blogs. "Far west . . . between 2nd and 10th, are trouble spots. . . . I for one would rather get a ticket than park my car down there with the fucking savages" (Hoboken411.com, 2007) and gentry discuss the safety of walking around there and the cost benefit of buying homes too close to public housing.

The Hoboken public housing campus appears to be physically separated from its neighboring community. It is located on the far southwest side of Hoboken and does not fit the grid of the city. The high-rise buildings are in the modernist style associated in the

collective consciousness with “the projects”: violence, drugs, and gangs. When the Center tries to host events or programs for gentry families, Center staff are faced with concerns when the gentry hear that they are on Jackson Street. I spoke with one gentry mother who would not visit a park on Jackson Street, a block and a half away from public housing, for a long time because she said that she “does not like Jackson Street.” A book entitled *Hoboken: History and Architecture at a Glance* (Gabrielan, 2010) features a picture of one of the luxury developments, the Velocity, at 600 Jackson Street, immediately adjacent to public housing, with the following caption: “The structure is oriented to its interior courtyard. The layout becomes understandable when considering its location adjacent to ‘the projects’” (p. 152).

However, public housing residents clearly feel that their neighborhood is less isolated than it used to be. Wealthy neighbors in luxury buildings and the gentry playing organized sports on Mama Johnson Field have opened the public housing campus to outsiders to a certain extent. When asked whether the public housing community is isolated or separate, one HHA mother said,

I feel like it's all together because, like I told you, you wouldn't have a person that lives in Uptown walk through the projects. They would be so scared. Now, I be like, “Oh, my God,” you see, like, these rich people, like, walking through. It's calmer; I like the way they [are] doing it now, whether they decide to knock it out or not.

However, participants of the focus group composed of eight residents from the HHA confirmed that a separation between the public housing community and the rest of Hoboken still exists, as they unanimously agreed that, when they think of their “neighborhood,” they mean the area around public housing, not all of Hoboken. A teenager described feeling that there was a wall between her neighborhood and the rest of the city. “I sort of feel like there's a wall between the projects and then the other people.”

She then described how some of her White/Asian friends visited the public housing campus with a friend of hers: “We’re, like, hugging her and holding onto her arm like ‘Oh, my God, I’m going to get shot.’ I guess that’s the joke about it, like every time you go to the projects, you’re going to get shot.” One teenager from HHA explained what she saw as a difference: “Over there [outside public housing] I think people get along and recycle, clean after themselves.” A number of participants noted that their neighborhood is louder, less clean, and less taken care of than the rest of Hoboken.

Despite these feelings of physical separation, these young people seem to be very comfortable in leaving the public housing neighborhood. All of the parents, adults, young adults, and teenagers with whom I spoke leave the public housing campus on a regular basis, beyond going to school, including one of the women who was clearly disabled. They go to the parks and playgrounds, public events, restaurants, cafes, stores, and the library on and near Washington Street. One teenage participant explained, “I feel close to the people I know are in the public housing area, but I do feel comfortable outside of the area.”

To test the hypothesis that public housing residents are physically isolated, I asked the youth participants to map where they go on a daily basis and their favorite places in the community. Originally, I had intended to conduct cognitive mapping research (Lynch, 1977); however, when I realized that this would not work, I gave the youth participants blank street maps of Hoboken on which to draw. The maps were difficult for young people who were not accustomed to looking at maps and the geography of their community, and they found this activity to be challenging.

The results of the youth participant mapping are clear. All eight of the maps show that these young people are not physically isolated in their neighborhood. All eight maps show the youth participant going to at least one park in Hoboken. All eight show that the youth participant accesses Washington Street. Seven of the eight maps show that the youth participant goes to the waterfront area. Four of the maps (that are most visually clear) demonstrate this below.

Map 1 (Figure 23) is clearly labeled and shows that this teenager frequents places throughout Hoboken, including parks, Washington Street, uptown, and the waterfront.



Figure 23. Teenager's places of activity, Hoboken: Map 1.

Map 2 (Figure 24) does not have a key but the markings show that this teenager frequents and likes a variety of places in Hoboken, including all of the large parks. This teenager “hangs out” on the waterfront and Washington Street.



Figure 24. Teenager’s places of activity, Hoboken: Map 2.

Map 3 (Figure 25) shows through the markings that this teenager utilizes the light rail and accesses areas all over Hoboken, including a long stretch of Washington Street, parks, and the waterfront.

Map 4 (Figure 26) shows that this teenager has “chill spots” and likes parks in Hoboken and on Washington Street but does “not really like” her school.



Figure 25. Teenager's places of activity, Hoboken: Map 3.



Figure 26. Teenager's places of activity, Hoboken: Map 4.

The youth participant maps clearly demonstrate that, although the public housing campus might feel separate from the rest of Hoboken, the activities of the youth who live in public housing are not centered in the public housing campus and their high school. These young people are not self-constrained to the public housing community, like the public housing residents that Small (2004) described in Villa Victoria in Boston.

Yet, it is clear that most public housing residents in Hoboken perceive themselves as different from the gentry. As one mother remarked, “It’s like them and us. We’re treated differently, there’s no unity within this town.” One young adult HHA resident even mentioned feeling like an “alien . . . because when we go on their territory, we stand out in the rest of Hoboken.” HHA residents frequently say “y’all” (because they are speaking to me), “yuppies,” “they,” “them.” One woman consistently pointed toward the water and said “them” when referring to gentry families. One participant noted, “When we go on their territory, we stand out.”

Impressions of Their City

To understand whether the feelings of social separation have created negative feelings about Hoboken or about their role in Hoboken for youth in public housing, I asked the teenagers to write lists of words to describe Hoboken. Table 7 lists their words or phrases given in response (original spelling maintained).

Although it is difficult to generalize from these findings, which are sometimes contradictory, it is apparent that youth in public housing in Hoboken do not have strong negative views of the city (with the exception of Youth 6). When they think of Hoboken, they seem to think of parks, food, and history.

Table 7

Youths' Words to Describe Hoboken

Youth 1	Youth 2	Youth 3	Youth 4	Youth 5	Youth 6	Youth 7
Good view	Lovely	Historical	The park	Good parks	Dirty	Historical
Boring	Wonderful	Parks	Historical	History	Boring	restaurants
Nice	Fun	Wonderful	Fun	Pizza	Nosie	Small
Expensive	Amazing	Fun	Awesome	Good view	Fights	Lively
Rich	Cool	Pizza	Nice	Boring	Homeless	Interesting
neighborhood	Great	Small	Funny	River	Broke	Weird
Hobo's	Pretty	Babies	The food is	Musicia-ns	Annoying	Sometimes
Getto people	Crazy	Exciting	good	Small town	Getto	annoyingly
Mean people ^a	Wild	Art	Nice place to	Clean	Fat	loud
Happy people	Happy	Families	go	Good town	Distructable	Sometimes
		Community	The people	Nice people	Ugly	depressing
		Unity	The preetty	Good stores		Great!
		Hometown	place	A lot of people		Everyone
		Music	Fun	Peaceful here		knows
		Sports		Lots of liars		everybody!
		Education				Nice people
						is here
						Awesome
						Diversed
						Lots of fun
						Lots of love

^aIn general, when I asked the teenagers to tell me more about “mean people” or “liars” in the community, they cited issues of bullying or arguments with their friends in school. I asked these follow-up questions to determine whether they were referring to issues with the gentry, but this was never the case.

