

# Gentrification *before* Gentrification?

## The Plight of Pilsen in Chicago

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## **About this report:**

This report was developed by John J. Betancur and Lee Deuben with Helen Edwards. Other contributors were: Amanda Becker, Heather Donoghue, Monica Medrano and Tynnetta Qaiyim.

The report was produced in conjunction with students in "UPP 545: Urban Revitalization and Gentrification" taught during the Fall Semester of 2004 by John Betancur, Associate Professor, Urban Planning and Policy Program. The course runs as a seminar on urban change and policies in U.S. cities since World War II. It pays special attention to changes associated with socio-economic restructuring and globalization, the challenges posed by them, and public and private responses. After a review of major efforts at reversing urban decline, the course examines restructuring under the new "global order" and its impact on cities and urban planning. Gentrification is a major focus. All students in the class identify and conduct participant research projects looking at this theme.

Including those mentioned above, the class project, also included work by Katherine Ansorge, Erica James, Javier Perez, Rob Rawls, Sara Rothschild, and Cristina Vera. However, the final report (this document) only drew from the work of those mentioned above. The work of the other teams was not conclusive enough or did not have the information needed to meaningfully include in the final report. The other teams and individuals may have contributed to the extent that their work suggested that gentrification had not penetrated the community or advanced yet to the point of transforming the local economy or its institutions significantly.

The Nathalie P. Voorhees Center for Neighborhood and Community Improvement was established in 1978 as a technical assistance and applied research center in the College of Urban Planning and Public Affairs at the University of Illinois at Chicago. Its mission is to improve the quality of life for all residents of the metropolitan area by assisting community organizations and local government entities to revitalize the many and varied communities in the City of Chicago and surrounding area. This report is part of periodic white papers series on topics important to the communities the Voorhees Center works with and in.

## Gentrification *before* Gentrification? The Plight of Pilsen in Chicago

### Introduction

Since the 1960s, activists have used the term gentrification to describe and challenge the recent path of socio-economic and spatial restructuring in major US cities. Whether we limit its definition to the displacement/replacement of lower- by higher-income households or expand it to address the wholesale transformation of the city into a place of speculation and spectacle, gentrification has spread steadily driving up along the way real estate prices to unprecedented levels. In Chicago, gentrification has advanced in the last three decades to cover the ring of neighborhoods surrounding the CBD, the lakefront, selected train or station routes, and other areas particularly in the north side and is moving into many other locations of strategic importance to the public-private growth coalition presiding over the process. Along the way, it has contributed to a dramatic increase in property values leading to the deepest affordability crisis ever. The mere expectation of gentrification has become a gentrifying factor to the point that neighborhoods such as Pilsen in the near southwest and Bronzeville in the mid-south have been considered gentrified far before they actually have--hence the title of this report. Or have they?

Intrigued by all the gentrification hoopla, fears, pressures, discourses, perceptions, intense organizing, contentions, and expectations in Pilsen, a neighborhood immediately next on the gentrification path moving away from

downtown, we decided to research such dynamics and determine whether or not or to what an extent this community was gentrifying. Although we had observed some changes in the physical landscape, in our frequent visits we continued to see the dominant features of a low-income Latino (Mexican) neighborhood. We were thus interested in determining the reasons for so much agitation including the possibility that they represented the intentions of some and the reactions of others. Our research, thus, focused on four main questions:

- 1) The actual pressure of gentrification on Pilsen;
- 2) The nature of discursive representations accompanying gentrification;
- 3) The extent of gentrification in Pilsen; and
- 4) The impact of these factors in the struggle for control of the community.

While contributing to the neighborhood's history and the general debate on gentrification, the response to these questions, we hoped, would illuminate the struggle of residents for community and the multiple contradictions involved. Of particular relevance to our analysis was the manipulation of cultural identity and the dialectics between culture as identity—used by residents—and culture as industry—pushed by developers and the city.

This report is organized into six sections. The first provides a brief background including the introduction of the topic of study. The second examines the main stakeholders involved in or opposed to the gentrification process. This section points briefly to the positions of the forces involved. The Third explores the development pressures that Pilsen has been experiencing for several decades. It pays special attention to the difference between previous and

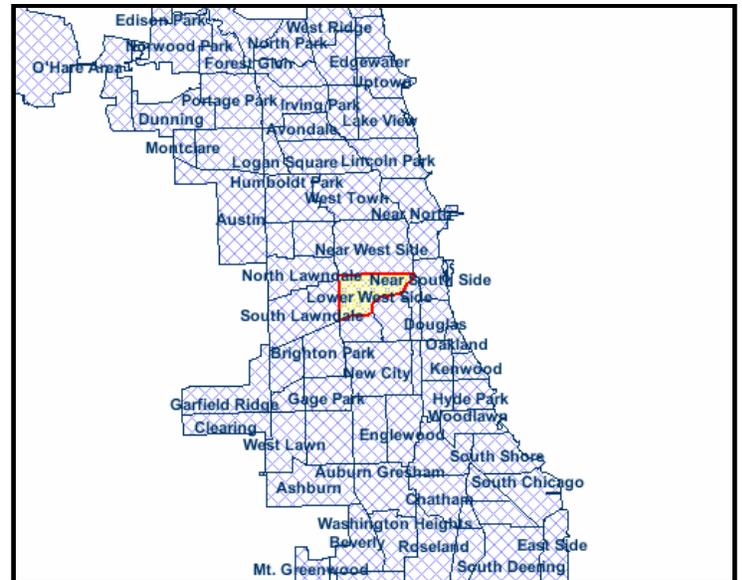
ongoing pressures and the positions of the different stakeholders. The fourth section focuses on the commodification of the Mexican culture in Pilsen. Based on statistical indicators of gentrification, the fifth section explores changing demographics in an effort to determine the advance of gentrification into Pilsen. Finally, the report examines the significance of findings, especially, the impact of these dynamics on the struggle of residents for community.

This research started in fall 2003 as a project of the Urban Revitalization and Gentrification class at the University of Illinois at Chicago Urban Planning and Policy program. The class generated the initial insights and information. Research included a review of the literature on gentrification, study of literatures on space and representation, and of the history of neighborhood struggles in Pilsen; archival analysis of relevant media articles; participant observation of many local events; physical surveys of the community; archives and the experiences of various participants—including interviews and data from their own research; five new interviews and multiple consultations with local activists, residents and leaders; and census and other data detailed in the report. Its main authors, John Betancur and Lee Ann Deuben, completed the report. Helen Edwards compiled student reports into a first overall draft. The Nathalie P. Voorhees for Neighborhood Improvement presents it as a testimony to the history and struggle of Chicago neighborhoods and the myriads of low-income residents struggling for community.

## Pilsen: Background

Pilsen (also known to its residents as La 18 and to planners as Chicago community area 31, the Lower West Side) is located just southwest of Chicago's central business district or CBD (see Map One) in close proximity to many of the city's main attractions. Western Avenue to the west, 16th Street to the north, and the South Branch of the Chicago River to the east and south demark the community.

Map 1: Chicago Community Area Map (source: [chicagoareahousing.org](http://chicagoareahousing.org))



Pilsen is easily accessible to the Chicago Transit Authority's blue line providing a direct route to Chicago's central business district (the Loop) and connecting to the rest of the public transportation system of trains. It is easily accessible to four major expressways serving the Loop and connecting the Metropolitan area: the Eisenhower, the Kennedy, the Stevenson, and the Dan Ryan. The eastern side of the community is located immediately south of the University of Illinois at Chicago (UIC) home to "25,000 students, 12,000 faculty and staff, 15 colleges, including the nation's largest medical school and the state's major public medical center" (University of Illinois at Chicago Website, 2003). Pilsen's western portion is located south of Chicago's main concentration of health facilities, the Medical district including UIC's health sciences and hospital complex, Rush Presbyterian

hospital, Cook County's medical facilities, the Veteran's Administration health facilities and multiple others. Pilsen itself is rich with amenities, including the largest national ethnic Museum, The Mexican Arts Museum, an affordable housing stock, and numerous churches, restaurants, and bakeries. The Chicago River bordering much of the community has become also a great asset for its potential for riverfront developments.

Originally built for the working class, Pilsen has been home to various immigrant groups. Between the late 1800s and early 1900s, there was an influx of Polish, Czechoslovakians and Lithuanians. Immigrants came to the community hearing that there were many available entry level, well paid jobs in places and industries such as downtown, the South Loop railroad hub and a significant industrial corridor to the east bordering the south branch of the Chicago River. Pilsen survived the Chicago Fire of 1871 continuing as a working class neighborhood although much of the city's industry had moved westward as a result of the fire (The Chicago Fact Book Consortium, 1984: 86).

In the 1920s, Pilsen was home to 85,700 immigrants primarily from Czechoslovakia, Poland, Lithuania, and Italy. They gave the community a distinctively Bohemian feel (Pilsen Neighbors Community Council, 1976). Beginning in the 1950s, the demographics shifted to reflect an expanding Latino population, predominantly from Mexico. By 1960, only the Polish population outnumbered Latinos in Pilsen (The Chicago Fact Book Consortium, 1984: 86). Many Latinos had fled here displaced by construction of the University of Illinois

at Chicago (Oclander, 1998: 10). By 1970, Pilsen became the first majority Latino community in Chicago (The Chicago Fact Book Consortium, 1984: 86).

Since then, the community has been an important port of entry for Latino immigrants and one of Chicago's largest Latino communities. According to the US census, in 2000 Pilsen was 88.9% Hispanic with 49.1% of the population foreign-born (chicagoreahousing.org, 2004). Home to many Latino organizations, Pilsen and the community of West Town in the near northwest of Chicago have pioneered many of the movements of Latinos in Chicago, including efforts at development of a citywide Latino identity and agenda.

Pilsen's location has attracted the interests of developers and City Hall especially with the transformation of the city from a manufacturing into a service city anchored by the interests of a growth coalition of financiers, developers and high service professionals from the CBD. In the last four decades, this growth coalition has presided over the transformation of downtown into one of the most successful in the country and its continued expansion into surrounding areas. Such a transformation included the development of a new campus of the University of Illinois at the site of a working class neighborhood immediately to the north of Pilsen. It also included the Chicago 21 Plan to transform working class communities surrounding the CBD into middle class areas for downtown workers. Enacted by Mayor Jane Byrne (1979-1983), the Chicago World Fair plan slating the easternmost parts of Pilsen for parking and other services to the fair followed. Other public plans included the development of a *Mexitown* or Pilsen

Triangle (following on the footsteps of Chinatown) for tourists and, most recently, various concepts floated by the administration to transform Pilsen into the Mexican Mecca of the Midwest. Although these plans reflected the interests and designs of outside public-private partnerships for the community, other private interventions or proposals include development of an artist community to the East, proposals to redevelop the manufacturing corridor into upscale housing including marinas and shopping facilities, and other individual initiatives to convert buildings into condominiums and middle income housing.

Most recently, the real estate industry has been combing Pilsen for buildings to turn over (*flip*) or redevelop; the city has engaged in an intense process of promotion of Pilsen's unique Mexican culture including the neighborhood in its downtown tourist route; condominium conversions have moved into east Pilsen; the media and multiple web pages are promoting the area as a place to visit and live in; specific sites have been proposed for zoning changes and middle income developments; in short, the area has moved into center stage as a high stakes development/gentrification prospect.

As discussed in a later section, Pilsen has managed to stave off many attempts at redevelopment for higher income residents and uses. The threat, however, has never been so real as today. In the public perception, gentrification is already moving in at a fast pace. Residents see the daily parade of real estate characters and fortune seekers looking for "deals;" suffer from dramatic increases in home prices and rents; fear the specter of proposed conversions

looming in the horizon, the presence of cafes, businesses and residents of other ethnicities and incomes, and a City Hall ever more sympathetic to gentrification. For many, however, this environment is only a new chapter in the struggle against displacing redevelopment. The following chapters try to capture these tensions and the accompanying unfolding conflicts and events.

### Stakeholders in the Gentrification Process

The gentrification process includes a few major stakeholders and many other players siding with one or the other or trying to sail through or take advantage of the situation. This section focuses in the main forces of contention in Pilsen and their interests.

First, as cities in a market economy compete for economic development, *local governments* become a dominant force behind gentrification in their pursuit of growth and a strong tax base. As part of this, they vie with one another to become the preferred locations of businesses. Unfortunately, economic achievement is more often than not, at the expense of low-income, typically, minority populations. This, however, can be challenged: communities can organize and impact the agenda of administrations, or can vote unresponsive representatives out of office. Local aldermen and other elected representatives closer to their low-income constituencies can be particularly vulnerable when their policies are perceived as having a negative impact on their communities. The orientations and priorities of elected officers certainly can make a difference vis-à-vis gentrification. In Chicago, the reigning growth coalition of downtown

interests has managed to gain reelection since 1989 through a tight discipline on its aldermen and a compact neo-liberal system of patronage and development. Gentrifying development has been at the core of the regime's priorities and agendas permeating practically every force in the city and conditioning public intervention on the support of its agenda. Initially appointed by the mayor to fill the position vacated by an indicted representative, the alderman of Pilsen has promoted the gentrification agenda in the city. In practice, however, he and the administration have run into a formidable and highly organized local block of resistance to gentrification. Thus, gentrification is highly contested and the alderman has its hands somewhat tied by a highly organized opposition. As a result, the city has been largely limited to infrastructure development, support for private activity that does not require major public decisions, promotion of the community among developers and tourists, and quiet intervention in the multiple daily fronts that contribute to gentrification in the long haul (from policing through public improvements and agendas to development of plans). Wholesale public support of projects immediately to the north of Pilsen—listed in the following section—is helping move the development frontier to this border while intensifying wholesale gentrification pressure on the community.

Second, the *private market* (e.g. developers, bankers, and retailers) plays a fundamental role in the gentrification process, as it seeks to maximize profit through hefty real estate transactions and to capture potential rent through reinvestment in severely divested areas (Smith, 1996). Historically, real estate

practices have exacerbated the economic stratification of minority populations through redlining and blockbusting. Today, they focus on maximizing profit through investing in distressed areas (without preserving affordability) to capture ground rent with the consequence of pricing out long-time residents.

