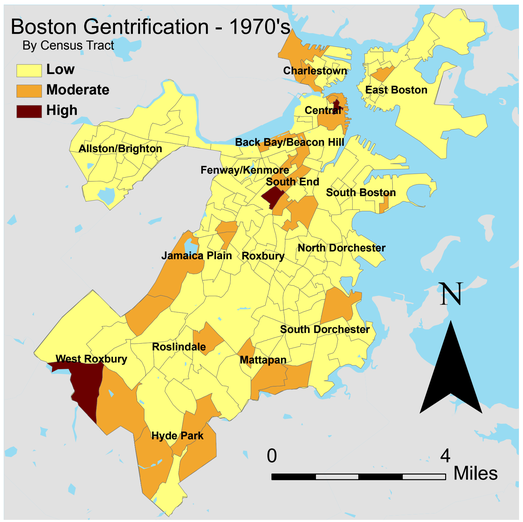
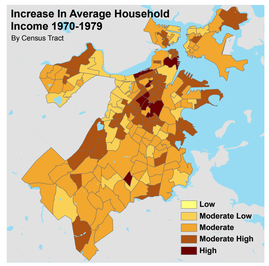
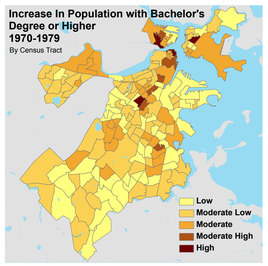
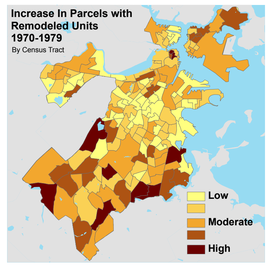
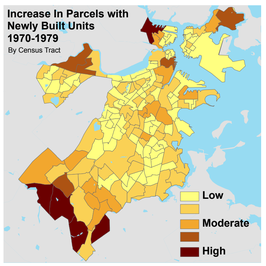
Mapping Neighborhood Change: Three Decades of Gentrification in Boston