To define the overlap and frequency of their words and the overall sentiment of the words, I created a word cloud (Figure 27). All of their words were entered into the word cloud generator; the more frequently they were used, the more apparent they are in



Figure 27. Word cloud of youths' words to describe Hoboken.

the word cloud (words that had the same meaning as other words [e.g., *history* and *historical*] were made the same so the frequency would be apparent).

It is clear from this word cloud that the young people with whom I worked do not see their community as overwhelmingly scary, intimidating, dangerous, or isolated. They have largely positive impressions—fun, historical, nice, wonderful, good view, parks, pizza, awesome, happy—and a few negative ones—boring, homeless, ghetto. These words demonstrate the bifurcated city in which these young people reside. However, the preponderance of positive words shows that they do not have a strong negative impression of their town.

Despite the fact that many residents feel socially separated from the rest of Hoboken, most of the youth in public housing do not realize that they are part of a

socioeconomic minority. Many stated that there are “more poor people than rich people in Hoboken.” One teenage participant said, “If they were rich, they wouldn’t be in Hoboken.” Another teenage participant estimated that Hoboken is 75% rich and 25% poor. Only one of the teenage participants stated that there are more rich people than poor people in Hoboken. Although this might be evidence of their teenage narcissism—an inability to look beyond their own immediate circumstances and see the broader picture, it is also evidence that they do not walk around Hoboken feeling like isolated poor children who do not belong.

When I asked the youth to photograph “their community,” a few of the pictures (Photographs 46 through 50) reflect feelings about the evident wealth in the community but at the same time reflect their positive feelings about public housing. As one teenage participant said of public housing, “Honestly, everybody’s saying how disgusting the projects are, but, you know what, it’s a home.” Another said, “It’s nice and peaceful and quiet.” These views contrast with the argument stated in the Vision 20/20 plan for the demolition and redevelopment of this neighborhood: “The lack of distinction between the buildings prevents residents from recognizing a particular structure as ‘home’” (HHA & Marchetto Higgins Stieve PC, 2010, p. 42).

Role Modeling?

Scholars have argued that a benefit to mixed-income housing for youth from low-income families would be exposure to positive, successful role models (Anderson, 1990; Ellen & Turner, 1997). Researchers have argued that exposure to certain role models can increase one’s social capital (Putnam, 2000). The interviews for this study were held to determine whether the middle-class social capital and cultural capital of the gentry were



This is my Home, I took the picture because I love my home. of course I like my home, I am always at my house. I live there with my Grandma,

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Photograph 46. "My home" by Hoboken Housing Authority teenage resident.



Every time I go home from school I pass by this place. I call it "The Woods" and it really reminds me of the place that I used to live in Connecticut. Danbury was the name of the city and I loved it there. I cried so much when we had to move from there to Hoboken. At that time I really hated "The Projects." This places sort of lets me see that Hoboken and the projects do have some beauty.

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4530 003 N N-2-16 AS103 GR08 2063.5/100.0

Photograph 47. "The woods" by Hoboken Housing Authority teenage resident.



I took this pic because I want to
live in a bidden in this

CUS<No> - 1 1A>015 @ CN
4529 003 N N H-2-17 AS+03 GR00 2063.5/100.0

Photograph 48. "I want to live here" by Hoboken Housing Authority teenage resident.



I like the colors ~~in~~ how they look
on the bidden

CUS<No> - 3A>023 @ CN
4529 003 N N H-2-16 AS+03 GR00 2063.5/100.0

Photograph 49. "The colors" by Hoboken Housing Authority teenage resident.



I dislike this house because I always wanted to live there but
couldn't afford it

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4528 003 N N H-2-03 AS+03 GR00 2063.5/100.0

Photograph 50. "I couldn't afford it" by Hoboken Housing Authority teenage resident.

being shared with HHA residents through these types of relationships and whether, in turn, the gentry were learning from their relationships with youth in public housing. These types of relationships could help to bridge the separation between the public housing campus and the rest of the city. The interviews uncovered very little evidence of this. When asked about their role models, all of the youth from public housing cited their own mothers and fathers (one cited her mother and a classmate)—not a surprising finding, as most people when asked this questions would likely cite their parent(s). Just because parents live in public housing certainly does not mean that they are not role models for their children. As one teenage participant put it, “I look up to my mom because my mom’s a really strong person and she’s been through a lot and she hasn’t let nobody down no matter what.” Another explained that her mother is her role model because, “every day I’ll be like ‘I’m broke, I have no money,’ and I know she probably doesn’t have any money, but how is there still food on the table? I know she saves up money and she’s smart about stuff.” Just as Joseph et al. (2007) posited, there was no evidence of cross-group role modeling with these teenagers; they did not say that their role models are wealthy, financially successful gentry in their community; instead, they admired their parents for overcoming obstacles.

I asked the focus group of HHA young adult residents whether they knew of any role modeling occurring between yuppies and HHA residents. One participant answered, “Well, we live right next to condos, luxury condos. But we never, never see them.” All of the participants were in agreement, except one young adult male who thought about it and then took part in the following exchange:

Participant 6: Actually my friend lives in there. I have one friend that lives in there.

Interviewer: From the High School?

Participant 6: Yeah, but now she graduated from high school; she's in a college.

Interviewer: So did you, like, hang out with her parents? Did you feel like they were good role models in your life?

Participant 6: I went to her house, and, yeah, I think they're role models. Her mom is friends with my favorite singer, Ciara.

This young man (Participant 6) had met his friend through Hoboken High School. If more gentry children attended the high school and if the elementary schools were more integrated, there would be more potential for these types of relationships to form. This type of cross-group role modeling and relationship building can benefit HHA residents and the gentry. If youth from public housing can make friends with children of highly financially successful college-educated parents, go to their homes, and feel comfortable interacting with them, these experiences and connections can benefit them in terms of education and employment in the future.

Proximity to Middle-Class Capital

The proximity to middle-class capital has the potential to benefit young people who live in public housing. The teenage participants' photographs indicate some advantage to living in close proximity to middle class capital. Living near a college residential campus, corporations, and businesses that could employ them can influence their quality of life and decrease isolation. Teenager B mentioned the campus of Stevens Institute of Technology in the heart of Hoboken (Photograph 51) and job shadowing at the Wiley building (Photograph 52). Teenager D mentioned that he would like to work at Rita's Italian Ice on Washington Street (Photograph 53). Teenager E also mentioned Stevens Institute of Technology and specifically the Animé Convention that is held there



This is Steven's Institute of Technology, close to the Hudson River. I took a picture of it because I have gone there from a numerous amount of times for different reason. I like it because it is big and has several buildings. I don't go there too often, but I do see it a few times a month.

Photograph 51. Stevens Institute of Technology, Hoboken (Teenager B).



This is the Wiley building in Hoboken where they process books shipping and manage the Wiley website. I took a picture of it because I went there for job shadowing. I like the building and the staff. I have only been there 3 times.

Photograph 52. The Wiley Building, Hoboken (Teenager B).



Rita's sell some good Italian ice's because it's cheap and I would like to work there.

Photograph 53. Rita's, Hoboken (Teenager D).

annually (Photograph 54). Teenager F mentioned that she would like to work at Ricky's on Washington Street (Photograph 55).



The image is terrible but in the background there is a sort of like a castle structure. I know that is right by Stevens, a really great college that it is sort of my third choice of where I want to attend. At Stevens they hold an Anime Convention which I go to every year with my friends. It is really fun.

Photograph 54. Site of the animé convention, Hoboken (Teenager E).