This sector has already made some inroads into Pilsen: real estate prices have escalated tremendously resulting in high real estate taxes, inflated home prices and rents, and a serious affordability crisis (Glesne et al, *Pilsen Rent Study Update*, 2003). Although increases follow a general citywide trend, they have been influenced by the growing attention to the area and the resulting outside demand for local property. Housing costs are certainly far above the ability of residents to pay. Notice that local property owners are also profiting from such increases. Many of them,<sup>1</sup> however, lack the means to capture the main gains that come with gentrification and are ambiguous about their own future—in particular the resident homeowner displaced by higher taxes, code enforcement and similar expenses resulting from this process and having to buy elsewhere within an overpriced general housing market. Retailers tied to the community's ethnicity also feel the threat of higher income tenants whose shopping habits and demands cut on their business and, in the event of total gentrification, tend to ride them out of business. Hence, gentrification would threaten traditional building and home owners along with ethnic retailers representing the bulk of Pilsen while benefiting banks, speculators with the proper financial back up and

know how, trendy retailers, large chain stores and large box retailers, and owners of large tracks of land and manufacturing buildings—provided that someone else absorbs expensive clean ups or costly demolitions.

Thirdly, residents play an integral role in shaping a community's future. The area is caught in the contradiction between developments that provide improvements intended to benefit residents, and redevelopment schemes with serious displacement impacts. On the one hand, homeowners and local business owners may encourage the gentrification process to maximize returns on property investments. On the other hand, long-time residents run the risk of being priced out. Renters are particularly vulnerable to displacement as a result of gentrification. As property values increase, rent follows, forcing out lower income residents and replacing them with higher paying customers.

Communities like Pilsen who have developed infrastructures of self-help and organized against discrimination, for access and opportunity, have the added risk of losing such crucial social infrastructures and weakening the causes of their larger constituencies. Communities like Uptown and West Town in Chicago have seen the demise of many of their long fought for organizations and the disintegration of closely knit networks of self-help and self-promotion. Loss of such a social capital is difficult to assess. Most Pilsen organizations have managed to stay in place. They, however, feel the threat of gentrification on

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<sup>1</sup> Although property owners break into different categories (e.g., slumlords, owners of multiple dwellings or real estate, owners of vacant property, and resident owners), most of them are tied to a low-income property market.

their work and the negative impact on the Latino community at large. Hence, they have joined the struggle against gentrification. In turn, forces gaining from gentrification have or are also organizing to promote their interests against those of the rest of residents threatened by gentrification. Other groups or individuals have pursued their own political agendas without much concern for the larger impacts of gentrification. We prefer to keep their names anonymous. However, our research suggested the existence of three main types of institutions: 1) those openly opposed to gentrification and organized around the Pilsen Alliance; 2) upwardly mobile individuals seeking immediate benefits from their support of the current politics in power and organized around forces such as the Hispanic Democratic Organization and United Neighborhood Organization generally in support of gentrification, and 3) those trying to remain neutral, sometimes taking ad hoc positions on this or that issue but generally focusing on their specific services to the community; generally these are groups who fear to compromise their connections to the outside and try to remain on the fence to avoid it.

In evaluating the various stakeholders, Feagin and Smith (1987: 6) pose the question, "*Who* creates cities?" and respond, "One important answer is that cities are built environments that have been shaped by powerful development actors, both those in the private sector and those in government, working within the capital accumulation structure of modern capitalism." Much of the time, the top-down interests of local politics and private sector forces stand in direct opposition to community efforts to maintain affordable housing and preserve

community. Consequently, the market's free hand does not necessarily look after the best interests of lower-income residents. The profit-maximizing motive of developers proves the private sector incapable of obliging the best interests of all parties involved. Gentrification may be thought of as a consequence of these diverging interests, resulting in highly racialized and classed conflicts. Are each of these stakeholders interests so conflicted that inevitably there are only winners and losers? Is there room for a consensus to achieve viable development within communities that do not result in displacement? We explore these issues throughout the paper while, at the same time, exploring in more detail the positions and actions of the stakeholders introduced here.

### **Recent Development Pressures from the "Outside"**

Whereas in many areas of Chicago the massive loss of jobs tied to de-industrialization led to equally massive defaults in mortgages and the undermining of communities making them ripe for gentrification, this does not seem to be the case of Pilsen with traditionally low rates of resident home ownership and correspondingly high levels of low-income rental housing. Similarly, unlike other candidates for gentrification, Pilsen's housing stock does not stand out for its large lot sizes, generous front lawns, unique architecture, available land for new construction, or other characteristics typical of such areas. On the contrary, a good proportion of the community features vaulted sidewalks, first floors and backyards below street level, small lots, and old housing in poor shape. Pilsen

contains many old manufacturing buildings, contaminated sites, box style warehouses interspersed within housing, and noisy truck transportation facilities and factories. It is very dense, has few empty lots and lacks the designs and amenities that could allow for easy conditioning into middle class housing. Under these circumstances, the main asset of Pilsen, as mentioned before, is its location. This is why the housing is fully occupied and has never been plagued by abandonment or similar features of typical low-income areas. Low-income people need location as much as anybody else and depend on it like nobody else—for jobs, savings, local services, networks and multiple other place-based assets that are particularly critical for low-income people.

As a result, most threats on the community have come from outside. We summarized them earlier. These and more recent gentrifying pressures and proposals to revitalize Pilsen have instilled the fear among residents that they may once again be displaced. An example is part of the Chicago Housing Authority's Plan for Transformation, the redevelopment of the ABLA Homes housing project. This development originally encompassed Cabrini Street on the north to 14th Street on the south, Loomis on the west and Racine on the east (Chicago Housing Authority Website, 2004). A new development, which borders mid-Pilsen to the North, named Roosevelt Square, will expand the original ABLA Development past 14<sup>th</sup> and Loomis southwest to 15<sup>th</sup> street and Ashland. Roosevelt Square will consist of 2,441 housing units comprised of 1,090 units of affordable rental housing (inclusive of 755 public housing units) and 1,351 units

of affordable and market rate for-sale housing. It will bring homeownership opportunities to land initially reserved only for public housing. Development of the entire site will take approximately 10 years, with Phase 1 began in spring 2004 (<http://www.Rooseveltsquare.com>, 2004). Redevelopment of ABLA Homes removes the major low-income housing presence to the midsection of the northern boundary of Pilsen. Along with this but at an earlier stage are plans to redevelop a low-income area between Pilsen and the Medical District (bordering Pilsen's northern boundary to the west) into middle-income housing also moving the developer frontier from the north to the edge of Pilsen (Alvarez, 1999).

University Village is another new residential development resulting from the University of Illinois at Chicago's Campus expansion. Bordering Pilsen on the eastern side of the northern boundary, it includes 913 housing units and mixed-use commercial development (Geroulis 2003). In addition to the potential gentrifying impact that it has on Pilsen, this project effectively leveled the Maxwell Street neighborhood, a vibrant and bustling commercial district known as the Maxwell Street Market area that once existed at its site. The market never threatened to gentrify the Pilsen community; in fact it was quite an asset because it provided local jobs and business opportunities for residents and was easily accessible and highly affordable.

The University Village housing stock is primarily sold at market rate with only 20% set aside for "affordable housing" units, which tend to be located in

the mid-rise condo buildings and are mostly one-bedroom. They start out at about \$170,000. Although considered affordable according to HUD guidelines, the square footage is small compared to what one could get in other city sites for the same price. The cheapest unit on the market was listed in November 2003 for \$165,900 for a 671 square foot one bedroom in one of the mid-rise buildings; it excluded parking spaces selling for an additional \$26,000 each. While these units may be suitable for a working class couple with double incomes and no children, they are not large enough for the family with children typical of Pilsen.

The larger market rate for-sale townhouses have two to three bedrooms and at least two bathrooms. While the square footage might be suitable for families, most of them are priced in the \$400,000 range, far beyond what could be purchased in Pilsen. In 2002, the median value of a single-family home in Pilsen was \$160,000. Although most of the units are owner-occupied, a few condos are available for rent. They, however, would not accommodate the current majority of Pilsen households that tend to be quite large. University Village developers did not intend to keep the Pilsen residential composition—instead, they are seeking to create a different, more expensive community with professionals who have few children and the ability to afford more expensive residences. Moreover, the typical rent for a one bedroom in one of the mid-rises is around \$900 per month; this is much higher than the 2000 median gross rent of \$480 in Pilsen (Chicagoareahousing.org, 2004). The Village's rates are only slightly less than typical 2000 US census median gross rents found in upper

income Chicago neighborhoods such as the Loop (\$1,158), the Near North Side (\$948), or Lincoln Park (\$931) (Chicagoareahousing.org, 2004). Recently, private developers have introduced housing construction plans directly in Pilsen that would not be considered affordable to current residents. Such developments have run into intense community opposition—explored later in this report.

Before we close this section, however, we should differentiate between the initiatives mentioned so far. Proposals such as the Chicago 21 Plan and the World's Fair were closely associated with City Hall. They had a clearly identifiable proponent, one indeed accountable to the public. They also affected more than one area and represented a competing use for scarce public resources. As such, they faced a citywide audience and a strong local opposition. They also took place under other political circumstances including public bitterness over urban renewal and a strong community movement following the civil rights movement. Differently, University Village and plans for the northern boundary of Pilsen came after disbandment of the community movement that had brought Harold Washington to City Hall in the 1980s, are located outside Pilsen, are taking place under an administration most favorable to developers, and represent private initiatives—at least in form. Finally, gentrification is largely perceived as a private market initiative, has far too many players, is more subtle and hidden, and profits from the weakening of community forces, indeed the support of some of them and, hence, is a more formidable challenge to organizing, one indeed with multiple fronts and perhaps uncountable battles. We will get back to this point in

the discussion of community resistance—after exploring other elements used in gentrification. At this point, we turn to the description of ongoing public and private sector efforts to change the image of slum and blight that made Pilsen unattractive to higher income groups, developers, and tourists before.

### The Commodification of Identity

The struggle for place is complex. It includes the entire gamut of class, race, ethnicity, gender, culture, and like factors along with the tools at their disposal. Under urban renewal, for instance, neighborhood condemnation included its classification as area of “slum and blight.” This is what happened to the area razed to build UIC. In its 1960s and 1970s planning directives, the City of Chicago classified Pilsen as an area of slum and blight and, on this basis, slated it for redevelopment along the lines of the central communities proposed in the Chicago 21 Plan—issued in 1973. Short of total redevelopment à la urban renewal, such image actually kept the middle class off Pilsen until recently.

Gentrification, meanwhile, implies the opposite process. Often based on the attraction of middle-class “pioneers” to the inner city, it requires other images to attract them. This has assumed the form of elaborate processes of transformation of perceptions/representations of place or what we call gentrification of the discourse. A community must be perceived as “up and coming,” exciting, or “trendy” as opposed to “blighted” or “ghettoized” in order for reinvestment to enter; in turn, the presence of gentrifying activity sets off a

process of representation that opens the door for further development.

Stakeholders in the gentrification process play an integral role in how places are represented. Since gentrification is a gradual process, it is almost impossible to completely reinvent the perception of place without considering the cultural context of existing residents. This often manifests itself in manipulation of the cultural representation of a community's existing fabric from that of a "ghetto" or "slum" to a place which outsiders are encouraged to visit and "experience" due to the uniqueness of the existing culture. Essentially, people intrinsically rely on symbolic representation to guide perceptions of place (Mele, 2000).

Thus, local governments and private investors often redefine place by emphasizing the existing cultural experience and local excitement. Strong ethnic identities and cultural heritages can give place a uniqueness that cannot be met by others. In this context, cultural distinction becomes a marketing tool in the quest to make areas more appealing to outside residents, developers, and businesses. It includes the "packaging" of culture in ways that sell a locality to outside consumers. While focusing on the culture of residents, this packaging, however, has to provide other safeguards to visitors or investors, namely safety, comfort, generic aesthetics and entertainment; it certainly has to turn the locale into the standard saleable representation that attracts tourists and outside investment (Fainstein and Judd 1999; Mele 2000). As such, it is by definition, a process of co-opted culture—indeed it implies a process of dis-embedding and repackaging of local culture along the lines of the general industry of culture.

Featherstone (1994) examines this under the notion of *cultural capital* or the consumption of symbolic goods, a critical element of identity today. Here, previously excluded elements of differentiation can be allowed in to the extent that they represent unique (exotic and sanitized) cultural forms and, hence, offer exclusive identities to consumers. Consumption of places bearing such qualities maximizes one's particular cultural capital and is valued through this blending of culture and place. This notion has been prorogated by cities, developers, planners, and even the community development profession as a way to create outside interest and value in a neighborhood.

Cultural heritage, meanwhile, can be also a powerful factor as a means of community residents taking ownership of their neighborhood. When history is created, interpreted, and celebrated by community members, it can be a very effective mobilizing tool—a call for ethnic identity and self-determination as opposed to the sale of cultured place or comodification. A sense of pride and knowledge in the history and heritage of their neighborhood can encourage residents to take a more active role in preserving their community, can raise awareness, and help dissolve the negative internalization of their areas as “slums” or “ghettoes.” Furthermore, pride can act as an incentive to remain even if economic status permits one to have more residential options. A celebration of community heritage in this context, however, can only be derived from within the community. This type of “fostering pride” is only effective if it is a community-driven process. It involves an active dialogue in interpreting history

and envisioning the future and can be a very powerful factor in harnessing local cohesion. Furthermore, a community that has a strong sense of solidarity can more readily assure that future development is less prone to “outside” decision makers and that it is more in favor of a community’s controlled future.

These factors have become integral to the struggle for or against gentrification in Pilsen. On the one hand, there is an interest from local government officials and private developers to commodify the pervasive cultural identity of the community and to use Mexican heritage as a selling point to trigger development. On the other hand, residents continue to exert a strong sense of identity as a means to resist impeding development and displacement.

The experience is very similar to the one Mele (2000) depicted for the Lower West Side in Manhattan. The factors that marked that area as edgy and unreserved and that initially dissuaded middle- and upper-class people from moving in eventually became the very symbolic qualities sparking intrigue and curiosity towards that same place. Although resistance by Lower Eastside residents may have postponed the process, gentrification did eventually settle in. Several similarities can be drawn for Pilsen. As in the Lower East Side, in Chicago local government and developers intentionally reconstructed the symbolic representations of Pilsen for gentrification purposes; they changed the perception of threat to one of curiosity and cultural edge. Thus, what formerly discouraged people from moving to the area was intentionally reconfigured into a selling point. As in the Lower East Side, the artist community has played a

significant role in selling Pilsen to the outside. This community set the stage, perhaps unintentionally, for developers and local government to reconfigure the image Pilsen formerly represented. Developers and local government have been using cultural identity as a marketing tool aimed at changing the perception of the area and making it desirable to middle class tastes.