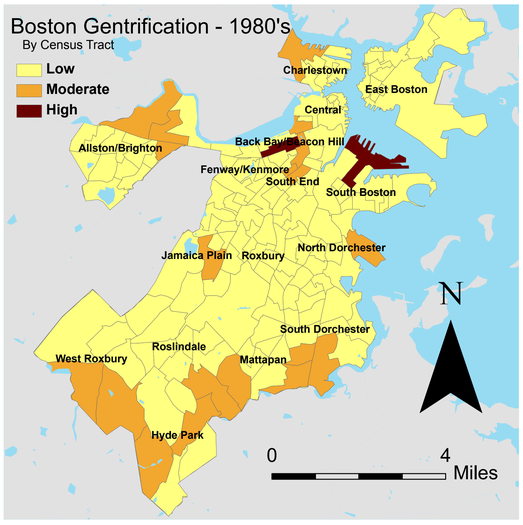


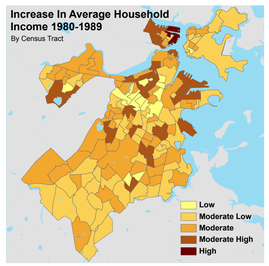


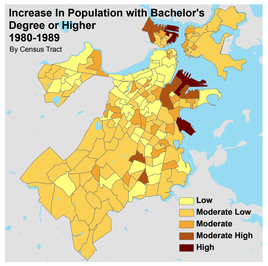


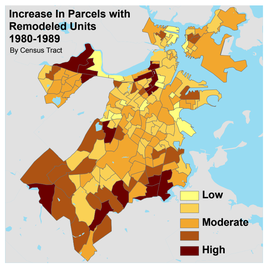
1970's

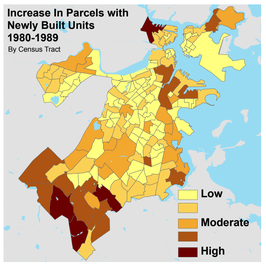
Boston in the 1970's saw each of the four indicators having highs in largely distinct areas of the city with only moderate crossover. Incomes were on the rise all over Boston, with the largest gains occurring in the Central business district, South End/Dudley Square area, and the Back Bay. Charlestown, East Boston, and the South End/Dudley Square area saw the largest increases in those with higher education attainment. As for the built environment, most of the heavy increases in both remodeled and newly built units occurred around the city's periphery; West Roxbury, Jamaica Plain, Hyde Park, and the edges of Mattapan and Dorchester for remodeled units, and Charlestown, West Roxbury, and Hyde Park for parcels with newly constructed units. Overall, with all four factors taken into consideration, West Roxbury, the South End, and the Central district saw the largest increases in indicators of gentrification throughout the 1970's. Several areas of the city saw moderate rises in these factors, with many of them being in the aforementioned periphery neighborhoods of Hyde Park, Back Bay, Charlestown, Jamaica Plain, and the south and eastern edges of Mattapan and South Dorchester.





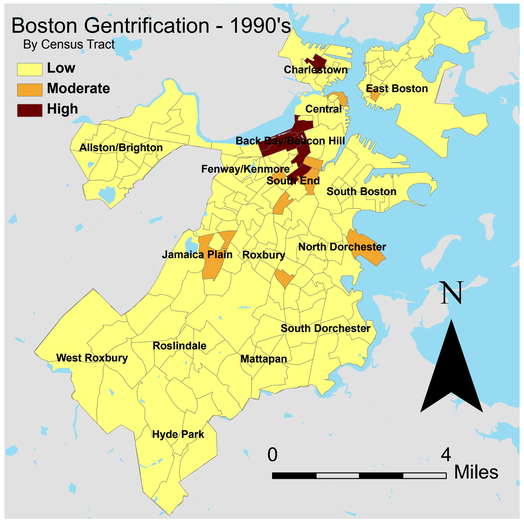


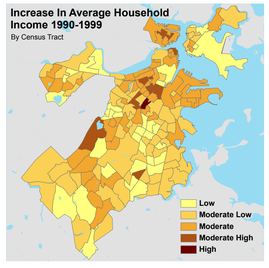


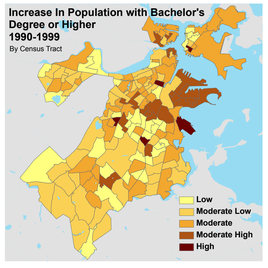


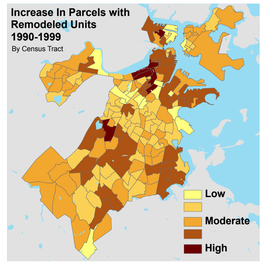
1980's

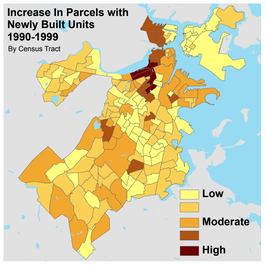
Areas displaying moderate levels of gentrification characteristics in 1980's Boston largely mirrored those showing both moderate and high gentrification in the 1970's. However, the areas showing signs of heavy gentrification in the 1980's were new on the scene: South Boston and a different part of Back Bay. During this decade, the heaviest percentage increase in average household income occurred in Charlestown, but there were moderate gains in several areas of the city, namely, Back Bay and South Boston. Likewise, South Boston, again along with Charlestown as well as part of North Dorchester, saw large increases in the percentage of population with at least a bachelor's degree. As for parcels with newly remodeled units, many of the same areas that saw increases in the 1970's again saw large increases in the 1980's, the notable exception being the heavy increase of remodeled units in Allston. Similarly to the renovated units, the patterns of heavy growth for parcels with newly built units were nearly identical to the previous decade. Again the areas with the largest numbers of new units were in the southwest corner of the city in the neighborhoods of West Roxbury and Hyde Park. Additionally, Charlestown again saw a heavy increase in new structures.