I want to work here so bad. :(but I have to be 18

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Photograph 55. Ricky's, Hoboken (Teenager F).

Implications for Research and Theory

I did not find that living next to extreme wealth left youth in public housing isolated or depressed about their situation; overall, they like Hoboken and access all of it, but they feel a separation between their community and the rest of the city. To create real change in their lives, significant changes should be made to the segregated school system in Hoboken, as in communities nationwide. True mixing does not occur in a community

by virtue of living next door to someone or even playing together at the park. As the youth participants and parents in this study reported, the children form their social networks, which last through the years, in elementary school. This research shows that children from public housing who attend the segregated Connors have social networks made up mostly of other children from public housing, while children who attend the more diverse Wallace are more likely to have a more diverse group of friends. If all public housing youth were attending diverse, integrated, middle-class schools, there would be potential for role modeling and more expansive social networks. Yet neoliberal school choice has created an environment in which, despite the demographics of the city, both gentry parents and parents in public housing can make school decisions that are maintaining rather than ending segregation.

Even more important than integrating schools, there must be a larger discussion about poverty and income inequality in the United States (Anyon, 2005; Berliner, 2007). Many of the parents in this study who lived in HHA were gainfully employed; I spoke with residents who work for the Board of Education, in transportation, in hospitality at a hotel, at stores, and for institutions of higher education. Many very poor and unemployed residents live in public housing, but there are also residents who are working and still struggling to make ends meet. There are few realistic ways for them to overcome poverty when they are at a disadvantage even before entering school. The cycle of poverty will continue as long as economic inequality is this great.

In this economic system, those at the top rely on those at the bottom to provide services (Sassen, 1990). The gentry in Hoboken want to have their homes cleaned, their children cared for by nannies, and their nails manicured, and they have the economic

capital to make this happen. However, those in the service industry are not making enough to break the cycle of poverty, and the achievement gap will not decrease until this occurs, whether the poor are moved to opportunity or the opportunity moves to them. Neoliberal policies that rely increasingly on the private sector rather than the public sector are weakening the existing safety net for low-income families and making it more difficult for them to survive and thrive. If this continues, the separation between the two communities could increase rather than decrease.

Policy Implications

Failing a complete restructuring of the American economy and ideology, the least that can be done is to maintain economic diversity in cities through public housing, subsidized housing, and rent control. It is problematic that cities have become places where only the wealthy and the poor can live because the working class and lower-middle classes have been squeezed out. It is all the more important that public housing be maintained and, with it, some level of city-wide urban socioeconomic diversity. Even J. Jacobs (1961), who so famously wrote in disgust about slum clearance and high-rise public housing design, argued that public housing projects should not be demolished. “These expenditures, in spite of having been ill conceived, are too large to write off, even for a country as rich as ours” (p. 393). Jacobs argued that, to be safe, a street must have clearly marked private and public spaces, have eyes on it, and be frequently used. She claimed that housing projects did not have these qualities but asserted that they could be improved (Jacobs, 1961). This study has demonstrated that many of these qualities are coming to public housing via gentrification. As one HHA mother reflected,

It [the public housing campus] used to be a little isolated, but now it doesn’t feel like that anymore because there’s so many other things coming around it. It’s

funny to even find like, “Oh, where did this building [come from] this wasn’t here?” So it doesn’t feel isolated. I think we’re surrounded by so many other buildings, it seems pretty cool now.

Public housing should be maintained so residents can benefit from gentrification. The schools must be integrated so children can benefit from the social and cultural capital of one another. Every effort must be made to bridge the separation between the public housing campus and the gentry.

Those who work with residents in public housing should make every effort to harness the capital of the gentry to benefit those most at risk and to bridge the separation between the HHA main campus and the rest of Hoboken. Fortunately, the arch between public housing and the light rail—which had a fence so no one could pass through—was recently opened (Photographs 26 and 27). The Center has begun to host activities (during hours when the Center was previously not in use) geared toward the gentry. These activities will increase revenue for the Center and bridge the divide between the communities by opening up Jackson Street. The most socioeconomically and racially diverse event that I experienced in Hoboken was an 10,000-egg Easter egg hunt on Mama Johnson Field hosted by Hoboken Grace Community Church (Field Notes, March 2013). More efforts like these should be made to open this community to the gentry without taking away access to amenities for public housing residents or demolishing and rebuilding the neighborhood. More festivals and other events (like the Easter egg hunt) that the gentry cannot resist and that are marketed to the gentry should take place on Jackson Street. Restaurants, bars, and other amenities should be encouraged and supported on the southwest side of Hoboken. All events on Washington Street should be deliberately marketed to public housing residents.

In Hoboken, maintaining the low-income housing projects is not the only necessary move. Rent control laws should be clarified and strengthened, and all new developments should be required to provide set-asides for low- and moderate-income residents (this has not happened historically in Hoboken). One charter school founder explained the need for more affordable housing in Hoboken:

I don't think there's enough public housing. I think that it's terrible that our society has become such a kind of a winner-take-all type of society where we're an incredibly wealthy, prosperous country, and I feel like everything is rigged to benefit the rich, and I think that's deeply unfair. I think the least we can do is offer public housing and subsidized housing. I would like to see more subsidized housing, for example, for teachers. Our teachers can't afford to live here in town. I mean, the thing is, they provide an essential service to our community, and they can't afford to live here, and I think that's a shame.

Chapter 9: It All Comes Back to Schools and Public Housing

“I think people should have a right to some stability. Families have a right to live in a neighborhood.” (Sister Norbetta, tenant activist on gentrification, Hoboken New Jersey, 1981, as cited in Schept, 1981, p. 16)

I feel their master plan is to get rid of all of this. (HHA resident, commenting on the Vision 20/20 Plan for redeveloping public housing in Hoboken, 2012)

This dissertation has told a story of young people who live in public housing in the gentrified community of Hoboken, New Jersey. The findings show that school integration in a community that is predominantly middle class is not occurring. Youth from public housing do not attend integrated, predominantly middle-class schools as a result of gentrification because neoliberal school choice policies maintain school segregation. Both gentry parents and HHA parents make school choice decisions out of fierce protectiveness of their children; neither group wants to take what they perceive as a “chance” with their children. As a result, the children attend different schools. The majority of public housing residents opt for their local school, Connors, as their school choice decisions are based primarily on convenience and social networks. Meanwhile, gentry residents opt for charter schools, private schools, or public schools other than Connors. They make these decisions based also on social networks, but on the reputation of the school, parental involvement, and the presence of a clear educational philosophy, as well. Public housing residents are not applying to charter schools, founded by and dominated by the gentry, for three reasons: preference for their neighborhood school, confusion surrounding charter schools, and a feeling that their children will not fit in at the charter schools. Meanwhile, gentry parents do not even consider Connors for their children because of a fear that their children will not fit in and the school’s reputation and

test scores. The result is that the potential for school integration and the sharing of social and cultural capital that comes with gentrification adjacent to public housing is lost.

However, young people in public housing in this gentrified community enjoy access to parks and public spaces, free sociocultural events, transportation options, restaurants, cafes, and shops that are the results of gentrification. They struggle with the affordability of amenities in Hoboken, but overall they enjoy many of the same spaces and places as the gentry. While youth from public housing do not feel isolated, they feel physically separated and socially different from the larger Hoboken community. Although public housing residents are comfortable in accessing all of Hoboken, meaningful sharing of cultural and social capital between the groups does not occur frequently and HHA residents sense a divide that has not been breached to the extent it could have been, in large part due to segregation in the schools. In addition, while HHA residents are comfortable in accessing all of Hoboken, gentry residents are not as comfortable in the HHA neighborhood.