***Local Government Initiatives: Promotion of Pilsen as a tourist attraction***

Pilsen boasts a sense of Mexican heritage unparalleled to any other Chicago neighborhood. The community hosts well-known festivals, adorns buildings with murals, and plays host to numerous ethnic businesses catering to Latinos. Originally developed as part of the Chicano movement, these murals and celebrations were part of the initiative to claim and mark place under the motto "we shall not be moved." As such, they stated the community's right to stay and a strong spirit of self-determination. In the last decade, however, they have been appropriated for the opposite role of attracting tourists and selling place to outsiders. Consequently, tourism has become a major development initiative and industry in Pilsen. The city has posted throughout the area a walking tour map of its famous murals, has sponsored free trolley rides, and has established tourist buses that are part of the downtown scene. Heavily supported by the city and the philanthropic community, The Mexican Fine Arts Center Museum represents one of Pilsen's largest tourist attractions. Founded in 1982, the museum boasts of itself as being the largest Mexican cultural center

and museum in the country (City of Chicago website, 2003). Publicity for the museum can be found in many Chicago websites and tourist publications such as Frommer's, or in articles on "what to do" in Chicago in the New York Times and the Washington Post (Trip Advisor website, 2003). These descriptions of Pilsen, typify the emphasis on the neighborhood's rich cultural heritage as the main reason to visit. Frommer's describes Pilsen and the museum in these terms:

Ethnic pride emanates from every doorstep, taqueria, and bakery and the multitude of colorful murals splashed across building exteriors and alleyways. But the neighborhood's most prized possession could be this vivacious cultural institution, the largest of its kind in the country and the only Latino museum accredited by the American Association of Museums. That's quite an accomplishment, given that the Mexican Fine Arts Center Museum was founded in 1987 by a passel of public schoolteachers who pooled \$900 to get it started (Frommer's Chicago website, 2003)

The museum isn't without controversy, however. Many local residents feel that it was not actually created for the benefit of residents and that it infringes on the neighborhood. There is tension within the community concerning its underlying motives and its creators. A sense is that it only serves an elitist crowd and that it is suspiciously tied to the Hispanic Democratic Organization (HDO), a coalition with close relationships to Mayor Richard M. Daley (Interview with long time community resident and activist, 2003).

Fiesta del Sol, Pilsen's annual street festival, provides residents with an opportunity to exhibit their heritage and cultural pride to the estimated 1.5 million visitors who attend every year. Created by Pilsen Neighbors Community Council, this organization emphasizes the festival as a means to preserve the

cultural heritage of the community and as an avenue to showcase neighborhood plans. The Fiesta del Sol website describes the festival as follows:

Fiesta del Sol calls upon thousands of years of Mexican history by invoking the image of the sun. For the ancient Mexicans, the sun represented the life source, thus the Mexicans developed a religion and culture around keeping their sun alive. That is why Fiesta is so important because like the sunrise that assured the ancient Mexicans that they had another day to celebrate, Fiesta de Sol reminds everyone that Pilsen and its residents are here to stay. In fact, worked into the Fiesta machinery, is the State of the Neighborhood Address. Given at the festival's commencement, the address is both a report card and a blueprint for the City of Chicago. The beauty of Pilsen as well as its blemishes is proclaimed for all to hear (Fiesta del Sol website, 2003).

The city's Department of Planning and Development website (<http://cityofchicago/Programs and Services/Retail Chicago/EmpowermentZones, 2003>), portrays the Fiesta del Sol celebration quite differently:

Neighborhoods located in the Pilsen/Little Village Cluster are known internationally for their neighborhood festival. The community-sponsored, three-day, "Fiesta del Sol" is Chicago's largest neighborhood fair. A tour of the neighborhoods located within this cluster clearly reflects the cultural heritage of its residents. Colorful murals painted by local artists depicting scenes from Latin-American life and myth cover the sides of many stores and social agencies.

This description neglects to mention that the event is intended to provide a platform for social protest and trivializes it as a regular fair for tourists. As Fainstein and Judd explain, "Cities are sold just like any other consumer product... Each city tries to project itself as a uniquely wonderful place where an unceasing flow of events constantly unfolds..." (Fainstein & Judd, 1999: 4) In

this sense local government plays an integral role in manipulating the cultural identity of particular areas (or events) to its own advantage.

The city also features Pilsen on the official city tourist site. The site descriptively markets the guided tours and free trolley rides of Pilsen. It presents Mexican cultural heritage as the main attraction for visiting the neighborhood:

Join us as we explore Mexican culture and the Mexican American experience in Chicago's neighborhoods. Pilsen, once a Czech and Polish enclave, is now the cultural heart of the Mexican community and is home to the nation's largest Latino museum. Not far away is Little Village or La Villita, a neighborhood abundant with shops and restaurants that showcase the flavors and treasures of Mexico. (City of Chicago, Chicago Neighborhood Tours, 2003)

Alejandra Ibáñez, Executive Director of The Pilsen Alliance, a local activist organization, views these free trolley rides and overt attempts to boost tourism as a bit of a slap in the face to residents, in light of the fact that night and weekend public transportation service for the community was discontinued in 1997. Whereas residents do not have sufficient access to public transportation to get to their places of work or shopping, tourists are invited to take a free trolley ride in the very same neighborhood at the city's expense. The city's marketing of Pilsen serves to promote middle class development and sell carefully "packaged" Mexicannes to tourists and potential investors. In contrast, local groups emphasize heritage and self-determination. This is clearly stated at every opportunity. A clear example occurred at Fiesta del Sol where, in 2004, the Pilsen Alliance sold t-shirts that read, "Pilsen is not for sale."

The consequence of this commodification of culture on the part of the city and developers may be the eventual displacement of the same heritage they are promoting. Ironically, community residents strive to exert a strong cultural identity as a means of solidarity and resistance to outside pressures—the same element policy makers manipulate to induce gentrification. A prime example of such a possibility is Chicago's Greek town located just north of Pilsen. Although the neighborhood is comprised of Greek restaurants and shops catering to tourists, it no longer plays host to a Greek residential community. As mentioned earlier, this area experienced massive upheaval due to the construction of UIC's campus. While the Greek businesses enclave still exists for tourist consumption, the residential community and culture were disbanded and the area gentrified.

The city of Chicago constantly boasts its reputation as the "City of Neighborhoods" explicitly inviting tourists to explore its ethnic communities and experience their diverse cultures. In essence, however, this claim also highlights the segregation of ethnic groups within the city while overtly trying to commodify culture for the purposes of tourism and redevelopment. A local community development practitioner describes the process of making peoples' daily experiences and culture into a novelty as objectifying and demeaning to community residents. Jeff Edwards, a professor at Roosevelt University, describes the "theme-parking" of Chicago neighborhoods as distasteful and states, "You're taking superficial symbols from particular cultures, putting them in a cityscape and calling it 'recognizing cultural diversity.'" It's a fake

multiculturalism. It's about displacing citizens with shoppers and tourists" (Edwards as cited in Savage, 1999).

Tourist initiatives can be damaging to communities, such as Pilsen, where low-income residents are struggling for resources; these resources are instead being funneled to support people who enter the community for a brief period of time, consume and absorb certain aspects of it, and then leave it to its own self-preservation and the often polluting effects of this tourism.

Local politics have been particularly impacted by these dynamics. In 1996, Mayor Daley appointed a strong supporter of his administration in the Latino community, Danny Solis, Pilsen's local alderman and president pro tempore of the City Council. Prior to his appointment as alderman, Solis was the Executive Director of United Neighborhood Organization (UNO) (a major supporter of the Daley administration and its gentrification agenda). Irrespective of community concerns, Pilsen's political leaders have carried Daley's agenda conveying the impression that their sole objective is the promotion of new economic and residential development (Ibáñez, 2003). Solis' goal is to make the Pilsen area a cultural attraction, much like Chicago's Greek town or Chinatown.

The alderman's website reads, "Utilizing the community's assets of immigration tradition, Solis has promoted the 25<sup>th</sup> Ward as primary host to Chinese, Italian and Mexican culture" (City of Chicago, 2003). In a *Chicago Sun-Times* article (Webber, 2003: 49) he states his development agenda for the area: "the future of Pilsen is more like Chinatown, a vibrant ethnic community that also

draws tourists and artist.” Furthermore, Solis is quoted in the article as stating, “My vision for Pilsen is to become the best Mexican-American community in the Midwest, where you can come, taste the food and experience the culture.”

His goal is to promote mass consumption of Mexican culture for tourists and, eventually, to attract the middle class to the area. City Hall also sees this is as crucial to viable neighborhood development.<sup>2</sup> Tourism, however, as a primary local development tactic may carry the danger of solely providing an experience to the tourist while ignoring factors influencing quality of life for its residents. Many such “place-based” development initiatives have been a source of contention. At the end, tourism may be a temporary promotional tool to gentrify the area. Meanwhile, gentrification has become a dividing factor—discussed next. Election after election the city supports its pro-gentrification candidate against local leaders running on anti-gentrification, heritage, or development without gentrification agendas. In turn, the alderman’s relocation of his offices to a gentrified site in East Pilsen sent a clear message to the community.

### ***A Divided Reaction to Development Pressures***

Political actors in Pilsen and in the Latino community are divided on local development initiatives within and surrounding the community. An example of this was the recent expansion of UIC’s campus. Alderman Solis, UNO and a

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<sup>2</sup> Fainstein and Judd (1999: 4) write, “If an infrastructure that will attract and nurture the needs of tourist does not already exist it must be constructed. Since this cannot be left to chance, governments are inevitably involved in coordinating, subsidizing and transforming the urban environment.”

group of Latino businessmen and organizations viewed the expansion as an opportunity to control jobs and contracts (Oclander, 1998). They, hence, agreed to the expansion in exchange for an offer of 700 jobs and a commitment of \$70 million in subcontracts to Latino businesses that they would control and review—regardless of the impact of the expansion on Pilsen and whether the beneficiaries lived in Pilsen or not (Betancur and Gills, 2003). Siding with other community organization forces fearing gentrification and its displacing impact, Senators Jesus Garcia and Miguel del Valle opposed this tentative agreement, pointing out that it would not equally benefit current Pilsen residents and would, ultimately, be detrimental to the community's future (Oclander, 1998). This divergence in opinions between the Latino leadership inside and outside Pilsen has been a source of division within the community and, thereby, may have reduced its power to confront gentrification. Their disagreements about future development have left the community more vulnerable than ever to outside forces.

### ***The Private Market and the Commodification of Culture***

Much of Pilsen's housing stock is around 130 years old, as it is one of the few areas spared by the Chicago Fire of 1877 (Betancur et al, 1995). The housing stock is aging and, consequently, many of the buildings suffer from deterioration and code violations. Local governments have great discretionary power to enforce housing codes. Similarly, private concerns can use code violations for their own purposes. This has been a favorite strategy of gentrifiers to go after lower-income or "undesirable" neighbors. Similarly, developers report

code violations to housing code enforcement agencies as a means to acquire more land or properties; these agencies have the power to condemn, fine, and otherwise close buildings. Thus, code enforcement can lead to gentrification, displacement of tenants, and loss of affordable housing (Policy Link Website, 2003). If strictly enforced, violations provide the opportunity to remove current residents—in particular, low-income owners lacking the means to make the repairs—through excessive fines or teardowns and land clearance for new upscale developments. A review of code violations throughout Chicago Community areas, however, does not show evidence that Pilsen is currently experiencing excessive code violations when compared to others (Center for Neighborhood Technology: Early Neighborhood Warning System, 2004). However, as the demographics of Pilsen shift, the use of such methods may become more appealing to potential developers. Local interviewees report that there is in fact an increase in such activity particularly to the east of the community. The strategy has been used in this section as part of the struggle between organized residents and a private developer of artist housing.

Speculation and land acquisition are not the only tactics developers use in the development process. Manipulation of cultural representations has been used as a marketing tactic in Pilsen. Podmajersky's artist community, albeit created in the 1960s (Podmajersky, Inc., 2003), played a role in the re-conceptualization of this area. Shortly after construction in the 1960s of the Dan Ryan Expressway, John Podmajersky became interested in purchasing property

in Pilsen to preserve it from foreseeable demolition. In a *Chicago Tribune* article explaining his father's intentions (Webber 1992), John Podmajersky III stated, "My father was very concerned about the deterioration of Pilsen and wanted to do something to rejuvenate the neighborhood." According to this same article, shortly after he purchased property on the east side of Pilsen, friends of Podmajersky suggested he consider renovating the buildings to accommodate an art colony. Because most artists have modest incomes and space needs that parallel those of a small manufacturer (Webber 1992), Podmajersky's property seemed to suit the needs of artists quite well and he went on to develop and acquire new land for that purpose.

The result was a successful operation housing "many fine Chicago businesses and more than 1,500 creative entrepreneurs" in a period of five decades (Podmajersky Inc., 2003). Unfortunately, it operated as an enclave of outsiders without any major ties to the larger community. Podmajersky has been accused of producing the first major gentrification inroad in Pilsen (Puente 1998)—reflected in gentrified development in Pilsen's east side. Not only did his artist colony show the way to others but it also helped portray Pilsen as an exciting possibility to outsiders. Today, as Podmajersky's son inherits the real estate business, Podmajersky and Associates, the initial intention to create an affordable, livable workspace for artists seems to be changing. The firm is developing newer retail space on the eastern end of Pilsen and hopes to attract

art galleries, theaters and a destination restaurant that will complement the lofts his father created (Webber 1992).

Observers believe that the presence of an artist community in East Pilsen makes Pilsen extremely palatable to “gentrifiers” (Puente, 1998). Gentrification has entered Pilsen through this area. Between 1990 and 2000, the median household income of East Pilsen increased between 46.86% and 68.78%—compared to Chicago’s 47% increase) (MCIC & Chicagoareahousing.org, 2004). Median owner-occupied housing values in East Pilsen have increased between 68% and 548% in this decade, with the eastern census tract 3103 (adjacent to University Village) experiencing the highest increase of 548%—compared to a citywide average increase of 68.23% (Chicagoareahousing.org, 2004). As in the case of marketing Pilsen’s Mexican heritage, the “artist” element has been used in the same rhetoric for several new developments throughout the area.

