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NEIGHBORHOOD AND COMMUNITY CHANGE IN BROOKLYN'S SUNSET PARK

By

Anthony G. Aggimenti

A master's thesis submitted to the Graduate Faculty in Political Science in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts, The City University of New York

2016

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This manuscript has been read and accepted for the Graduate Faculty in Political Science  
satisfying the thesis requirement for the degree of Master of Arts.

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Abstract

Neighborhood and Community Change in Brooklyn's Sunset Park

By

Anthony G. Aggimenti

Advisor: Professor John Mollenkopf

Significant demographic changes within New York City's neighborhoods have served as an impetus for civil strife, community activism, and political debate. While much attention has been dedicated toward the gentrification occurring in Harlem or Williamsburg, emerging trends indicate that the Brooklyn waterfront neighborhood of Sunset Park is also undergoing a shift. Drawing upon the theoretical frameworks of human ecology, the urban growth machine, and gentrification, the paper posits that Sunset Park is a neighborhood in transition. A three pronged quantitative, historical, and qualitative analysis examines major demographic changes in Sunset Park including the increase in Chinese and Mexican ethnic immigrant groups along with the potential early stages of gentrification.

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## INTRODUCTION

Since Aristotle’s musings on the polis, the relationship between the individual and the city has been an area of great inquiry. While much has changed since the era of Ancient Athens and Aristotelian philosophy, the desire to examine what motivates mankind’s movement into and out of cities still remains. With the expansion of municipalities into immense geographic areas of significant population, concepts such as neighborhood and community have developed. Scholars have also sought to study how and why these urban enclaves undergo transformations. I will argue that one such enclave in transition is the Brooklyn, New York waterfront neighborhood of Sunset Park. The following paper will review the major theories of neighborhood and community change and use the framework of these concepts to analyze the shifts in Sunset Park. I will first conduct a literature review that grapples with the meaning of important terms such as “community”, “neighborhood”, “city”, and “urbanism”. Subsequently, an overview of the academic literature on the three major schools of thought in urban neighborhood and community change (namely Human Ecology/Chicago School, Urban Political Economy, and Financialization/Gentrification) shall be conducted. Following this, I will conduct a brief historical overview of Sunset Park, in order to ground the contemporary events with those of the past. A quantitative data analysis section includes charts using American Community Survey — U.S. Census data and the Furman Center for Real Estate and Urban Policy data to detail significant demographic changes. A qualitative data analysis section focuses on the spatial layout of the community, the business and housing sectors, and Community Board 7. Since the three aforementioned schools of thought serve as the theoretical perspective for my work, a number of instances in which the schools of thought were both evident and absent will be detailed. For the conclusion, an attempt to explain how a better model could be constructed for

future research is also included. For the purpose of this paper, a neighborhood shall be defined as an infinitesimal region in which residential properties and other institutions that support the daily needs of life exist. A community shall be demarcated as an undefined area where inhabitants conduct social interactions and share common features with other residents.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

The notion of community is grounded in geography, social interaction, and history. Communities, or areas within a municipality, are not limited by strict boundaries of the political or even geographic nature. It is important to note however that a community may serve to influence local politics, as evidenced by the creation of districts for City Council seats or Community Boards in New York City (Mollenkopf et al, 2013). The fundamental nature of community stems from social forces. Historically speaking, the importance of communities can be traced to the role they played in the development of towns and villages and eventually, the evolution into large scale cities. Urban enclaves have formed around communities that “...derive from sites of original village settlement” (Kornblum, 2013). A neighborhood is a sub-division of a community in which residents live within close proximity to one another. While definitions may diverge amongst both scholars and non-scholars alike, for the purposes of this paper, I adopt the notion that community acts across neighborhoods — it involves the convergence of relationships across a larger, undefined area. From an institutional perspective, communities supply a larger set of services to multiple neighborhoods such as hospitals, high schools, civic associations, and community colleges while neighborhoods fulfill more basic daily needs such as stores, religious organizations, and primary schools (Kornblum, 2013). It is important to note that the term community may also be applied to a group of individuals who share certain