These findings show that current public housing policy that promotes the demolition of public housing and the creation of mixed-income communities is not necessary in gentrifying or gentrified communities where the public housing has been well maintained. The environmental benefits that will come for low-income residents, from this movement toward poverty deconcentration will come through gentrification alone. Many of the arguments used to justify the demolition of public housing in the Vision 20/20 Plan (such as isolation and lack of access to amenities) are simply not issues for public housing residents in Hoboken because of gentrification.

Neoliberal policies that promote gentrification, school choice, and demolition of public housing have created an environment in cities in which young people from low-income minority families are now living in a middle- to upper-middle-class environment, but they are still attending segregated schools. In addition, they are facing the potential demolition of their housing. Unchecked neoliberalism could lead to the breakup and privatization of both their schools and their housing.

Significance of the Findings

This qualitative case study of the mile-square city of Hoboken, New Jersey, supports rethinking of current public housing policy. The case in Hoboken, a city on the precipice of new urban renewal (i.e., the demolition of public housing projects in order to build mixed-income development in line with current thinking and policy on public housing) demonstrates that such a move is not only unnecessary but would have adverse effects on the most at-risk residents and the diversity of the community. Neoliberalism and gentrification in Hoboken have created a situation in which the benefits that would come to public housing residents from demolishing public housing and rebuilding—increased safety, amenities, parks and playgrounds, transportation—are already present. Youth in public housing in Hoboken feel a degree of physical separation and social difference but they use the amenities that Hoboken has to offer. Contrary to the widely held belief that gentrification has negative or isolating effects on low-income populations (DeSena, 2009; Small, 2004; Zukin, 2010), HHA residents enjoy the cultural commodities of Zukin’s “bourgeois bohemians” and attain cultural capital from this exposure. They enjoy the parks, walking and eating along Washington Street, and the

piers on the waterfront; they now have access to local transportation options to get them to nearby cities, as well as supermarkets, banks, and a library.

When I worked with youth in East Harlem in 2007 and 2008, there were no Starbucks in that area. One day, I was walking on Third Avenue around 116th Street when a group of White people in an SUV slowed down and yelled out the window, looking straight at me, “Where is the Starbucks?” The group of Black and Latino teenagers with whom I was walking started laughing hysterically, amused that they had been asked for a Starbucks in East Harlem. They were also amused because the White people looked at me, the one person in the group who did not live in East Harlem, to ask where it was. In Hoboken, the young people who live in the HHA do not have to laugh at the idea of a local Starbucks. While the gentry might not think that it appeals to them in the way it does to me, these findings demonstrate that it does and that youth in public housing enjoy these types of amenities in their community. However, the problem remains that, with insufficient education and career opportunities and a lack of middle-class social, cultural, and economic capital, they will not have the same ability as the gentry to afford these amenities.

One area that gentrification has not improved for youth in public housing is education. Youth of color from low-income families attend majority minority schools with below-average test scores and large numbers of low-income children. Meanwhile, the gentry, even those who live close to public housing, utilize school choice to avoid the district-run school convenient to public housing or to select a charter school where they feel their children will fit in and receive the type of education that they desire. These

findings confirm what other research on this topic shows (DeLuca, 2007; DeSena, 2006, 2009; Hankins, 2007; Stuart Wells, 2002).

Charter schools, founded on particular pedagogical philosophies and themes, are open to anyone who applies and wins the lottery. However, low-income families of color demonstrate a preference for their neighborhood schools and confusion about what a charter school is, and they experience feelings of not fitting into these charter schools. As a result, the children of the gentry and the children in public housing both miss the opportunity to attend truly socioeconomically and racially diverse schools and share their social and cultural capital.

The demolition of public housing to build a mixed-income community will not change the education situation in Hoboken. In fact, the particular plan in Hoboken to create a mixed-income community on the public housing campus calls for a charter school in the development (HHA & Marchetto Higgins Stieve PC, 2010), which the findings in this study show will increase rather than decrease segregation in the schools. The only way to increase integration in education in Hoboken, which should be a goal of all urban reformers and which will benefit youth in public housing as well as gentry youth, is to create plans, within the current system, to attract all parents to make school choices that promote economic and racial integration.

Over the past 20 years, many cities undergoing gentrification have chosen to demolish public housing projects in favor of mixed-income housing and poverty deconcentration. The cynics and conflict theorists argue that this is all part of a larger neoliberal agenda to clear out the urban poor, usually people of color, and make room for global elites and corporate wealth (Crump, 2002; Hackworth, 2007; Lipman, 2011;

Smith, N., 1979). Even those who believe that the intentions behind these plans are honorable must remember that, historically, when authorities attempt to engineer better social conditions for low-income families, they often miss the particularities of their lives and much is lost (Jacobs, J., 1961; Young & Willmott, 1992).

In Hoboken public housing I saw numerous examples of the benefits of social networks for the residents that could be lost through demolition. Families in HHA have social capital; that is, they feel a sense of safety and collective efficacy because they know that their friends, neighbors, and relatives are watching their children. One participant from HHA noted,

Parents look after each other's kids really here. I've had a couple of moms who knew my daughter and when she would play with their kids and I never had to worry about anything happening to them because they all watch each other's children. When it comes to the kids we're like a family, but with the other things, no. But when it comes to the kids, they bond. No one messes with our kids.

One teenage participant explained, "It's, like, everybody knows everybody, so they have your back, no matter what. If you're in trouble you could just [say] 'Hey, help me out.'" These residents are part of a well-connected community (Putnam, 2000).

Social networks also influence the day-to-day lives of residents. One grandmother told me that she and her daughter, who both live in public housing, do their shopping at "BJ's, you know, you can buy wholesale and get a certain amount. And if it's too much, my daughter is my neighbor and we split it. She pays for one, and I pay for one, and then we split it. . . . I live by myself and I cannot bring too much home." She also told me that, when her daughter had a child and was in a smaller HHA apartment, they traded apartments so her daughter could raise her child in the larger apartment where she had grown up.

These examples of social networks within public housing demonstrate what will be lost if it is torn down, not to mention the “root shock” that families would feel. Fullilove (2004) defined *root shock* as the “traumatic stress reaction to the destruction of all or part of one’s emotional ecosystem” (p. 11). She warned that urban renewal efforts cause root shock for urban African Americans and can threaten “the whole body’s ability to function” (p. 11). She noted that because “you dance in a ballroom, have a parade in a street, make love in a bedroom, and prepare a feast in a kitchen” (p. 10), these places, a person’s roots, are deeply important. She detailed how the experience of root shock can negatively affect generations of people. This is a concern as the teenage youth participants expressed warm feelings about their homes in public housing.

The gentry in Hoboken appreciate diversity, but many are aware that their housing values will increase if public housing in its current form is decimated. One gentry participant, an urban educator, said,

As a homeowner, I know that if the public housing didn’t exist behind where I live, my home would be worth significantly more money than it is at this point. On the other hand, everyone needs a place to live, so it’s definitely a two-sided question for me. But when finances come into play, in my mind and in my upbringing that becomes the most important thing. So I would rather that they weren’t there, but they are.