Multiple other initiatives from inside and outside Pilsen, private and public or public-private, have increased the attractiveness of the area over the years. As stated earlier, UIC opened its doors to 10,000 students in 1965. In the words of the *Chicago Tribune* (1999: 16), “Mayor Richard J. Daley wanted it [the campus] constructed near downtown, but his first choice, the railroad land south of the Loop, fell through. So he chose a site south of Harrison and west of Halsted Street, a decision that essentially destroyed the neighborhood called Little Italy.” The article continues by saying, “More than 5,000 people were displaced, 200 businesses forced out and some 800 homes razed.” Members of

the current Pilsen community were among those displaced by the UIC campus construction; as the University Village, a new \$450 to \$550 million project to expand the campus south of Roosevelt Road (edging the northern Pilsen border) has recently been completed, Pilsen residents feel the pressure of their next door neighbor expressed through statements such as those used in its marketing.

The Village, in fact, boasts the tagline "Chicago's New 'Old Neighborhood.'" Its website states,

No other part of Chicago provides such direct access to the full variety of the city's cultural and entertainment opportunities... [including] the ethnic and artistic riches of Pilsen immediately to the south..." (University Village website, 2003).

Again, one can see the overt reference to cultural heritage and artistic cache as a marketing mechanism. The role of developers in the gentrification process is apparent. Each of them has the ability to market various representations of culture to spark outsider intrigue. Such covert tactics to promote the area to a potential new resident population present a major challenge to long-time residents attempting to fight displacement.

As Pilsen experiences "revitalization" with its expanding artist colony and "trendy" businesses such as Volare Salon, Bom Bon Bakery, the Jumping Bean, and Fogata Village (Chicago Sun Times, 14 June 1992), other real estate developers have also taken the opportunity to build new residential property directly in Pilsen while increasingly enticing middle class households to be part of this unique blend of new and old and be part of one of the most exciting ethnic neighborhoods in the city boasting a unique and extremely rich culture.

Marketing Mexican heritage has become a central element in sale pitches. The website for Pilsen Gateway, a new 32-unit “multi-family” development just south of University Village—within Pilsen—reads,

...The neighborhood is where they (buyers) want to be, the place they probably moved to a couple of years ago. It's close enough to the heart of the city yet far enough away for a sense of individuality. It's not trendy (yet); its design is thoroughly modern” (Pilsen Gateway website, 2003).

Pilsen Gateway is just one of many new residential developments in the area.

Other real estate firms advertise Pilsen in similar ways. The North Clybourn Group, an apartment rental agency in Chicago, states in its website,

“Considered by many to be Chicago’s largest Mexican community, this neighborhood [boasts] at offering us the only truly authentic burrito in town! Its main hub can be found along side 18<sup>th</sup> Street where an array of small shops, food markets, restaurants and clothing stores can be found. This street also houses one of the cities largest collections of urban murals that adorn many of the building’s exteriors.” (North Clybourn Group website, 2003)

Despite community’s systematic opposition to middle and upper housing development, developers continue to propose plans for new development.

### **Organized Community Responses**

As previously stated, for a long time Pilsen has been subjected to steady pressures of upward development coming mostly from the “outside.”

Since the seventies, Pilsen has been under development pressures to the north from the University of Illinois at Chicago’s expansion plans and to the east from the South Loop development (Betancur 1995: 31).

Several other initiatives mentioned earlier also constitute attempts to develop Pilsen without any local input. Importantly, however, these initiatives have met

with unprecedented deliberate community action to thwart development and maintain the community's ethnic heritage and self-determination.

An early form of opposition was the creation of community murals—spurred by the Chicano movement (Margolin, 1999). They became indispensable in the local struggle for respect and control. A local leader stated that if there had not been a cultural movement in Pilsen, none of the other accomplishments could have occurred (Interviewee; see also Fisher and Kling, 1993). Despite the individuality in the design and message portrayed by each piece of artwork, the underlying focus was on expressing the interests and concerns of Mexicans. The murals convey a variety of themes, from cultural heritage and political history to anti-discrimination, anti-displacement and resistance to assimilation (Margolin, 1999). This form of expression has enabled Pilsen's Mexican population to confirm its active local presence and portray a sense of activism and pride. It exemplifies the use of identity as a form of resistance and appropriation of place. Ironically, the murals have become major local tourist attractions. Yet, residents continue to view them as a symbol of resistance and self-assertion. Meanwhile, the mural movement was only a part of community building efforts started by leaders formed in the struggle against urban renewal and inspired by the bottom-up struggles of the 1950s and 1960s, including the Civil Rights and Chicano movements. The core of such efforts was pride of heritage, identity politics, Latino consciousness, resistance, and organization for self-determination.

These efforts converged initially around the Chicago 21 Plan introduced by the City of Chicago and the Chicago Central Area Committee (CCAC)—comprised of downtown businessmen only—in 1973. Two assumptions of the Plan were that Chicago's CBD should continue as the dominant focus of commerce and culture for the entire metropolitan area, and that the surrounding communities should serve as the transportation hub, the seat of government, office and business locations, cultural and entertainment sites, residences for downtown middle-class employees and part of the central market place (Chicago 21 Plan, 1973). The plan targeted Pilsen for continued renewal of the existing residential environment through rehabilitation and infill housing for Chicago's business community (Chicago 21 Plan, 1973). Pilsen and other neighborhoods such as Chinatown, the South Loop, Cabrini-Green, and East Humboldt Park were depicted as having "low civic pride" and were slated for upward redevelopment. As Wright writes (1979: iii), "the main focus of the plan was to build a new-town in-town" without any provisions for resident participation and low-income housing. As a result, these and other low-income communities throughout the city took it as a slap in the face, indeed, a new phase of urban renewal and minority displacement.

In response, Pilsen leaders formed the Pilsen Community Planning Council (PCPC), a coalition of various organizations from the neighborhood. In turn, the PCPC became part of the Coalition of Central Area Communities (COCAC), a group of organizations representing the various neighborhoods to be affected by the plan. COCAC advocated for representation in CCAC and the opportunity for

each community to create its own plan. After much pressure, the CCAC agreed to a contract with the community groups to complete individual plans, but did not agree to the quest for community representation on its board. Furthermore, CCAC placed numerous stipulations on COCAC and the neighborhood plans. Each community had to raise a matching grant of \$12,500 to hire a professional planning agency to help complete its plan. Only East Humboldt Park and Pilsen<sup>3</sup> were able to raise the required funds (with the help of The Chicago Community Trust) and develop their plans. This provision split the coalition and weakened its ability to have the CCAC and the city adopt the plans. According to Wright,

...after two years of fighting in the Chicago 21 Plan it is ironic that in taking the route of formal participation the central area communities found that their unity and strength of action and resistance had been undermined and dissipated (Wright, 1979: 49).

Although the PCPC/COCAC was not a landslide success, it challenged the motives of big business and negotiated the creation of plans by residents. Moreover, COCAC drew public attention to the intentions of the city and CCAC in their vision of Chicago's future. The process generated definite experiences and challenges in Pilsen. A local outcome was the formation of the Eighteenth Street Development Corporation (ESDC) to pursue residential rehabilitation projects in Pilsen. Choosing to take a radical position against the Chicago 21 Plan, ESDC brought together a group of city activists to form The Coalition to Stop the Plan 21 that would become a catalyst for future efforts to oppose the city's growth

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<sup>3</sup> Pilsen Neighbors Community Council completed the plan for Pilsen in 1975 (Betancur, 1995).

machine tactics (Baker, 1995). In contrast, Pilsen Neighbors Community Council chose to work with the city to promote improvements in Pilsen.

The experience helped lay the groundwork for future community action and awareness. Additionally, the actions of the PCPC provided an important symbolic gesture that Pilsen was not a complacent community. It encouraged further action to address many of the community needs locally. As a result, by the late 1970s, Pilsen was home to a strong network of social agencies, churches, labor, and other organizations of self-help and advocacy. This network was decisive in thwarting other gentrifying development initiatives in the 1980s.

Camiros, LTD., a consultant firm working for the economic development task force of Pilsen Neighbors and the Pilsen Chamber of Commerce, introduced the Pilsen Triangle Plan in the 1980's. While focusing on the triangle formed by 18<sup>th</sup>, Loomis and Blue Island streets in the middle of the community, the plan included development of the commercial corridors including predominantly Mexican specialty stores serving residents and outsiders while at the same time becoming a tourist attraction. *Analysis of the Pilsen Triangle Plan* (Voorhees Center, 1988: 3) explained that the proposal sought to "profit from the rich Mexican heritage to make the area into a 'focal point for Hispanic culture in the city'". It pointed to the contradiction between a survey indicating that residents felt that more Mexican specialty shops were not needed and the plan's focus on creating a pronounced ethnic niche community à la Chinatown. It also proposed a cultural center despite the fact that one already existed. The report argued

that the plan focused exclusively on place-based strategies such as increasing parking or facade repairs while ignoring people-based development initiatives (e.g., training and job development). Finally, it called attention to the plan's potential gentrifying impact as it tried to turn the community into a showcase and to focus on redevelopment schemes setting off the process of property valorization and redevelopment for higher uses and income groups. Working in partnership with LISC and the City of Chicago, its promoters formed the Pilsen Development Corporation to lead the project. Strong opposition by a majority of local leaders derailed it, strengthening the anti-gentrification cause in Pilsen.

Another prominent event threatening Pilsen during this decade was the city's proposal to hold in Chicago the 1992 World's Fair. Located to the east of Pilsen, the Fair would absorb part of the community for construction of facilities such as parking. During this time, many community groups throughout the city were promoting local preservation as a priority in development policy. Fearing many neighborhoods would be damaged or even demolished if plans for the project were completed, 125 to 150 activist groups across the metropolitan area organized into the "Chicago 1992 Committee" to fight the World's Fair proposal. The Committee rallied for a "fair, Fair" policy (Betancur and Gills, 1993: 201). Tensions built among differing factions; some saw the World's Fair as an opportunity for an economic resurgence while others considered it to be another attempt by white majority interests to profit at the expense of minority communities. Activists in Pilsen feared displacement and, as a result,

vehemently opposed all aspects of it. As Betancur and Gills (1993: 203) explain, “The opposition was based on the determination to keep Pilsen Latino, the experience of being ripped off by downtown interests, and the call for local self-determination of the Mexican community.” These plans were dropped in the mid-1980s when the Harold Washington administration and other major players withdrew their support in part because of the widespread community opposition to the Fair. Clearly, the Pilsen community played a vital role in mobilizing opposition to the World’s Fair project; this effort would serve as an example for future organizing endeavors among community activists in Chicago.

In spite of this opposition, some of the ideas continue coming back either in wholesale or piecemeal fashion. In 2000, the LISC New Communities Programming partnership with the The Resurrection project once again introduced a plan (this time named El Zocalo) to develop the commercial corridors of Pilsen into a more pronounced Mexican cultural attraction including specialty stores and other tourist features (LISC and TRP 2000). The city has also introduced improvements including street furniture and sidewalk beautification using Mexican symbols along the 18<sup>th</sup> Street commercial corridor. It has also created a Mexican plaza in the intersection of 18<sup>th</sup> and Blue Island streets. As mentioned before, it has added Pilsen to the central communities’ tourist routes. These efforts constitute an incremental introduction of some of the concepts mentioned earlier. The scale, however, is still limited and the community continues watching very carefully each development and proposal.

Despite the conflicting objectives of Pilsen's organizations, most agree that development is good, as long as current residents are not removed from the equation (Puente 1998; Hernandez, 2003; Ibáñez, 2003, Betlegewski, 2003). However, preventing displacement did not seem to be a driving force in the recent proposal for a new upscale development within Pilsen. In May of 2003, Concord Homes, Inc. introduced plans to build a high-end housing development from 16<sup>th</sup> Street to 18<sup>th</sup> Street and Peoria Avenue. Specifically, this developer wanted to create a residential community comprised of 13 buildings with a total of 132 condominium dwelling units with a starting price of \$280,000 for a two-bedroom, two-bath unit in the site of an empty factory (Jewish Council on Urban Affairs, 2003 and Community Hearing, 2003). The proposal included a 10% set aside of "affordable" housing. The obvious intention of the developer was to bring in new people from outside Pilsen, who could afford such prices.

Formed in 1997, The Pilsen Alliance, a community activist organization, worked tirelessly to organize the Coalition of Pilsen Residents and Community Agencies (hereinafter called the Coalition), a collaboration of 14 groups intent on preventing construction. The Coalition set out to inform organizations, churches and residents of the proposal and organize an effective strategy to terminate it. During the summer of 2003, they delivered a petition and letter to Alderman Solis, the attorney for Concord Homes, Inc., and the Chair of Chicago's Zoning Committee (Pilsen Alliance, 2003). The letter outlined the community's concerns and expressed the widespread opposition through member signatures. In

August 2003, 150 residents and groups attended a community meeting sponsored by Concord Homes and Alderman Solis and presented the following statement and demands (Pilsen Alliance, 2003):

The proposed development does not benefit the community and, therefore, is not supported by the Coalition.

1. The Coalition demands that Alderman Solis end all procedures for Concord Homes' proposed development.
2. The Coalition will follow up with Alderman Solis to formalize his position.

As a result of the Coalition's unending resolve, in September 2003, Alderman Solis responded in a letter to the Coalition explaining that the development "as it stands" will no longer be considered due to the lack of community support.

The Coalition is presently focused on keeping the momentum of its previous success by expanding its membership and continuing the quest to influence development policy within Pilsen. Most recently, it ran a highly successful campaign to pass a referendum stating, "Shall the alderman be required to hold public hearings on zoning changes in Pilsen?" Although referendums are not binding in Illinois legislation, the Coalition feels it is a positive step to make local government accountable to its constituents. This task entailed a highly successful voter registration initiative requiring 300 signatures to place the referendum on the ballot, and a campaign to pass it. The Coalition put the referendum on the electoral ballot in March of 2004 winning with 97% of the voter turnout within 13 precincts that compose Pilsen. Currently, it is working with Pilsen Alliance in the creation of a zoning committee to review all major zoning changes in Pilsen, take an inventory of all of the existing local zoning, and

educate and host workshops to educate Pilsen residents on homeownership, property taxes, property value, and community organizing and how property and zoning issues impact the gentrification of neighborhoods like Pilsen.

Alejandra Ibáñez (2003) commented,

We realize this is not the end-all be-all answer, and it is not going to solve the problem of gentrification. But for us, this is an organizing tool and a first step in getting people involved.

The Coalition continues working toward organizing the community into one cohesive voice that can speak freely on controversial issues.