common features such as ethnicity, racial origin, sexual orientation, and/or immigration status. One such example is the Chinese community within Sunset Park. These types of communities are not limited by territory and may exhibit a symbiosis of interests amongst the community members. Communities serve as identifiers and establish lines of inclusion and exclusion. These communities may intersect with others. Known as “communities of interest”, racial and ethnic divisions may be surpassed in order to form an association to work toward bettering common interests such as social services, economic opportunities, and quality of life issues (Hum, 2002). From a social science perspective, a city can be defined as “a relatively, large, dense and permanent settlement of socially heterogeneous individuals.” (Wirth, 1938). The traits associated with the definition of a city help to explain urbanism. The greater the exhibition of traits associated with a city — size, density, and heterogeneity — the more prevalent a condition for urbanism.

Cities became a hub for population growth as factories developed into the dominant means of wealth accumulation and employment. The rise of industrial capitalism in the 1800s belies the link between urbanization and industrialization. Scholars posit that these urban communities consist of two key elements. These elements are “production and economic accumulation” and “social interaction and community formation” (Mollenkopf, 1981). Economic accumulation refers to the creation of the means of sustenance and the distribution of these resources within society. Community formation is not solely dependent on geographical considerations or political/municipal boundaries. Rather, it is a sense of common interests that develops amongst residents within a social network. The relationship between economic accumulation, community formation, and the institutions that mediate urban life animate the correlation between urbanization and industrialization. The economic dynamic of this

association creates employment opportunities, leads to physical infrastructure developments, and develops a consumer market. The community dynamic of this inter-connected relationship leads to “communal institutions” that seek to increase the standard of living for residents (Mollenkopf, 1981). Meanwhile, the urban mediators contribute a structure of governance in the form of local politics. The political institutions are mediators between accumulation and community because they helped to shape the outcome of each. For example, the urban mediators often were the portal for employment accessibility (Mollenkopf, 1981). However, the 1900s signaled a decrease in the power of the urban mediating institutions as the process of suburbanization and public policy reforms occurred. These changes foreshadowed the larger scale evolution from the industrial factory city to the decentralized administrative state. Deindustrialization forced public policy makers to shift their focus toward the foundation of a new form of urbanism. In New York City, the Regional Plan Association formed an initiative that would create “a set of highway, mass transit, rail and port investments, together with zoning plans” with the goal of fostering a large scale business office environment (Mollenkopf, 1981). This next phase of urban development formulated a novel structure of spatial design within metropolitan areas. Production and middle class housing relocated to the suburbs while administrative and high level service jobs were found in the central city. Politically, this shifted power away from city government to regional, state, and federal authorities. These changes did not please all sectors of society. The tremendous expenditures for these public re-development plans concerned those affiliated with the business community. Meanwhile, the residents of the central city became disturbed by the destruction of their neighborhoods during the construction of the public work projects. These concerns underscore the “cycle of growth and conflict” inherent within urban community formation (Mollenkopf, 1981). The economic elites require the genesis of urban

neighborhoods and community as a way to foster economic accumulation. Ironically, the formation of community becomes a chief obstacle to the continued expansion required by capitalism.

The Chicago School of urban sociology arose from a concern that urbanism would deteriorate the bonds forged by the rural, agrarian communities of the past. In the first half of the twentieth century, social scientists had uncovered multiple, significant divergences between urban and rural areas. The higher proportion of women, foreign-born residents, youths, and types of occupation caused major differences in the social structure of the city when compared to the countryside (Burgess, 1925). The early scholars of urbanism believed that intense competition amongst heterogeneous residents for limited resources in a densely populated city mimicked Darwin's research in biology (Wirth, 1938). Like flora and fauna, a population increase will lead to differentiation and specialization amongst a city's inhabitants. The populace will segregate into distinct communities based on employment, religion, race/ethnicity, language, culture, social class, desirability, and other considerations. Transportation and land values contribute to the community formation. Multiple homogeneous communities will form within a city — based on the notion that differences are detrimental to residents who live within the same space. This school of thought is also known as human ecology. Within this theoretical framework, a swift change in group membership is foreseen. As social mobility occurs, individuals and groups forego membership in communities.