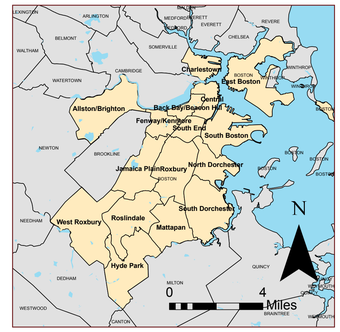


1990's

While the 1990's saw heavy increases in overall prosperity, the largest gains in each of the four gentrification indicator categories were limited to fewer areas of Boston. For example, there were considerable increases in average household income all over the city, but only one census tract, near Dudley Square in North Roxbury, qualified as a high increase for the decade (in reality, this is probably due to depressed incomes for the area in the prior decade). The 1990's also saw larger increases in the percentage of population with at least a bachelor's degree all over Boston, with the largest increases occurring in parts of historically poor areas of the city: East Boston, Dorchester, and Roxbury. Conversely, these parts of the city saw considerably less renovations and new construction than other parts of Boston. Back Bay, Jamaica Plain, and Charlestown all hosted the largest number of parcels with renovated or newly built units, with several other parts of the city showing moderate levels of construction as well. When taking all four indicators into consideration, Back Bay, Beacon Hill, and part of Charlestown, displayed the heaviest indication of gentrification during the 1990's. Given that Back Bay has historically been a wealthy neighborhood, it might be a stretch to call their gains "gentrification," but in the case of Charlestown, the term may be more appropriate.

Gentrification:

n. The restoration and upgrading of deteriorated urban property by middle class or affluent people, often resulting in displacement of lower income people.
(Dictionary.com 2009)



Boston, MA

Summary: Few terms in urban planning are as fraught or as problematic as gentrification. It is often a flashpoint in debates about urban governance and revitalization, with some arguing that it leads to more stable neighborhoods, and others arguing that it destroys the social fabric of working-class society. At its root, gentrification is the phenomenon of demographic succession (from poor or working-class to upper-income, from less-educated to more-educated, and from minority to white), driven by market forces in poor, minority neighborhoods. As socially mobile residents show increasing interest in diverse, urban neighborhoods close to job centers and creative industries, property values increase in these areas, often leading to residential displacement. This demographic shift also changes the social fabric of the neighborhood, which is a large part of the reason why gentrification is such an emotional issue for so many.

For this project, I aimed to show gentrification over time in the city of Boston. Neighborhoods grow and age, succeed and fail just as the cities of which they are a part. Gentrification is a large, albeit controversial, part of this urban evolution. To understand where we are as a city today, we must understand the path we have taken to get here. Through mapping indicators of gentrification over time, hopefully we can gain a better understanding of the city as it stands today. It is important to keep in mind, however, that these maps do not tell the whole story of what does or does not constitute a healthy neighborhood. That is a complicated matter far beyond the scope of this project.

Methodology: There is no widely accepted method for measuring gentrification. For the purpose of this project, I chose to examine four indicators - two demographic and two in the built environment - that tend to accompany neighborhoods that are considered "gentrified": Income, educational achievement, newly built structures, and newly remodeled structures. First, I examined the percentage change in average household income from the beginning of each decade to the end. Average household income was used instead of median income because the US Census did not begin measuring median income until the 1990 census. Second, I examined the percentage change in population with a bachelor's degree or higher. For both of these calculations I used the following equation to measure percent change, [(B-A)/A], with B being the last year of the decade and A being the first. After looking at the demographics, I examined evidence of gentrification in the built environment by looking at the number of parcels with newly constructed units as well as the number of parcels with units remodeled during each respective decade. In general, new construction and/or property renovations can indicate that renewal or gentrification is happening in a neighborhood. It is important to note, though, that this is not always the case as the data does not differentiate between types of new construction. For example, the construction of new subsidized housing, which is accepted as a buffer against gentrification, would appear the same as a multimillion dollar condominium complex in the data provided. Once the individual indicator data was established, I assigned ranks that displayed the highest indications of gentrification for each tract. I then added the score for each indicator in every tract to come up with a final score. The tracts with the highest gentrification score for each decade are shown as the darkest red, and those with the lowest scores in yellow.

Cartography: Matthew Hammer, Tufts University, Urban and Environmental Policy and Planning
Course: UEP- 232: Introduction to GIS - May, 2009
Projection: NAD 1983 Massachusetts State Plane Mainland FIPS 2001
GCS: GCS North American 1983
Sources: MassGIS, GeoLytics Census 1970-2000 Neighborhood Change Database, Boston Assessing Department 2009, Dictionary.com 2009