While there has been significant progress toward building an even larger alliance to hold politicians accountable, some groups continue working on the sidelines and even in opposite directions. UNO has absorbed ESDC—currently focusing on economic development and job retention in Pilsen. ESDC also envisions the future of Pilsen looking like Chicago's Chinatown district. Dave Betlegewski, ESDC's Executive Director, suggested in an interview that "changes" in income levels and the ethnic make-up of Pilsen are not necessarily bad. ESDC's and UNO's goals and objectives obviously conflict with those of the Pilsen Coalition that seeks to fight displacing development at any expense.

Another potential area of contention is the non-involvement of The Resurrection Project (TRP), a prominent community development corporation in Pilsen in the Coalition. Although TRP's objective is to preserve affordable housing and prevent displacement, our interviewees were of the opinion that its high dependence on local government funding possibly prohibits its involvement

in this politically charged issue. Because of TRP's strong reputation in community preservation, its absence in the coalition could serve to dissuade other organizations from joining. While these impediments do exist, the potential of the coalition should not be underestimated. Community mobilization as a form of resistance can be a powerful tool in influencing the future of a neighborhood. In Pilsen, it has managed to keep large scale gentrifying development off.

Most Pilsen organizations favor "Development without Displacement." The concept advanced in a Voorhees study for the Chicago Rehab Network (Betancur et al. 1995) offers policy solutions to thwart displacement in Chicago's gentrifying areas. It suggests that there is a need for a strong community voice to bring the issue of displacement to the forefront of development policy. Along with this, it argues that public involvement is necessary for this to occur:

Only strong community pressure will get the city government to respond. Community groups and others interested in the fair development of our city should urge the government to adopt a policy that requires that each and every redevelopment proposal in the city include a plan addressing displacement. (Betancur et al, 1995: 42)

... the challenge of communities and the public is to raise this [displacement] from a local matter affecting a group at a time, into a comprehensive interest and goal" (Betancur et al, 1995: 6).

### **Demographic Changes in Pilsen (1980-2000)**

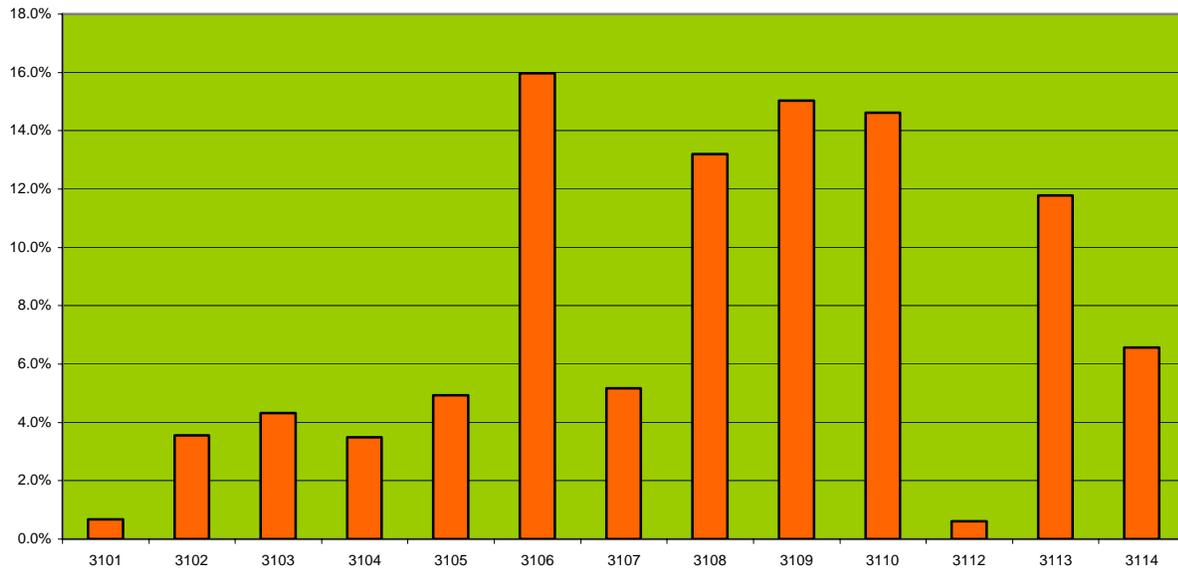
In spite of these efforts and dynamics, gentrification pressure on Pilsen grows by the day. This section attempts to measure its local advance and extent as reflected in a selected group of indicators. The data used come from the US

Census and the *Pilsen Rent Study Update* (Glesne et al. 2003). The reader should be aware of the difficulties of measuring gentrification: 1) It takes time for these indicators to show up in aggregate numbers, because residents stay in the neighborhood as long as possible and because gentrification often takes its time to achieve the necessary scale to change the statistics. 2) Indicators showing the dynamics of the housing market are not readily available or take resources to obtain and analyze that are beyond the scope of this study.

Generally, the first indicators of gentrification are found within the housing market. Increases in the median value of homes, rents, and home ownership rates are just a few. However, the notion that gentrification displaces long-time residents is often hard to prove due to the lack of information on whether they choose to leave on their own recognizance or are actually squeezed out by increases in housing cost burden. Also, residents may be displaced from their homes, but not necessarily their communities. Residents displaced by the demolition of their high-rise buildings as part of the Chicago Housing Authority's Plan for Transformation have been found to relocate within neighboring areas (Chicago Sun-Times, 4 February 2004; Fisher 2003). Moreover, low-income renters tend to move short distances. Often times, residents struggle to stay put, even if it means families doubling and tripling up in an apartment (Hsu, 2004). Gentrification also starts by clusters or includes only parts of an area. For this reason, we added shifts within sub-areas to our analysis of changes in Pilsen as a whole. The sub-areas selected included census tracts 3101-3115 (see map



Graph 1: Census Tracts as percentage of total Lower West Side Population



Therefore, in highlighting for example, the east side of Pilsen we are discussing 17% of the total Pilsen area population. Finally, we use the City of Chicago as the basis of comparison.

### ***Housing Construction***

The number of housing units in Pilsen has declined steadily since records have been kept. Little new construction has taken place since 1930. Given that much of Pilsen's housing stock was spared from the 1871 fire, many of the housing units, particularly in eastern Pilsen, are old and elevated from the sidewalks making rehabilitation expensive. Of the 14,410 housing units in Pilsen, 67.5 percent were built before 1939; furthermore, nearly 3,400 units were lost between 1940 and 1970 (The Chicago Fact Book Consortium 1984: 113).

Because of these factors, Pilsen has notoriously been known for its poor housing stock, yet relative affordability and overcrowding. Furthermore, only 3.8% of the

Lower West Side's housing structures have been constructed between 1990 and 2000 as compared to 4.6% for the entire city of Chicago (MCIC, 2004).

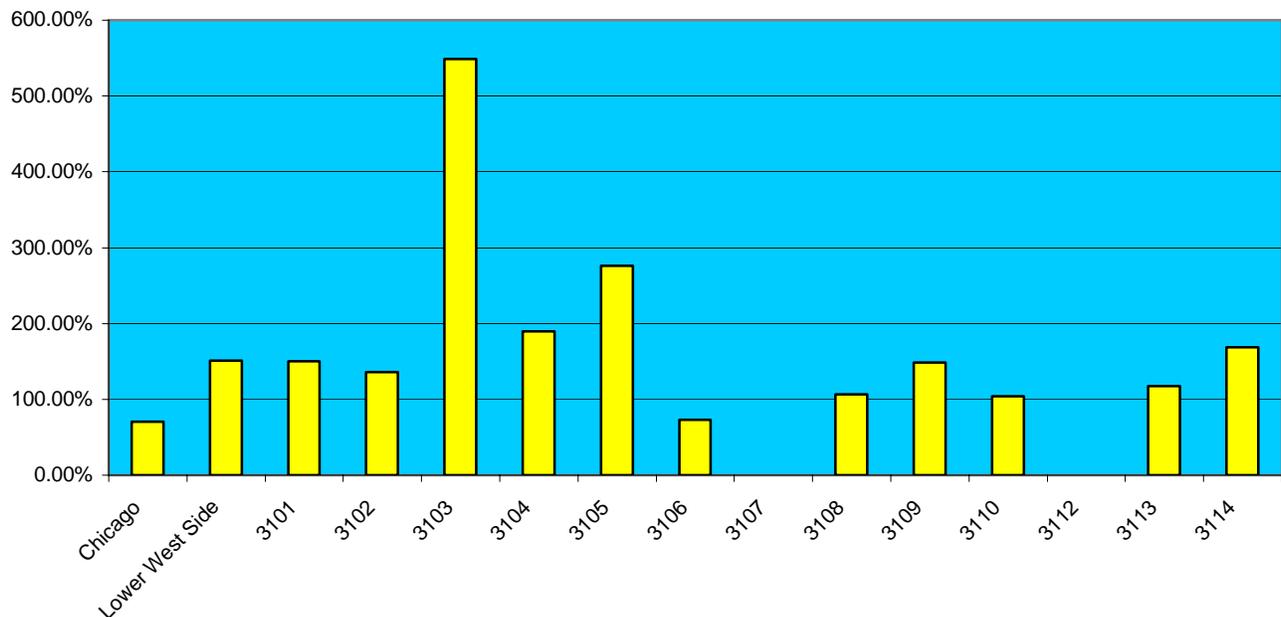
### ***Changes in Housing***

Pilsen has been home for working-class immigrants and, as previously mentioned, the low quality of housing has been historically reflected in low housing costs. Pilsen's property values and rents have historically been lower than the Chicago median although, as will be discussed in the next section, this appears to be rapidly changing. On the one hand, housing affordability in some areas of Pilsen continues to attract new immigrants—while also offering a choice to old residents to stay and attracting low-income households from elsewhere in the city. On the other hand, long-term disinvestment in the housing stock and speculation appears to be driving up housing values throughout the neighborhood but particularly to the east. The following indicators help assess changes in housing characteristics between 1980 and 2000.

In 2000, the median owner-occupied value in Pilsen was \$109,264, which is significantly lower than the city of Chicago median value of \$132,400. However, between 1990 and 2000 the Lower West Sides median value of owner-occupied housing units increased by 151% compared to a 71% overall increase in Chicago. In 2000, eastern census tract 3103 adjacent to University Village had the highest median owner-occupied property value in the area at \$270,500 (Graph 1), indicating a 547% increase between 1990 and 2000. This census

tract is of particular importance because it is considered the area on the foremost edge of gentrification. While the majority of eastern census tracts have median housing values comparable to other portions of the Lower West Side, percentage increases in median value between 1990 and 2000 superceded many of the western census tracts (see graph 2). The percentage change in median value of owner-occupied housing rose dramatically in the eastern census tracts (3103-3105) of Pilsen between 1990 and 2000 (see also graph 2). While owner-occupied housing unit values vary significantly among census tracts in both the eastern and western portions of the community, the average increase surpassed that of Chicago's in most of the community between 1990 and 2000.

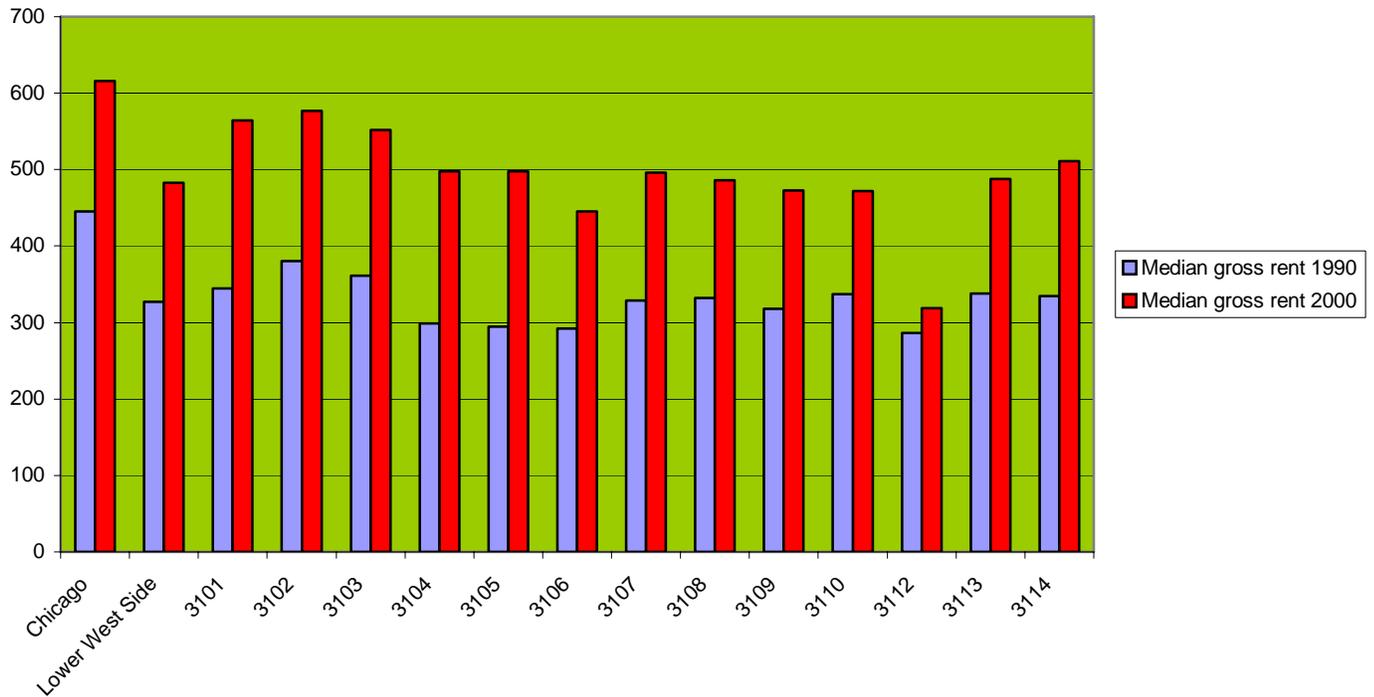
**Graph 2: Percentage change in Median Owner-Occupied Housing Value 1990-2000**