A thematic pillar of the Chicago School is the concentric rings that represent the growth of a city. According to this line of thought, a city expands radially from the smallest, inner most rings or circles (Burgess, 1925). The first concentric ring represents the downtown business hub of an urban area. It is often associated with a large homeless or migratory population. The

subsequent, and increasingly larger, rings represent a transitional zone (second ring), industrial workers' homes (third ring), a higher scale residential zone (fourth ring), and a commuter zone outside of the city limits (fifth ring). The transitional zone is home to the slums, ghettos and underworld culture of crime. This zone often serves as the port of call for new immigrants. During the early part of the twentieth century, examples of this transitional zone in Chicago included Little Sicily and Chinatown. The third concentric ring represents the residences of skilled manual laborers. These inhabitants tend to be the second generation of immigrants and have escaped the less desirable transitional zone. Chicago School scholars in the 1920s have cited the large German community as representative of the third concentric ring. The fourth and fifth concentric rings are what city dwellers aspire to — the most desirable areas such as upscale residences and the commuter zone outside of the city. Akin to the biological process of flora, the members of the inner rings sprout and spread their reach to the outer most areas. The expansion or invasion from the innermost areas to the outer reach shares its name with plant ecology — succession. Hence, the Chicago School of urban sociology is also known as human ecology. Social mobility, a driving force behind human ecology, animates the movement into the fourth and fifth concentric rings.

Human ecology portends that cities are not simply administrative governmental areas. Rather, the city is a product of “natural forces” whose boundaries are independent of any municipal body (Park, 1926). Continuing with the plant ecology theme, communities have a life cycle — they are birthed, grow, mature, and then die. Like the biological process of metabolism, new individuals are absorbed and older individuals are removed. The social metabolism exhibited in a given community is dependent on its composition. Communities that grow in response to immigration display a much more fast-paced social metabolism. Wealth increases,

standard of living improvements, building/machinery renovations, and property value appreciations are all more likely to occur at a high tempo due to an influx of immigration. This can be contrasted with a community which exhibits a slower pace of social metabolism — usually as a result of more births than mortalities. At the heart of this school of thought is the premise that spatial relations amongst people in communities are a result of social forces.

The descendants of the Chicago School furthered the study of neighborhoods and communities. Using the landmark work of Burgess and Park, Henry McKay and Clifford Shaw developed the theory of social disorganization. This theory posits that weak social bonds and networks lead to the chronic problems of criminality and lack of educational achievement. Social disorganization can be defined as “the inability of a community to realize the common values of its residents and maintain effective social controls.” (Sampson, 2012). Despite the advancements in studying urban areas under the Chicago School, the theoretical framework came to be a point of contention in the second half of the twentieth century. Critical scholars argued that human ecology focused an excessive amount of their theory on the natural forces that concentrate urban populaces. In addition, these critics contended that the political and economic powers that shape urbanism were largely ignored.

The critiques leveled at the Chicago School and human ecology led to the foundation of a new perspective. Urban political economy evolved into a new way to examine neighborhoods and communities. The fundamental thrust of this school of thought is the notion that cooperation between private and public sector actors have facilitated both the decline and the ascendance of the central city. The framework moves away from the concept that individual choice is the greatest determinant of shaping an urban sector. Policy actions such as tax breaks for developers, private mortgage assistance, zoning restrictions, investment/disinvestment, public

transportation/highway construction, and urban renewal programs are all key cogs in the arguments of political economy (Sampson, 2012). The decline of the central city can be traced to the mass transit lines and new housing developments constructed in the suburban areas outside major cities. Factories and manufacturing hubs, once located in core of the central city, sought to relocate following the urban blight and decay in the post-World War II era. Suburbanization benefitted business owners by increasing demand and allowing for the creation of a more stable production atmosphere. This process was aided by state actors. As a result, political reform movements can be interpreted as a way for capitalists to cost-cut and gain a firmer grip on the means of production (Mollenkopf, 1975). Urban political economy proposes that the new urbanism of the latter twentieth century has caused further division amongst both capital and labor. Large trade unions, government workers, real estate developers and powerful corporations forge symbiotic interests with regard to public spending. The alliance between monopoly firms and state/competitive labor molds the economy. Meanwhile other forms of labor such as non-state workers and property owners resist the increase in expenditures to avoid large tax increases.