The plan for demolishing public housing in Hoboken and building a Choice Neighborhood (HHA & Marchetto Higgins Stieve PC, 2010, p. 8) calls for one-for-one replacement so that no residents will be displaced. However, Congress suspended the requirement for this in 1995 (Goetz, 2011) and the research from other cities shows that this directive in Hoboken is unrealistic (Buron et al., 2002; Goetz, 2003; Marquis & Ghosh, 2008; National Housing Law Project, 2002; Popkin et al., 2000). The National

Housing Law Project made the following comments about HOPE VI redevelopment projects:

Contrary to impressions conveyed by HUD, only 11.4 percent of former residents overall have returned or are expected to return to HOPE VI sites; only about 30 percent of displaced residents are relocated with portable Housing Choice Vouchers. The bulk of residents, 49 percent, are simply transferred to other public housing developments. And, a disturbing number of the residents who are officially relocated are “lost” along the way, meaning that they no longer receive housing assistance. (National Housing Law Project, 2002, para. 17)

New strict requirements for residency, administrative dysfunction, issues with navigating the bureaucracy, and too little new affordable housing are among the reasons that many residents do not return to redeveloped public housing sites. The Hoboken Vision 20/20 Plan calls for a Choice Neighborhood, which calls for one-for-one replacement, but potential loopholes remain and this financing has not been obtained.

Ample housing for low-income families is a concern in Hoboken. According to the 5-Year Plan for Fiscal Years 2007-2011, 427 families were on the waiting list for public housing in Hoboken, with 77% of those reporting extremely low income. Also, 618 families, with 79% extremely low income, were on the waiting list for Section 8 housing (Housing Authority of the City of Hoboken, 2012). At the start of 2013, both waiting lists were closed. There is already a greater need for public housing than there are available units. The Vision 20/20 Plan states that the process will be phased over a number of years, and, “Over a span of several years, based on availability of funds and developer interest, this pattern of construction, demolition and relocation would be followed until all the existing structures have been replaced and all residents relocated” (HHA & Marchetto Higgins Stieve PC, 2010, p. 69). In theory, this should prevent displacement but concerns remain about the availability of funding and the process of demolition and relocation. One other concern with the demolition and rebuilding of the

HHA campus and the lucrative contracts that will accompany it is the long history of corruption in the city (the last mayor, Peter Cammarano, served 22 days before being arrested by the FBI for corruption).

If all elements of this plan were enacted and the directive to not displace anyone was ensured, it would certainly be an improvement for residents. However, there should be serious concerns over assurances of housing for current public housing residents and funding for completion of this plan.

If the Vision 20/20 plan is enacted, guarantees should be in place for current residents (beyond the proposed “Residents’ Bill of Rights”). Also, if the purpose is to create a community for people from different socioeconomic backgrounds that promotes socioeconomic integration and SES mobility, then carefully designed efforts for community building between residents should be enacted for maximum impact. Recreational facilities and amenities in the community would help to bridge divides between higher-income residents and public housing residents, but there should also be opportunities for more meaningful interactions such as potlucks, neighborhood associations, and cookouts (Joseph, 2006). In addition, wrap-around services and case management should be provided to HHA residents to assist in the transition and to meet these goals.

Given evidence from other communities, it is unlikely that all of the current residents would actually be rehoused in the new mixed-income community. As a few focus group participants explained,

Participant 3: I feel their master plan is to get rid of all of this.

Participant 2: No, that definitely is, because they’re getting rid of us in about 5 to 7 years. . . . They have a plan to knock the projects down. They’re going to

give vouchers and Section 8 to those who are willing to take it. Otherwise, whether you're willing to take it or not, your apartment will be gone.

Another HHA resident, a mother and grandmother who has lived in HHA for 35 years, when asked how she feels about the plan for public housing, said,

Participant: I hope I can get in there.

Interviewer: If you can get in then you'd be happy with it?

Participant: Yeah, but that's rich people apartments.

....

Participant: Do you go to Panera?

Interviewer: Yes.

Participant: On Washington?

Interviewer: Yes.

Participant: I was there having a cup of coffee all by myself, all of a sudden these three persons sat down, they don't know if I speak English or not and I heard all of the conversation.

Interviewer: And what were they discussing?

Participant: That it's going to be rich people.

Interviewer: Do you know who they were?

Participant: They don't know me.

Across the country, just as large public housing projects are being broken up or privatized, so are large urban schools (Lipman, 2011). This is not the case in Hoboken, where there are no known proposals to shutter the district-run public schools that remain and charter management organizations are not opening charter schools targeting low-income children, as they are in cities such as Chicago and Newark. However, the three independent charter schools in Hoboken are attracting gentry parents, and Connors School is segregated. If public housing is demolished, what would be next? Connors, the

neighborhood school that this research shows is valued in the community? The Vision 20/20 Plan calls for a charter school just two blocks from Connors. If this happens, it could prove to be the opening for a charter management organization such as KIPP to open a school with a mission to serve the public housing population, and the chance for socioeconomic and racial integration in the schools in the Mile Square City would be lost.

The Hoboken Board of Education, school administrators, and community members must embrace the neighborhood school, but they must also work to make it reflect the current demographics of the neighborhood. These changes can be made within the current neoliberal school agenda without closing the neighborhood school. Parents from a variety of backgrounds must be drawn to Connors by programs that appeal to the gentry and public housing residents so that both groups will feel that their children fit in. The gentry must be given an offer that they cannot refuse, such as a selective performing arts or Montessori program at Connors. This could result in within-school segregation but, if carefully implemented and monitored, it would help to remove the stigma from Connors for the gentry and for the children who attend the school. At the least, they should integrate the building first and, with it, the after-school and before-school programs, physical education classes, special classes (such as art and music), extracurricular activities, and the PTA. Over time, this should benefit all children.

The de facto segregation that is occurring in the Hoboken schools is certainly happening elsewhere (Carlyle, 2012; Orfield, 2001; Richmond, 2012; Wells & Crain, 1997). If charter schools become a way for middle-class families to move into affordable “edge” neighborhoods and to avoid district-run public schools by creating their own

schools, this will happen all over the country, enabling expansion of gentrification and super-gentrification and continuing the school segregation that is already apparent.

The findings in this study are context specific. Others can determine whether or not comparisons can be made with similar cities or communities. As Lipman (2011) argued in her case study of neoliberalism and education in Chicago, “It is up to other researchers to examine how these processes play out concretely in their contexts” (p. 19). However, the findings in this study can inform research and policy implementation because this case study illuminates important issues empirically, in depth, and from a perspective that is not frequently adopted.

The findings demonstrate empirically that, through gentrification, public housing residents can experience benefits that they enjoy but that it will take more than spatial integration through gentrification to improve their educational opportunities. Reformers and policy makers must work within the current neoliberal system to fight for low-income families of color who, too often, are not seen as ideal customers in the free market that is so valued in neoliberalism. Developers, who are all too keen to develop properties in Hoboken and other gentrifying or gentrified areas, should be required to set aside units to create socioeconomic diversity and to build amenities that will integrate the community. Magnet programs should be used to give parents choice and to integrate the schools. Public housing must be maintained, even as gentrification surrounds it. Without public housing, the same families that are not winning in a winner-take-all school system will keep losing when they are faced with housing shortages and a private marketplace that is averse to providing affordable housing (Smith, J., 2000). As one of the HHA

resident mothers put it, the system will continue “catering to the—not even so much the middle class; everything is upper class.”