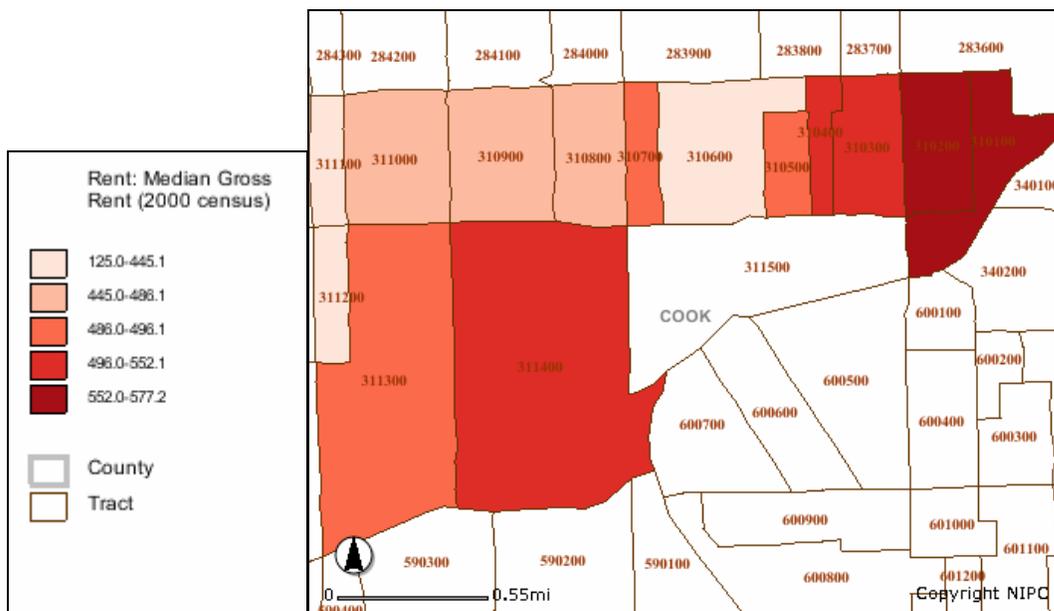
The median gross rent in Pilsen has also been historically lower than that of Chicago. In 2000, it was \$483 significantly less than Chicago's median of

\$616. Within Pilsen, however, rents in eastern Pilsen were considerably higher than in central and western Pilsen. In 2000, rents in the eastern census tracts were typically around \$100 more than in the northwestern tracts (See graph 3). In 1990, rents in Pilsen were comparable across the entire community area with some eastern census tracts slightly higher than the rest. In contrast, between 1990 and 2000 the gap grew larger between east and west. Median gross rents rose 47.7% for the entire Lower West Side as compared to the city of Chicago's increase of 38.43%. While Chicago's median is still higher than Pilsen's, it appears that the latter, especially in the eastern portion, is catching up. The 2004 *Pilsen Rent Study Update* reports that average rent levels in Pilsen increased nearly \$200 or 9.5% per year between 1995 and 2000. Rents increased the greatest (\$291) in Eastern Pilsen and substantially in the West (\$200). The northwestern portion and census tract 3106 continued to have the lowest gross rents (See Map 3). Furthermore, through using a random sample of 114 housing units, the *Pilsen Rent Study Update* determined that in the east, 58% of renters experienced a rent increase in the year 2002 while only 2% reported an increase in rent to the west.

**Graph 3: Lower West Side Change in Median Gross Rent 1990-2000**  
 Source: [chicagoareahousing.org](http://chicagoareahousing.org) 2004

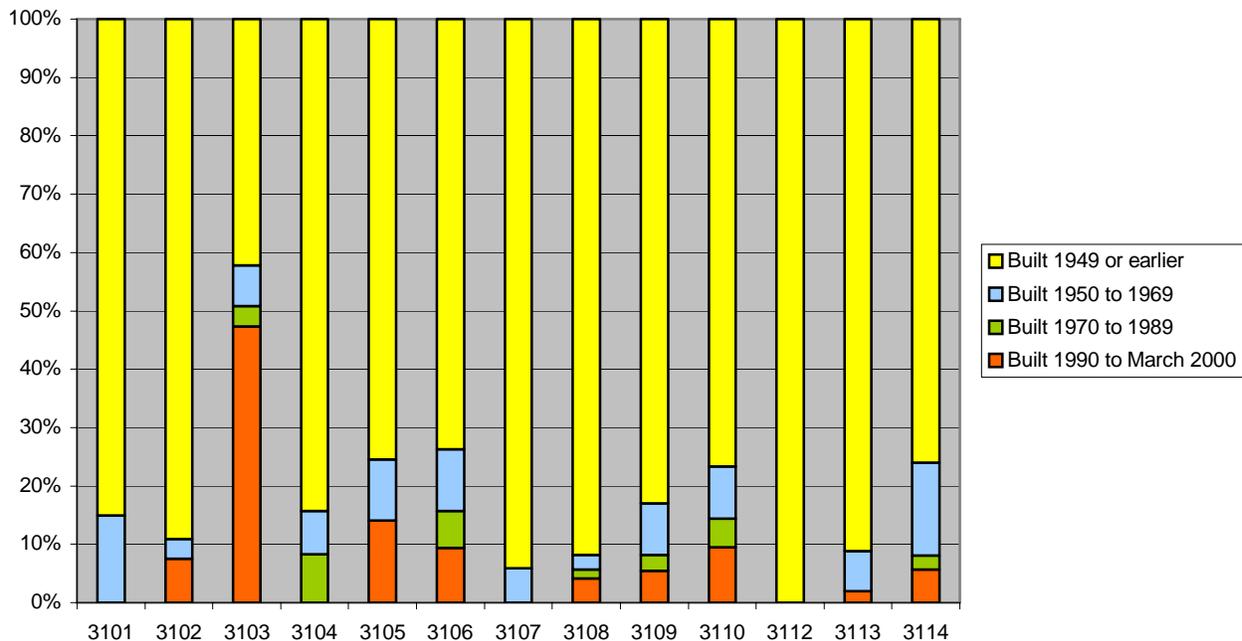


**Map 3: Median Gross Rent Lower West Side 2000 (Chicagoareahousing.org)**

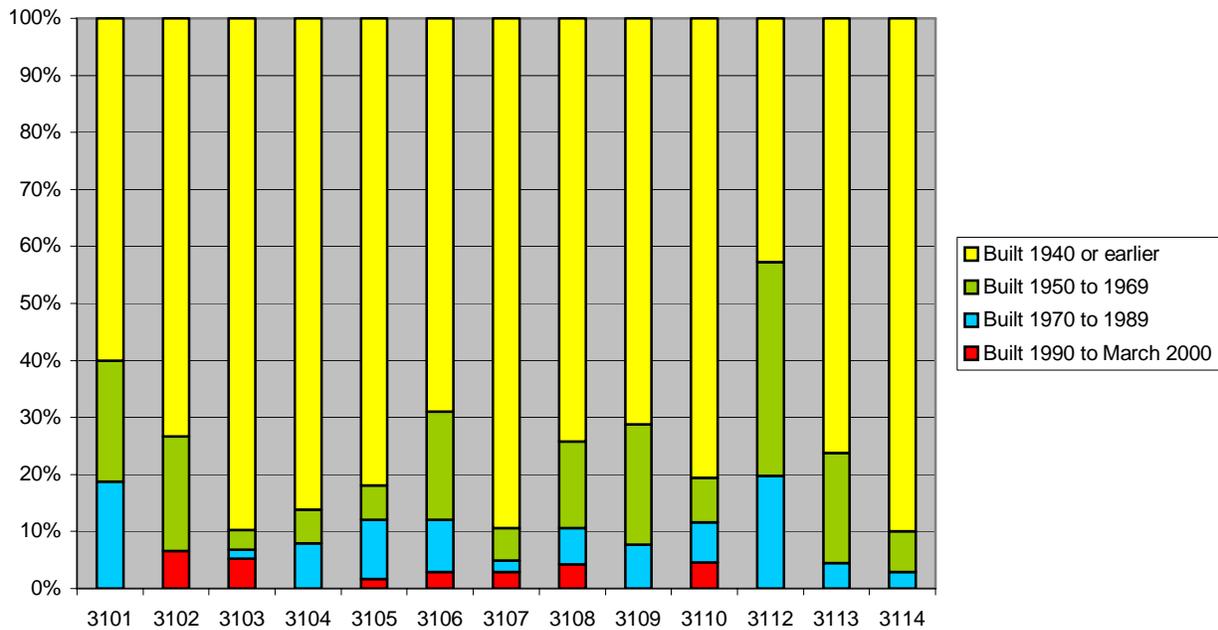


As previously mentioned, since the 1930s, Pilsen has seen very little new residential construction. But, in the past 20 years there have been some surges of new construction. Most of the new local residential construction has taken place in East Pilsen. In 2000, 37.2% of owner-occupied housing units in the eastern tract 3103 were built between 1990 and March of 2000 compared to 4.6% of all housing units in Chicago and 3.8% in the entire Lower West Side (see graph 4) (U.S. Census, 2000). Additionally, little renter-occupied new construction has occurred in the past few decades in Pilsen (see graph 5). This indicates that most housing constructed in the past decade has concentrated on owner-occupancy units, which could be considered a primer for gentrification.

**Graph 4: Lower West Side Age of Owner-Occupied Housing Structures**  
 Source: U.S. Census 2000

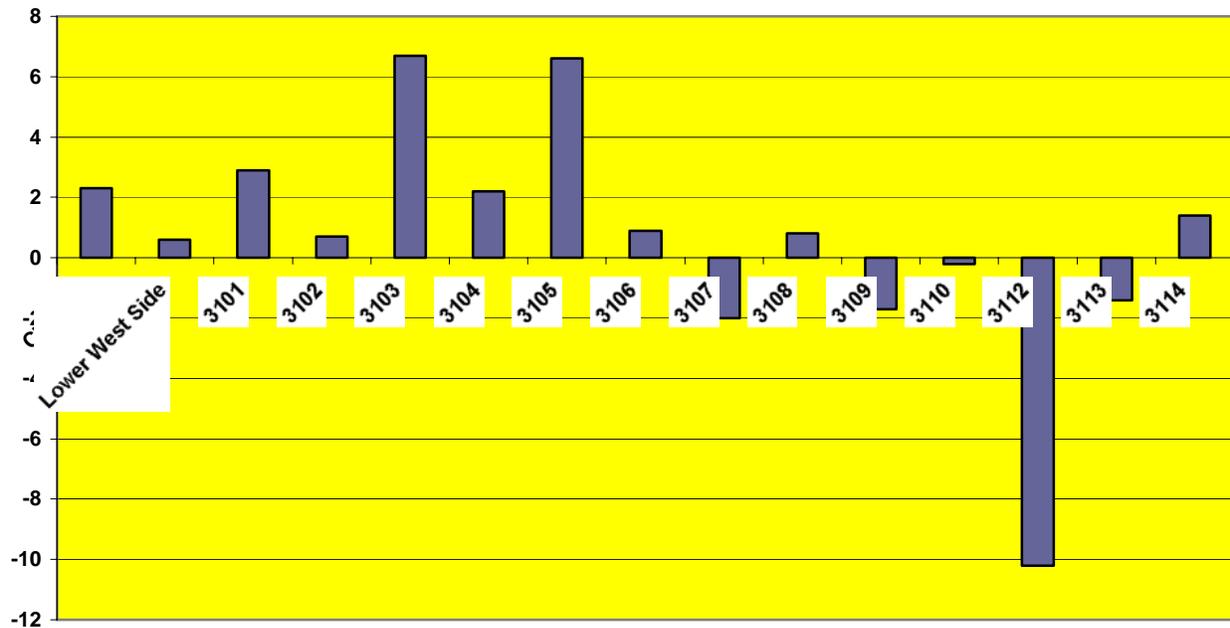


**Graph 5: Lower West Side Renter-occupied year structure built as percentage of total renter-occupied units**



Historically, Pilsen has had a lower home ownership rate than the City of Chicago. In 2000, 43.8% of Chicago's housing units were owner-occupied compared to 26% of Pilsen's housing units. Between 1990 and 2000, home ownership rates in Pilsen increased from 25.3% to 25.9% as a percentage of all housing units, with the increase in home ownership rising particularly in the east (See Graph 6). Tracts in the northeast corner of Pilsen (3101 and 3103) saw significant increases in the number of owner-occupied housing units, while some central and western border tracts of Pilsen have experienced decreases in homeownership rates. This suggests a westward push of rental housing as owner-occupancy rates increase to the east.

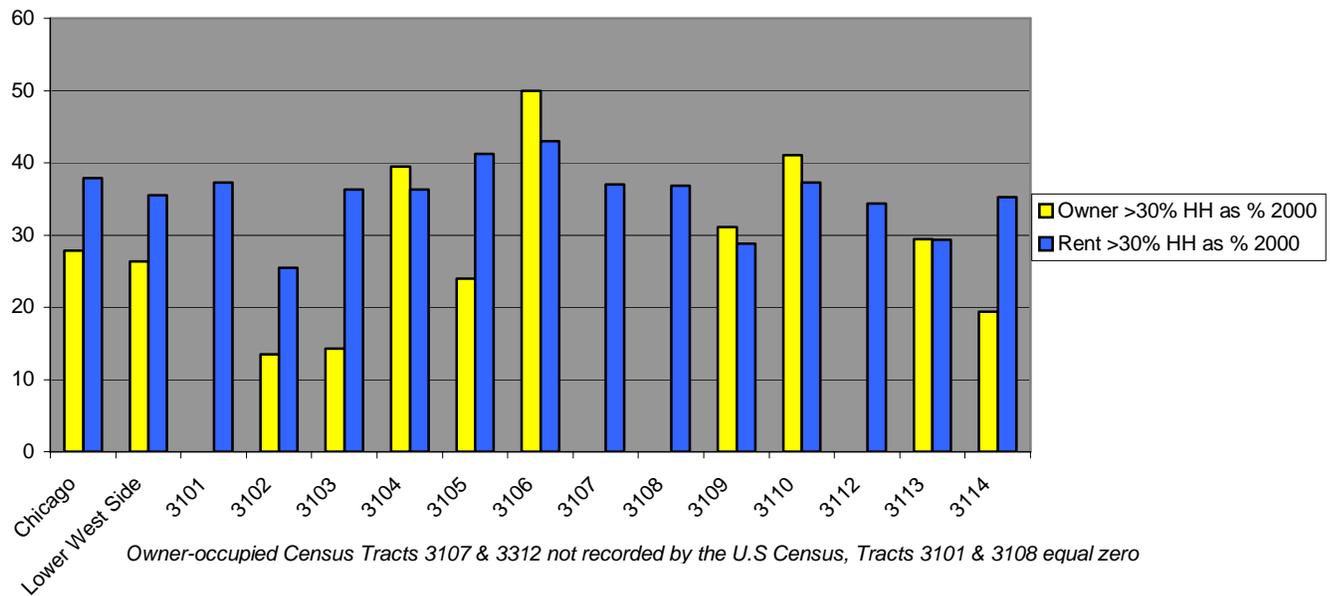
Graph 6: Lower West Side Percent change of Owner-Occupied Units as Percentage of Total Units 1990-2000 Source: [chicagoareahousing.org](http://chicagoareahousing.org), 2004



As defined by the US Housing and Urban Development department (HUD), housing is considered affordable if a household does not spend more than 30% of its income on housing expenses. If residents are struggling to stay put due to increases in housing costs, proportionally more income will be spent on housing costs. While Pilsen has always been regarded as an affordable neighborhood, in 2000, the majority of census tracts show that both renters and owners were paying in excess of 30% of household income on housing costs (see graph 7). While this percentage is lower than that of the city of Chicago, there has been a sharp increase in housing cost burden in the Lower West Side since 1990. According to the Metro Chicago Information Center (MCIC) Pilsen has experienced a 42% increase in owners' spending in excess of 35% of their

income on housing and a 12% rise for renters between 1990 and 2000. The city of Chicago has experienced a respective 48% increase for owners and an 11% decrease for renters (Metro Chicago Information Center, 2004).