Implications for Future Research

This study could be expanded in many ways. I plan to examine what becomes of the Vision 20/20 plan for Hoboken public housing. I will follow discussions and meetings about the plan, as well as whether it is enacted and with which developer. If this plan is enacted, it is a feasible case study to see how many residents are provided with housing and how many are displaced, as well as how the experiences of youth of color in public housing change if their homes and neighbors change. If the plan is enacted, or debated openly, this will be a situation ripe for youth participatory action research.

More qualitative research into race relations and socioeconomic diversity inside schools should be conducted. The area of early childhood education in gentrifying Abbott Districts (or other socioeconomically mixed neighborhoods with free early childhood education) is an appropriate area for further research. Additional research could examine how many of those families for whom Abbott is intended opt out of sending their children to preschool and why, which was not addressed in this study. Also, an interactionist examination of what happens inside the preschool classrooms among the students, teachers, and parents would be interesting.

It would be revealing for researchers to conduct a qualitative study inside the charter schools in Hoboken to examine the experiences of children of color and children from low-income backgrounds inside the school and what kinds of social interactions are occurring inside and outside the classroom. This could prove particularly interesting in the progressive schools, as that is a philosophy often viewed as out of synch with the

lower-income minority community. It would also be interesting to see whether HHA children at HoLa with Spanish speakers in their family benefit in any way and how gentry parents navigate their need to be involved and their inability to assist with homework in Spanish.

Another follow-up study could involve an in-depth comparison of the daily lives and activities of gentry children and children in public housing at a variety of ages: infants, elementary school, middle school, and high school (similar in style to the study by Lareau, 2003).

Another area with potential for future research is to determine how the gentry who choose to stay in Hoboken and send their children to Hoboken High School differ from those who do not make this choice. A qualitative examination of the experiences of these parents and their children in the high school would prove interesting, as well as an observational study inside the high school to understand the dynamics between these students and their classmates from different backgrounds.

Researchers could investigate the health of youth in public housing in Hoboken and compare it to the health of youth in public housing in an ungentrified disadvantaged community to measure the differences in physical health related to the resources that are easily accessible to the gentry (parks, large supermarkets, doctors' offices). A case study comparing Hoboken and other communities with similar dynamics between gentry and public housing would be informative to this field of research. Another important area in terms of environment would be to examine the effect of age on the environment findings of HHA residents.

Epilogue

After graduating from college in New York City, I was faced with the harsh reality of the New York City real estate market on a public school teacher's salary. In the 10 years that followed, I lived in four neighborhoods, all of which could be considered gentrifying or gentrified, and I have never lived far from public housing. The only way that Manhattan, or its bedroom communities, were affordable for me was to live in the shadow of public housing. I have enjoyed these neighborhoods and the diversity that is still present in these areas.

However, in a year I will begin the process of registering my daughter for preschool; I will have to face the same realities and decisions faced by those whom I have researched, and in some ways judged, during my years of studying education policy and working in urban public schools. In Akron, Ohio, where I grew up, I attended a large urban public high school that was racially and socioeconomically very diverse. This diversity was possible in a large part because of the specialized programs that this school offered. I transferred to this public school to be a part of the performing arts program from a private school. I knew others, from backgrounds like mine, who attended this school for the International Baccalaureate program, performing arts program, or the championship swim team. I enjoyed my high school experience and in large part believe it was the informal education that I received there that led me to pursue education and to focus on young people from low-income backgrounds.

I wish that my daughter could have the opportunity to attend an integrated local middle-class public school, where she too could have diverse social networks and learn from people whose families look different from hers, while receiving an excellent

education. Unfortunately, right now, there are not many of these options available. In addition, if public housing in changing urban neighborhoods is dismantled, there will be fewer opportunities for this to occur and there will be less affordable housing for low-income families, but also for middle-class families like ours. We cannot abandon the promise of school desegregation, but it will not occur on its own. Without housing policies that support, maintain, and grow socioeconomic diversity in cities and without school programs that appeal to a wide variety of parents, high-performing desegregated middle-class schools will remain elusive for most students.

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Appendix A: Interview Outline for Adult Nonpublic Housing Residents

Introductory Comments

“I would first like to start by welcoming you and thanking you for participating in this study. As you are now aware, the purpose of this study is to gain a better understanding of the environmental and educational experiences of children in public housing in Hoboken. I will be asking you some questions that may not be easy to answer. I encourage you to answer to the best of your ability. There are no wrong answers. If at any point you become distressed, we can stop the interview.”

Statement of Confidentiality

“We will be tape recording this session in an effort to maintain the integrity of your dialogue. However, your identity will remain confidential, and only the researcher will have access to this tape. This discussion is confidential, and any information will be solely used for research purposes.”

Opening Questions:

For how many years have you lived in Hoboken?

In which ward (section of Hoboken) do you live?

Do you live in a Hoboken Housing Authority building (“the projects”)? (*If so, interviewer use Appendix B instead*)

How would you describe your race/ethnicity?

What is your highest level of education?

What do you do for a living?

Do you have children? If so, how many children do you have, and what are their ages?

Neighborhood Conditions:

Do you think Hoboken is a good place to raise children? Why or why not?

Do you think Hoboken is a safe neighborhood? Why or why not?

Have you ever witnessed any crimes in Hoboken?

Amenities and Affordability:

What public spaces (parks, piers, playgrounds) do you frequently utilize in Hoboken?

Where do you grocery shop?

Are you happy with the amenities (restaurants, shopping) available in Hoboken?

Education:

Do you think the district-run Hoboken public schools (not charter schools) are high quality?

Would you, or do you, send your children to the district-run public schools? If not, where do/did your children attend school?

Probes:

- Did your child attend the Abbott pre-school program? Why or why not? Which site?
- If so, were you happy with the program?
- Was your child's pre-school class racially and socio-economically diverse?

If you would not send your children to the district run public schools, can you articulate why?

Probes:

- Did you visit the district-run public schools? If so, which ones, and why those?
- Would you consider Connors for your child? Why or why not?

What factors are most important to you in considering a school for your child (ask to think about each: teacher quality, racial makeup of the student body, socio-economic makeup of the student body, safety, test scores, school facilities, curriculum, parental involvement, discipline, class size, school leadership...)?

Would you consider sending your child to a charter school in Hoboken? Why or why not?

Probes:

- Did you apply to all of the charter schools in Hoboken? Which one was your first choice?
- If your child had not gotten into the charter school where would they have gone to school?
- Where did you get the application for the charter school?
- Did you tour all the charter schools?

How would you describe the racial/socio-economic makeup of your children's school?

Social Networks:

Do you volunteer at your child's school? If so, how often and in what capacity?

How often would you say you visit your child's school? For what reasons primarily?

Does your child have organized play dates?

Has your child ever socialized (play dates, birthday parties) with children from Hoboken public housing outside of school time?

In what organized outside-of-school activities are your children involved?

Would you describe public spaces in Hoboken (parks, piers, playgrounds) as racially and socio-economically diverse?

Isolation:

Do you volunteer anywhere in Hoboken or donate money to any local Hoboken charities?

Have you ever been in the public housing neighborhood in the southwest area of Hoboken? If so, for what purpose?

Do you know anyone who lives in public housing in Hoboken?

Do you, or anyone you know, socialize with public housing residents in Hoboken?

Would you prefer if Hoboken did not have public housing?

Are you content with the racial/socio-economic makeup of Hoboken?