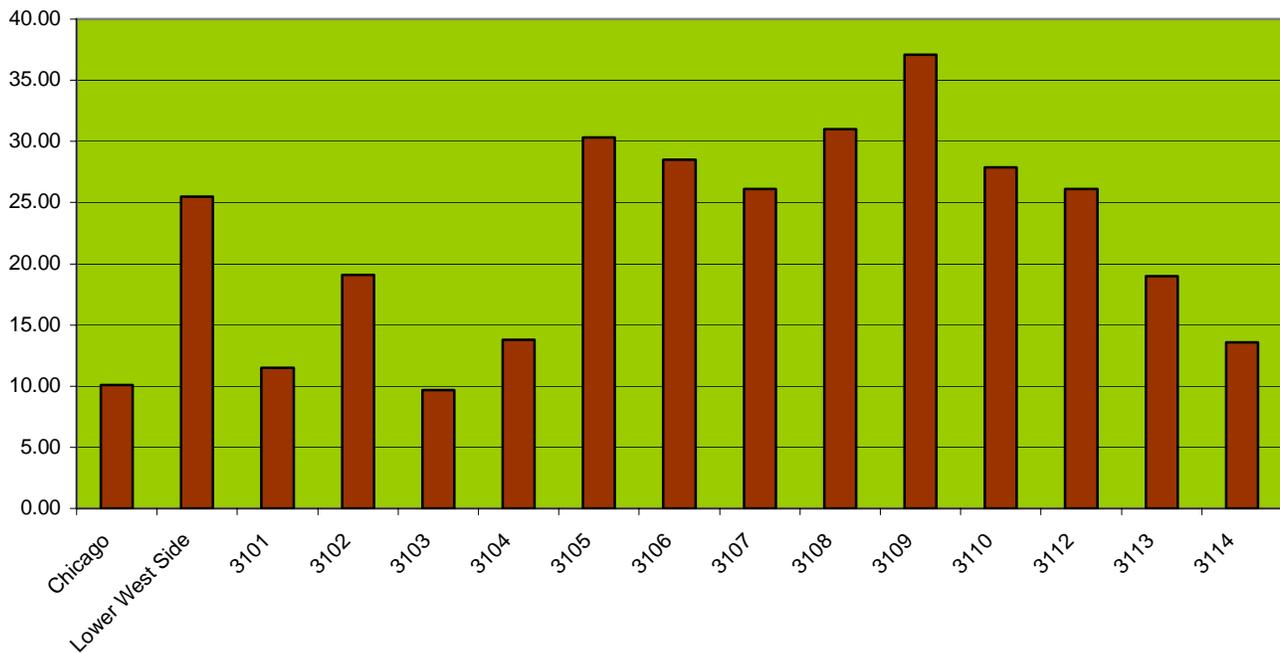
**Graph 7: Lower West Side Percentage of Renters and Owner-occupied units spending >30% of HH Costs on housing expenses (Source: U.S. Census)**



Overcrowding can also be a strong indicator of gentrification. It can indicate high housing cost burden resulting in doubling up. Furthermore, overcrowding tends to be more prevalent in immigrant communities as migrants stay with fellow family members and friends until they gain the economic position to find a place of their own. (Arguably, there are also cultural dimensions to cohabitating with extended family members). To assess overcrowding in Pilsen, we examined the number of persons per room within a housing unit. The prevalent definition of overcrowding is that if there is more

than one person per room in a home, the home is overcrowded. Between 1990 and 2000 Pilsen experienced a 21% increase in the occupancy rate of 1.51 or more persons per room (while there was a 16% decline in one person per room during this same time) (Metro Chicago Information Center, 2004). Overall, however, overcrowding in Pilsen at 25.5% in 2000 is much more prevalent compared to the entire City of Chicago at 11.1% (MCIC, 2004). In the eastern census tracts (3101, 3103, 3104 and 3105), overcrowding decreased significantly during the 1990. In contrast, central and western census tracts 3109, 3112 and 3113 saw increases during the past two decades. These census tracts are adjacent to the predominantly Latino Little Village community (or Chicago Community Area of South Lawndale), which is the most densely populated community in the City. This indicates that while housing and income values and owner-occupancy rates in the east have increased, overcrowding has decreased. Additionally, overcrowding in the west may indicate that there is a westward push of families struggling to stay put. In 2000, the data indicates that overcrowding is proportionally greater in the central and western portions of Pilsen (see graph 8).

Graph 8: Lower West Side Percentage of Population with Occupancy per room 1.01+ (2000)  
Source: U.S. Census 2000

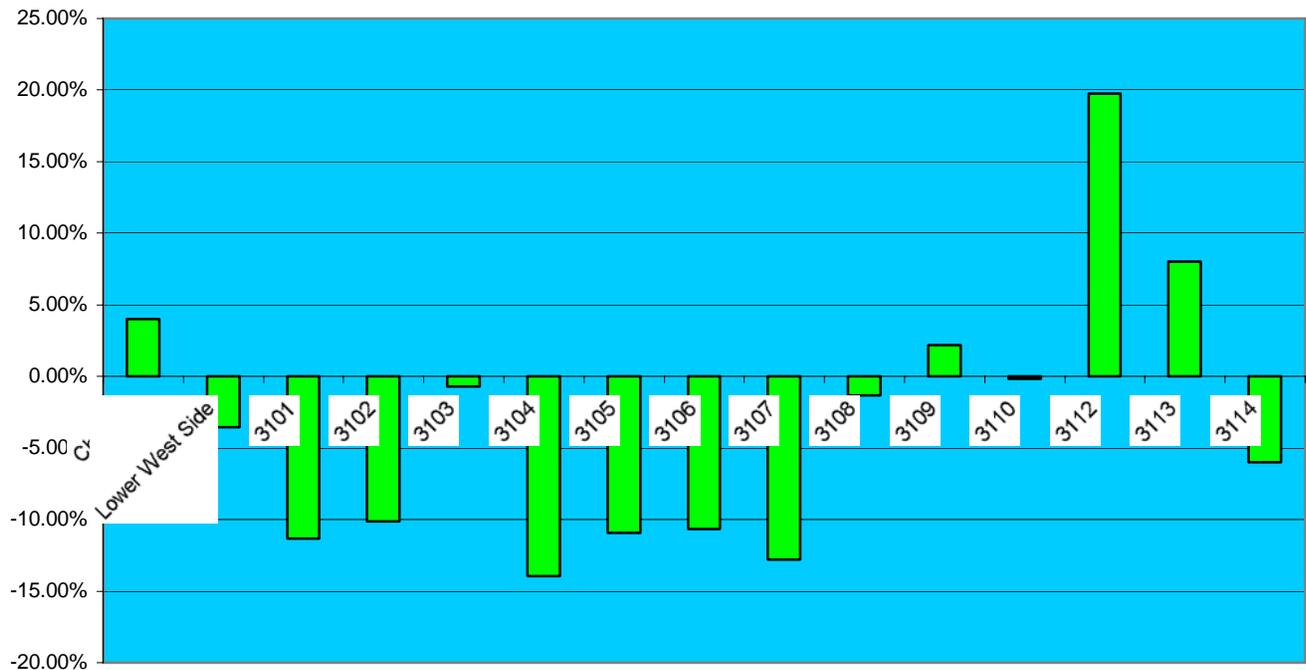


### Population Changes

Pilsen has traditionally been an immigrant community and, as previously stated, a port of entry for newcomers to the United States and the Chicago area. A closer look at demographic shifts can give further insight as to what types of residential mobility are occurring. Gentrification has traditionally meant a decrease in minority populations. In some cases however, it includes replacement of lower income by higher income households within the same ethnic group. Since Pilsen is a predominantly Mexican neighborhood, it helps to look at changes in the foreign born and Latino populations over the past two decades (as well as changes in household and family median income).

Overall, Pilsen's total population of 44,031 in 2000 is 3.6% less than the population of 45,654 in 1990 (2000 US Census). Many census tracts in eastern and central Pilsen reflect this decline. A few tracts in Western Pilsen did see increases during the 1990s, most notably tracts 3109, 3112 and 3113, which are again the census tracts adjacent to Little Village. Tracts 3101, 3108 and 3110 have had relatively stable populations during this time (see graph 9).

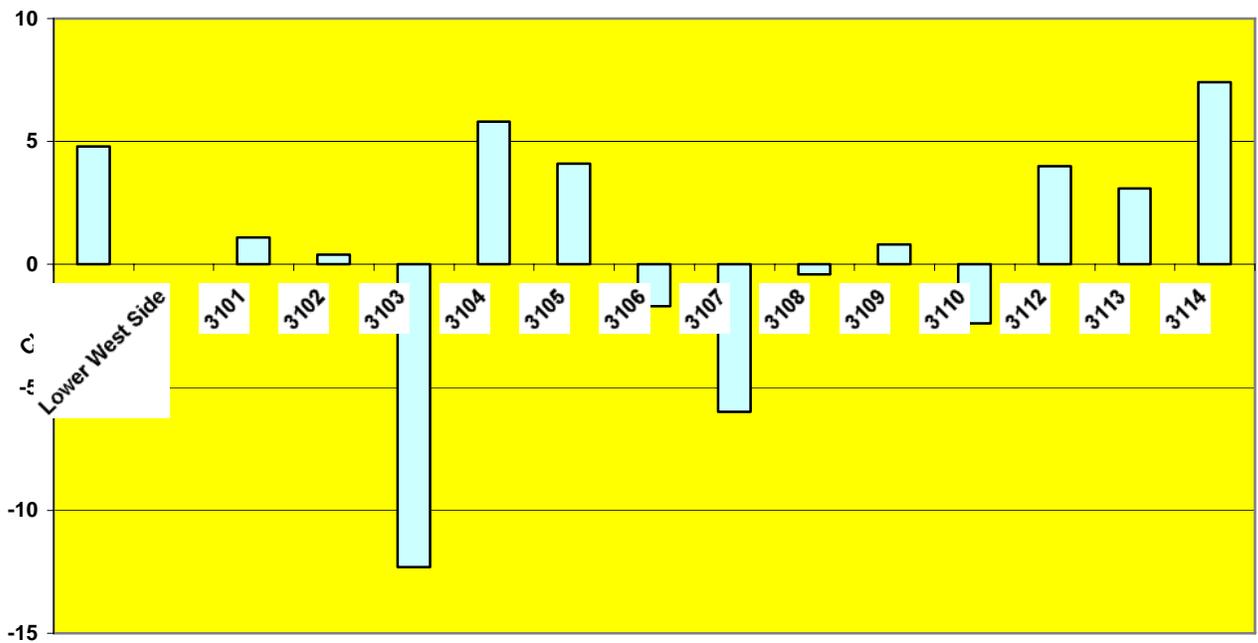
Graph 9: Lower West Side Population Change 1990-2000  
Source: [chicagoareahousing.org](http://chicagoareahousing.org), 2004



Although Pilsen has a foreign-born population much larger than that of Chicago's (49.1%: 21.7%), the foreign-born population has declined in some eastern census tracts (3101, 3102, and 3103) since 1990. Between 1990 and 2000, the eastern census tract 3103 experienced a 12.3% decrease in the

percentage of foreign-born residents as a percent of the entire population (see graph 10). We pointed out earlier that this census tract also had the greatest increase in median home values and home ownership rates between 1990 and 2000 and the highest median household income in Pilsen. Other census tracts in the east experienced small increases in foreign-born population and census tracts 3104 and 3105 slightly more. It is important to note again that the census tracts bordering Chicago's densely packed Little Village neighborhood experienced the most significant increases in foreign-born population.

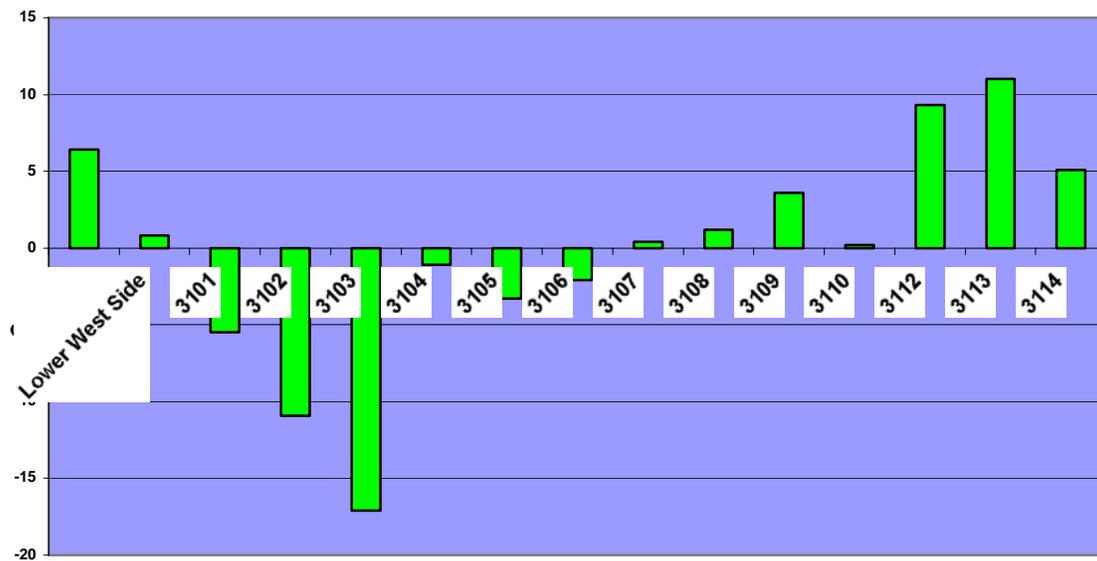
Graph 10: Lower West Side Percent Change in Foreign Born Population 1990-2000  
Source: [chicagoareahousing.org](http://chicagoareahousing.org), 2004



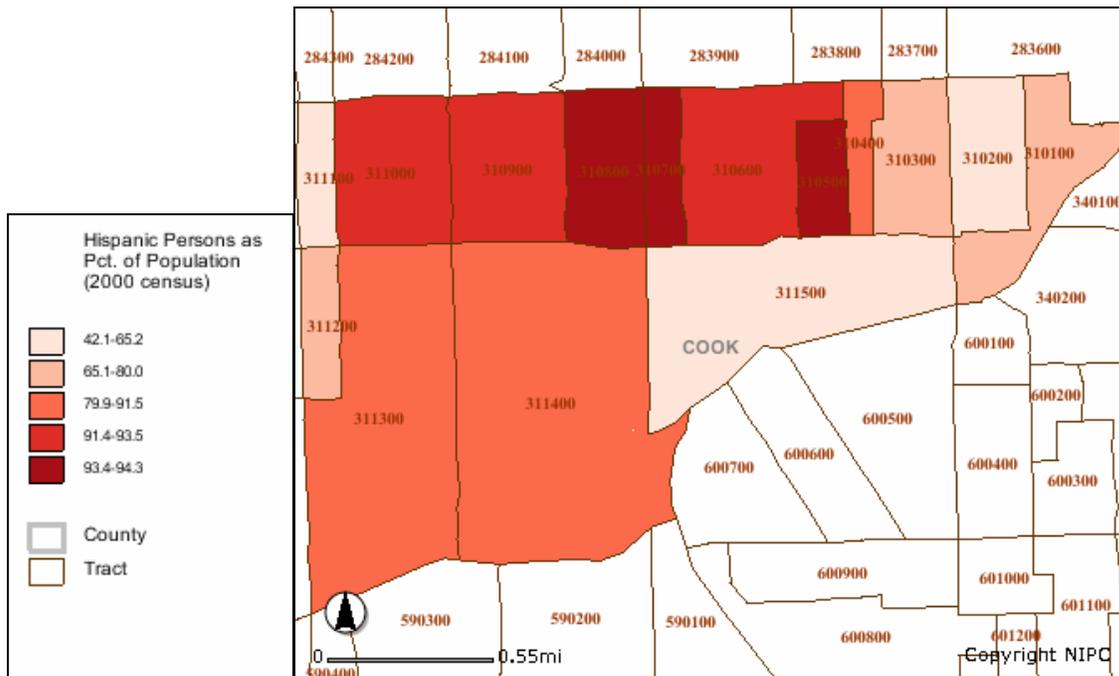
Although Pilsen still has a larger percentage of Latinos than the city (89%: 26%), there have been some changes since 1980 (Chart 11). After Latino increases during the 1970s and 1980s, many census tracts in Pilsen saw

decreases in this group during the 1990s. The group decreased in census tracts to the East (bordering University Village and the Podmajersky developments) during the 1990s, remained relatively steady in central Pilsen, and increased in the Western and Northern census tracts. The data indicates that there has been a strong transition in ethnic composition of Pilsen in the East.

Graph 11: Lower West Side Percent Change in Hispanic Population as Percentage of Total Population 1990-2000 Source: [chicagoareahousing.org](http://chicagoareahousing.org), 2004

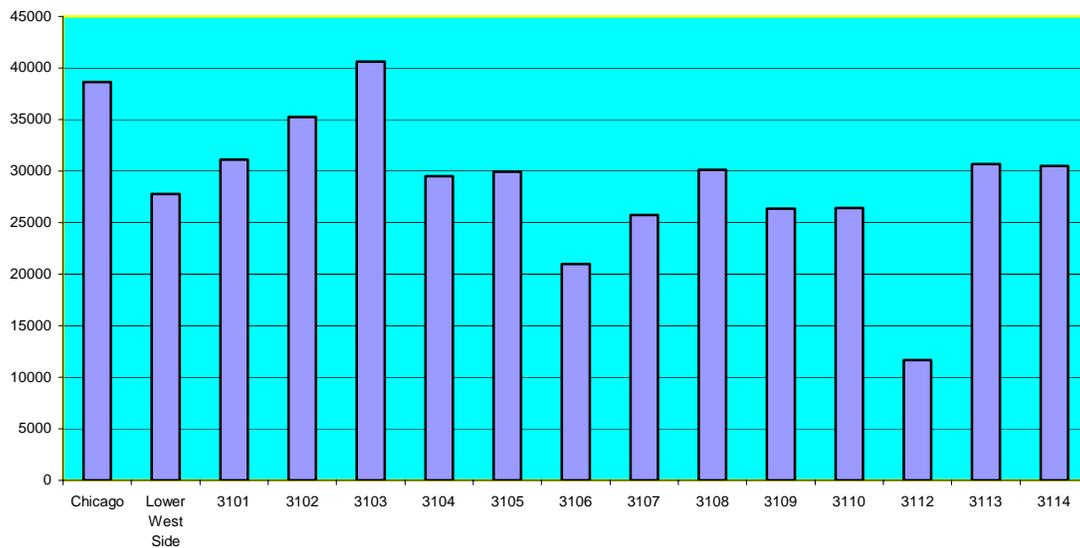


**Map 4: Hispanic persons as percentage of population 2000** (Source: [chicagoareahousing.org](http://chicagoareahousing.org), 2004)



Pilsen households historically have had lower median incomes than those of the city. In 2000, this was still true with a \$27,763 median household income compared to Chicago's \$38,625. The 2000 median incomes in Eastern Pilsen were slightly higher than in the west (see graph 12). Yet, again, eastern census tract 3103 (adjacent to University Village) represented Pilsen's highest median income of \$40,644—also higher than the city's median (Chicagoareahousing.org, 2004). Most recently, the *Pilsen Rent Study Update* (Glesne et al. 2004) found that income levels are 34% higher in eastern Pilsen than in Pilsen as a whole. Moreover, the study found that non-Latinos are far more likely to have higher incomes. Non-Latinos represented one third of households earning \$35,000 or more per year while they only accounted for 11% of the sample.

**Graph 12: Lower West Side Median Household Income 2000**  
Source: [chicagoareahousing.org](http://chicagoareahousing.org), 2004



This data appears to point to some substantial demographic shifts in the eastern portion of Pilsen. To summarize, this sub-area representing 17% of the population has experienced a relative decrease in both foreign-born and Latino populations while realizing a substantial gain in median household incomes, owner-occupancy rates, and property values. The data also suggest a probable movement of the Latino population westward, particularly to the western border of Pilsen near Little Village. This sub-area has experienced the greatest increase in population as a whole (including Latino and Foreign-born people), increased overcrowding, a decrease in owner-occupied units, and relatively little new construction in the past decade.

## Concluding Analysis

Three major factors have converged to make Pilsen such a desirable location for upscale redevelopment today. First was the transformation of Chicago from a manufacturing to a corporate city and tourist destination; correspondingly, Pilsen went from a stable port of entry and working class community supplying immigrant labor to nearby railroad and manufacturing shops to a highly desirable location for the exploding CBD and its expanding white collar workforce. Second, the dramatic expansion of the financial industry and the high availability of low-interest mortgages made areas like Pilsen extremely attractive for gentrifying investment. And third, the growth coalition controlling the city for most of this period has focused on development of the downtown, corporate-led service economy increasing the visibility and desirability of surrounding communities. The first two changes turned Pilsen into a highly desirable location and opportunity for upward redevelopment while the third made gentrification one of the main strategies of government and real estate.

Interestingly, Pilsen residents were able to keep these formidable forces at bay and defeat each proposal coming to the table before it went too far. Trained in the struggle against urban renewal around the construction of UIC, the leadership of Pilsen learned how to mobilize against the Democratic Machine. In this work, they capitalized significantly from citywide struggles such as the Civil Rights and the anti-urban renewal movements. A strong network of local organizations and leaders tied to these and the Chicano movement coalesced

each time and associated with similar forces throughout the city to keep Pilsen as a port of entry and a closely-knit working class community of Mexican ancestry.

An important element of this process was the struggle between representational discourses. Urban renewal was largely sold on the idea that communities like Pilsen were areas of slum and blight infested with crime, unworthy residents, and decay. The anti-urban renewal movement countered with civil-right claims arguing that such representations really stood for “negro removal” or racist cleansing of strategically located, viable minority communities. The Chicago 21 Plan repeated the themes of slum and blight calling for a physical fix. Organized resident forces countered with denunciation of the growth agenda and Democratic Machine politics relentlessly victimizing low-income, minority areas near the CBD and called for citizen participation that truly involved targeted communities in the planning process. For the most specific case of Pilsen, the Chicano movement opposed the expansionary projects of downtown forces with an intense process of community building around pride of heritage and a strong message of resistance to outside predators. They marked Pilsen with artistic symbols that were at the same time statements of turf and part and parcel of community building. They branded corporate downtown as an insensitive monster bent on destroying neighborhoods for the sake of profit—with the help of a corrupted and self-serving (actually anti)-Democratic Machine. Portraying Pilsen residents as a model, hard-working ethnic group struggling along the lines of earlier European immigrants, they asked for opportunity and

for resident-based community development. Through this discourse not only did they assert their dignity and validate their cultural heritage but also sent a strong message of resistance and readiness to fight.

Agents and supporters of gentrification came up with their own version that appropriated the discourse of ethnicity and reorganized it around neo-liberal ideas of entrepreneurship and commodification of culture and ethnicity. This is a clear case of identity as a source of community and resistance vying against identity as a marketable commodity and penetration tool. With the advance of corporate forces, the weakening of the neighborhood movement, and the return to power of an emboldened Democratic Machine in 1989, Pilsen, like other low-income areas confronting gentrification, became more vulnerable to it.

Strengthened by the aldermanic appointment of a close supporter of the CBD growth coalition and the formation of a Latino organization of beneficiaries of the regime to advance the corporate and Machine agenda in Latino areas (the Hispanic Democratic Organization or DOH), middle class, educated enthusiasts within the community sided with outside Latino business interests and others engaging in their own ventures and proposals of gentrification. Although still a minority, this group has emerged as the Latino avant-garde of gentrification in the community with its own discourse. It has tried to characterize gentrification opponents as rebel rousers supporting dinosaur ideologies of victimization that blame the outside for Latino problems and call for welfare solutions. Instead, they claim, Latino advance depends on following on the footsteps of earlier

European immigrants, joining the CBD growth coalition, accepting the “inexorable” forces of gentrification, and becoming entrepreneurs on their own. This group has bought also into the claim that race-based discrimination is no longer a factor in the USA and that mobility is now an open field for everybody. Macroeconomic changes, encroaching development, and the opportunity of a patronage regime highly supportive of gentrification have mobilized this group further exacerbating tensions within Pilsen.

Although they have been unsuccessful in promoting the big item proposals and in fully opening the floodgates to gentrification, they have been undermining the opposition through subtle actions, organization of their own cliques, political opportunism, and recruitment and positioning of their own in government jobs and local organizations while advancing their interests through procurement and subcontracts with the administration and appointments to city jobs. Still, the anti-gentrification forces are well and alive and continue promoting their version of resident rather than place-based development.

Meanwhile, demographic shifts appear to coincide with the expansion of Podmajersky’s artist community and ensuing development to the east and the border with University Village. Gentrification has advanced subtly in this side of Pilsen: eastern census tracts are undergoing a change with a decreasing Latino and foreign-born presence and decreasing household densities, increasing incomes, home ownership rates, home values and rents, and new residential construction. Interestingly enough, most of the outside redevelopment proposals

mentioned before targeted East Pilsen. Gentrification is also surrounding Pilsen from the south Loop while advancing steadily from across the northern border. In contrast, the manufacturing corridor by the river (on the easternmost edge of Pilsen) stands as a big statement against gentrification.<sup>4</sup> The rest of the area, as described earlier, is still largely unchanged, at least when it comes to residents and conditions. Pilsen is still a community with a majority Mexican and a large Mexican immigrant population, home to predominately large, low-income households and has a deteriorated but still comparatively affordable housing stock. As the non-Latino population increases to the east, the Latino counterpart increases to the middle and western portions of Pilsen. As household overcrowding decreases in the east, it increases in the west. Meanwhile, property acquisition by middle class Latinos and others continues throughout Pilsen as they have the expectation of large gains from property appreciation in the near future. What is most preoccupying is the affordability crisis. Home and rental prices continue escalating pushing people closer and closer to displacement. In this sense, increasing housing costs can become a self-fulfilling prophecy producing gentrification before gentrification.

Hence, two main factors seem to have become crucial vis-à-vis the future. The first is the ability of the anti-gentrification forces to continue staving off gentrification, proposal-by-proposal, and building-by-building. They have the strength and have been constructing the tools for this. The second is the

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<sup>4</sup> Not only is this area a planned manufacturing district but also it has many brown fields that would be rather expensive to clean and develop.

affordability crisis. Community organizations like the Resurrection project have been working on this. They have moved recently into development of affordable rental housing, a critical element at this point. This, however, is a huge challenge as the private sector moves in the opposite direction and housing policies, both local and federal, focus obsessively on homeownership—inaccessible to most Pilsen residents at current local prices. Public officials are crucial arbiters of this struggle. The community seems to have the ultimate decision in this front through the election of its own candidates to office. However, it confronts a very strong electoral Democratic Machine fully committed to gentrification. This is not new: with the exception of a six-year interlude, Machine politicians have always represented Pilsen. In the past, citywide neighborhood movements helped tremendously in opposing upscale redevelopment and displacement. Pilsen leaders have and continue linking their work very effectively to citywide coalitions and can continue doing so. Although weakened, organizations from low-income neighborhoods continue networking strategically with others to address the housing affordability crisis. The jury is out. Resistance is not about development per se. It is about its current form and targets, about the right to community within the market place, the right to location for those who have few options and depend most on community of place for their survival and the advancement of their collective causes.

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