Appendix B: Interview Outline for Adult Public Housing Residents

Introductory Comments

“I would first like to start by welcoming you and thanking you for participating in this study. As you are now aware, the purpose of this study is to gain a better understanding of the environmental and educational experiences of children in public housing in Hoboken. I will be asking you some questions that may not be easy to answer. I encourage you to answer to the best of your ability. There are no wrong answers. If at any point you become distressed, we can stop the interview.”

Statement of Confidentiality

“We will be tape recording this session in an effort to maintain the integrity of your dialogue. However, your identity will remain confidential, and only the researcher will have access to this tape. This discussion is confidential, and any information will be solely used for research purposes.”

Opening Questions:

For how many years have you lived in Hoboken?

Do you live in a Hoboken Housing Authority building (“the projects”)? (*If not, interviewer use Appendix A instead*)

How would you describe your race/ethnicity?

How old are you?

What is your highest level of education?

Do you have children? If so, how many children do you have and what are their ages?

Neighborhood Conditions and Crime:

When I say “your neighborhood” how would you define your neighborhood? (i.e., all of Hoboken or just surrounding blocks)?

Do you think Hoboken is a good place to raise children? Why or why not?

Do you think Hoboken is a safe neighborhood? Why or why not, explain.

Amenities and Affordability:

What public spaces do you frequently utilize in Hoboken (parks, libraries, piers)?

Probe:

- What are your favorite/least favorite places in Hoboken?

Where do you grocery shop? Why?

Probe:

- How often do you grocery shop?
- How do you get there?
- Do you have a bank in town? Which one?

Do you go out to eat in Hoboken? If so, where?

Do you shop for clothing or home goods in Hoboken? If so, where? If not, where do you shop for these items? How do you get there?

Do you work? If so, where, and how do you get to work?

Do you know people who work in the city of Hoboken? If so, what do they do?

Education:

Do you think the district-run Hoboken public schools (not charter schools) are high quality?

Probe:

- Are you happy with your child's school?

Would you or do you send your children to the district-run public schools? If not, where do/did your children attend school?

Probes:

- Was that your first choice school? Why?
- Did your child attend the Abbott pre-school program? Where?

If you would not send your children to the district-run public schools, can you articulate why?

What factors are most important to you in considering a school for your child (teacher quality, racial makeup of the student body, socio-economic makeup of the student body, safety, test scores, school facilities, curriculum, parental involvement, discipline, class size, school leadership...)?

What do you know about charter schools in Hoboken?

Probes:

- Can you name them?
- What do you know about their style of teaching, curriculum, philosophy...?

Would you consider sending your child to a charter school in Hoboken? Why or why not?

Probes:

- Have you ever been given an application for a charter school? Toured a charter school?
- Do you know anyone who attends a charter school?

Social Networks:

Do you volunteer at your child's school? If so, how often, and in what capacity?

How often would you say you visit your child's school? For what reason?

Does your child have organized play dates? Has your child ever socialized (play dates, birthday parties) with children from outside of public housing in Hoboken outside of school time?

Probes:

- Where did your child meet most of his or her friends?
- Do most of his or her friends live in public housing?

In what organized outside-of-school activities are your children involved?

Do you think children in Hoboken are exposed to good role models?

Isolation:

How would you describe the other residents of Hoboken?

Probe:

- Do you think there are more poor people or more rich people in Hoboken?

How do you think Hobokenites feel about public housing?

Probe

- Do you think the public housing neighborhood is separate or isolated from the rest of Hoboken?
- How often do you go to Washington Street?
- How often do you see the water?

Do you, or does anyone you know, socialize with residents in Hoboken who do not live in public housing?

Are you content with the racial/socio-economic makeup of Hoboken?

Appendix C: Interview Outline for Youth Public Housing Residents (10 to 17 Years Old)

Introductory Comments

“I would first like to start by welcoming you and thanking you for participating in this study. As you are now aware, the purpose of this study is to gain a better understanding of the environmental and educational experiences of children in public housing in Hoboken. I will be asking you some questions that may not be easy to answer. I encourage you to answer to the best of your ability. There are no wrong answers. If at any point you become distressed, we can stop the interview.”

Statement of Confidentiality

“We will be tape recording this session so that I can remember exactly what you say. However, your identity will remain confidential, a secret, and only I will have access to this tape.”

Opening Questions:

Where were you born? For how many years have you lived in Hoboken?

How would you describe your race/ethnicity?

Probe:

- Skin color, as in Latino? Hispanic? Black? White? Etc.

How old are you?

Where do you go to school? What other schools have you attended?

Do you have a job? If so, where? How do you get there?

Neighborhood Conditions and Crime:

When I say “your neighborhood” how would you define your neighborhood? (i.e., all of Hoboken or just surrounding blocks)?

What words would you use to describe your neighborhood?

Do you think Hoboken is a good place to grow up? Why or why not?

Do you think Hoboken is a safe place to grow up? Why or why not?

Can you tell me about your favorite places in Hoboken? What about your least favorite?

Amenities and Affordability:

Where do you and your friends hang out, outside of school?

Do you ever go to the parks, playgrounds, library, piers in Hoboken? Which ones? How often?

Do you ever go to the street festivals, fairs, summer movies, or theater or concerts in the park?

How often are you on Washington Street?

Do you ever go out to eat in Hoboken? If so, where?

Do you shop for clothing in Hoboken? If so, where? If not, where do you shop for these items? How do you get there?

Education:

Do you think your school is a good school? Why or why not?

Probe:

- If you have attended multiple schools, do you notice a difference between them?

Do you think your school is a safe school? Explain.

Do you think your school has high quality teachers? Explain.

How would you describe the racial makeup of your school?

Have you or your parents ever considered sending you to a different school? If so, which one?

Social Networks:

Who are your best friends? Where did you meet them?

Do most of your friends live in Hoboken? If not, where do they live?

Do most of your friends from Hoboken live in public housing?

How often do you socialize with friends who live in Hoboken but not in public housing?

In what organized outside-of-school activities are you involved (sports, arts, tutoring etc...)?

Where do you do your homework? Who helps you with it?

Do you have a role model (that you actually know—not a celebrity)? Who is it?

Isolation:

How would you describe the other residents of Hoboken?

Do you think there are a lot of rich people in Hoboken?

Do you think there are a lot of poor people in Hoboken?

Probe:

- Do you think there are more rich or more poor people in Hoboken?

How do you think Hobokenites feel about public housing?

Do you feel comfortable going anywhere in Hoboken? Is there anywhere you are not comfortable?

How often do you see the water (The Hudson River)?

Appendix D: Interview Outline for Charter School Leaders

Introductory Comments

“I would first like to start by welcoming you and thanking you for participating in this study. As you are now aware, the purpose of this study is to gain a better understanding of the environmental and educational experiences of children in public housing in Hoboken. I will be asking you some questions that may not be easy to answer. I encourage you to answer to the best of your ability. There are no wrong answers. If at any point you become distressed, we can stop the interview.”

Statement of Confidentiality

“We will be tape recording this session in an effort to maintain the integrity of your dialogue. However, your identity will remain confidential, and only the researcher will have access to this tape. This discussion is confidential, and any information will be solely used for research purposes.”

Opening Questions:

Do you live in Hoboken? For how many years have you lived in Hoboken?

In which ward (section of Hoboken) do you live?

How would you describe your race/ethnicity?

Please describe your professional responsibilities with the school.

Education:

How did you get involved with this school?

Please describe the school and give a brief history.

Probe:

- Who were the founders? Can you describe why they started this school?

Please describe the admissions process for this school.

Probe:

- Where do most people get applications for your school?

How has gentrification influenced the public school system in Hoboken? Have the public schools improved because of gentrification?

How have the charter schools influenced the district-run public schools in Hoboken?

How would you describe the racial/ethnic socio-economic background of your students?

Do you have students from Hoboken Housing Authority public housing? What percentage would you estimate?

Do you attempt to recruit children from public housing? If so, please describe any efforts.

Do you face resistance in recruiting children from public housing?

Do you think public housing residents feel they have choice in where they send their children to school? Why or why not?

Probe:

- In my research and conversations I have found (and the numbers back this up it seems) that many Hoboken residents feel the charter schools appeal to a certain demographic—the yuppies—and not to low-income residents and families of color. Do you agree or disagree with this? Why is this, do you believe?
- Have you lost children from public housing? If so, do you know why?
- To the best of your knowledge do parents who apply to your school apply to all the charter schools in town? If they did not get into your school where do you think they would go?
- Why do you think parents choose your school over a district-run public school?
- Do you have a grade level at which you see significant drop-off? What is the reason for this?
- Where do students from your school go to high school?

In your experiences, do you think children from public housing socialize with children of the so-called “gentry”?

In what ways, if any, do you think children in public housing who attend your school benefit from being surrounded by middle class families in Hoboken?

Appendix E: Interview Outline for Community Leaders

Introductory Comments

“I would first like to start by welcoming you and thanking you for participating in this study. As you are now aware, the purpose of this study is to gain a better understanding of the environmental and educational experiences of children in public housing in Hoboken. I will be asking you some questions that may not be easy to answer. I encourage you to answer to the best of your ability. There are no wrong answers. If at any point you become distressed, we can stop the interview.”

Statement of Confidentiality

“We will be tape recording this session in an effort to maintain the integrity of your dialogue. However, your identity will remain confidential, and only the researcher will have access to this tape. This discussion is confidential, and any information will be solely used for research purposes.”

Opening Questions:

Do you live in Hoboken? For how many years have you lived in Hoboken?

In which ward (section of Hoboken) do you live?

How would you describe your race/ethnicity?

Please describe your professional responsibilities.

How much experience do you have working with residents of public housing in Hoboken?

Neighborhood Conditions and Crime:

Do you think Hoboken is a good place to raise children? Why or why not? What about for children in public housing?

Do you think Hoboken is a safe neighborhood for children in public housing? Why or why not, explain.

How do you think gentrification has changed the neighborhood conditions for children from low-income families in public housing?

Amenities and Affordability:

Do you think children from public housing utilize the parks, piers, playgrounds, and other public spaces in Hoboken?

Do you think families in public housing find the restaurants, shopping, leisure, and cultural opportunities in Hoboken to be easily accessible and appreciated or expensive and inaccessible?

Do you think that public events in Hoboken like street festivals, fairs, free concerts, and movies attract families from public housing?

Education:

Do you think the district-run Hoboken public schools (not charter schools) are high quality?

Do they accurately reflect the demographics of the community? Why or why not?

Probe:

- Have you come across families from public housing that don't utilize pre-school? What percentage do you think? How big of a problem is it?
- How diverse socio-economically and racially are the pre-schools?

How has gentrification influenced the public school system in Hoboken? Have the public schools improved because of gentrification?

How have the charter schools influenced the district-run public schools in Hoboken?

Do you think the so-called "gentry" are opting out of the public schools? If so, how?

Do you think public housing residents feel they have choice in where they send their children to school? Explain.

Social Networks:

Do you think friendships between the "gentry" and public housing residents are common?

Do you think children from public housing socialize with children of the "gentry"?

In what ways, if any, do you think children in public housing benefit from being surrounded by middle class families (resources, volunteerism, role models)?

Isolation:

Do you think most "gentry" residents in Hoboken avoid the public housing neighborhood?

Do you think most of the "gentry" would prefer it if Hoboken did not have public housing?

Appendix F: Focus Group Outline for Adult Public Housing Residents

Introductory Comments

“I would first like to start by welcoming you and thanking you for participating in this study. As you are now aware, the purpose of this study is to gain a better understanding of the environmental and educational experiences of children in public housing in Hoboken. I will be asking you some questions that may not be easy to answer. I encourage you to answer to the best of your ability. There are no wrong answers. If at any point you become distressed, we can stop the interview. What is said in the group must stay in the group and the names and identities of those in the group must not be shared outside the group.”

Statement of Confidentiality (with the consent of all focus group participants)

“We will be tape recording this session in an effort to maintain the integrity of your dialogue. However, your identity will remain confidential, and only the researcher will have access to this tape. This discussion is confidential, and any information will be solely used for research purposes.”

Opening Questions:

For how many years have you lived in Hoboken?

Do you live in a Hoboken Housing Authority building (“the projects”)?

How would you describe your race/ethnicity?

How old are you?

What is your highest level of education?

Do you have children? If so, how many children do you have and what are their ages?

Neighborhood Conditions and Crime:

When I say “your neighborhood” how would you define your neighborhood? (i.e., all of Hoboken or just surrounding blocks)?

Do you think Hoboken is a good place to raise children? Why or why not?

Do you think Hoboken is a safe neighborhood? Why or why not, explain.

Amenities and Affordability:

What public spaces do you frequently utilize in Hoboken (parks, libraries, piers)?

Where do you grocery shop? Why?

Probe:

- Do you have a bank? If not, where do you cash checks?

Do you go out to eat in Hoboken? If so, where?

Do you shop for clothing or home goods in Hoboken? If so, where? If not, where do you shop for these items? How do you get there?

Do you work? If so, where, and how do you get to work?

Do you know people who work in the city of Hoboken? If so, what do they do?

Education:

Do you think the district-run Hoboken public schools (not charter schools) are high quality?

Would you or do you send your children to the district-run public schools? If not, where do/did your children attend school?

If you would not send your children to the district-run public schools, can you articulate why?

What factors are most important to you in considering a school for your child (teacher quality, racial makeup of the student body, socio-economic makeup of the student body, safety, test scores, school facilities, curriculum, parental involvement, discipline, class size, school leadership...)?

What do you know about charter schools?

Probe:

- Why do you think children from public housing generally attend Connors?
- Why not charter schools?
- Do you know anyone who attends a charter school? If so, do you know which one and why they chose it?

Would you consider sending your child to a charter school in Hoboken? Why or why not?

Social Networks:

Do you volunteer at your child's school? If so, how often and in what capacity?

How often would you say you visit your child's school? For what reason?

Does your child have organized play dates? Has your child ever socialized (play dates, birthday parties) with children from outside of public housing in Hoboken outside of school time?

Probe:

- Do you think there is a lot of socializing between children in HHA and “yuppie” children?

In what organized outside-of-school activities are your children involved?

Do you think children in Hoboken are exposed to good role models?

Probe:

- Do you think role modeling occurs between the “yuppies” and children in public housing? Why or why not?

Isolation:

How would you describe the other residents of Hoboken?

Probe:

- Do you think there are more poor or more rich people in Hoboken?

How do you think Hobokenites feel about public housing?

Do you know anyone who does not live in public housing in Hoboken?

Do you, or does anyone you know, socialize with residents in Hoboken who do not live in public housing?

Are you content with the racial/socio-economic makeup of Hoboken?

Curriculum Vita

Molly Vollman Makris

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|------|---|
| 1981 | Born January 27 in Akron, Ohio, United States |
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| 2003 | Bachelor of Science in Secondary Education, Social Studies,
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