The aforementioned alliance led to the establishment of what is known as “pro-growth” coalitions. This pro-growth partnership often consists of political actors such as mayors and private sector actors such as business leaders. The city becomes the canvas to achieve growth. Jettisoning the machine politics of a prior epoch, the growth machine generally involves private sector patronage of the urban renewal process (Mollenkopf, 1975). Capitalists birth the ideas behind closed doors and later seek support from the business community at large. After receiving the backing of the wider corporate community, the urban renewal proposals would be administered and championed by the political arena. An example of this process is the pro-growth coalition established in Pittsburgh between R.K. Mellon and David Lawrence. In 1943,



Mellon, the heir to a commercial empire, created the Allegheny Conference on Community Development. The goal was to promote a more attractive and business friendly central city. After inviting the other members of the business community, the Conference formulated plans to refurbish the economic hub of Pittsburgh. An alliance was forged between the Conference and the city's Democratic Party leaders such as Lawrence. The allure of job creation proves to be a great motivating factor to support urban renewal plans for both politicians and left-leaning constituents. Ideally, the growth machine helps to uplift the formally downtrodden and declining central city. This move is seen as beneficial for multiple sectors of the city. Conservative Republican-leaning business owners and real estate developers and Democratic Party supporters such as unions would all benefit in the plans of urban redevelopment. While there may be divisions on a multiplicity of other issues, the objective of growth operates as a primary motivator of consensus amongst the local elites (Molotch, 1976). Politically opportunistic and economically shrewd, pro-growth coalitions seek to please many different class divisions within the city. Civil rights advocates and public housing activists have become supporters of the movement. The binding element of the diverse assembly of participants in the coalition is the political entrepreneur — the individual who takes considerable risk to reshape electoral politics (Mollenkopf, 1983). On a national level, both President Franklin D. Roosevelt and Lyndon B. Johnson proved to be major proponents of pro-growth policies. Among the common traits of the political actors in this growth machine is strong association with economic actors in professional background, liberal and Democratic Party political affiliation, and a reliance on ethnic appeal. In fact, urban renewal and development policies became the chief mechanism in the Democrats' rise to prominence — both on local and national levels (Mollenkopf, 1983). Management-oriented and technocratic in nature, these liberal pro-growth mayors also exhibit adroitness at

extracting funding from federal sources (Mollenkopf, 1975). Some scholars go as far to claim that the creation of pre-conditions for growth is the primary force behind local politics (Molotch, 1976).

While the growth machine helped to ascend the central city, not all of the residents benefitted in the process. Displacement and relocation are common side effects of the pro-growth policy actions. A regressive income redistribution and lower income populace misery are among the most common results (Rothenberg, 1967). The costs associated with displacement are quite significant — financially and emotionally. Moreover, the relocation of individuals from the central city's business hub often leads to an overcrowding in the public housing stock. Examples of displacement due to the growth machine include the one thousand residents in Berkeley who were forced to move as a result of the construction of the mass transportation system known as BART (Mollenkopf, 1975). Pollution, roadway congestion, and increased property taxes are also associated with growth (Molotch, 1976). These dilemmas led to community organization and anger that erupted in the forms of protests and riots (Olson and Lipsky, 1975). The outcry over the pro-growth policies did lead to some retreat on behalf of the actors involved (Lipsky, 1968). The outrage and subsequent reaction to the growth machine underlies a significant contrast with that of human ecology. This contrast is best evidenced in one of the fundamental principles of urban political economy — the idea that freedom of individual choice has not been the primary mechanism for neighborhood and community change. Rather, it is the freedom of “corporate choice” that has shaped the urban terrain (Sundquist, 1975).

Another theoretical perspective for neighborhood and community change is gentrification and financialization. The process of gentrification can be defined as the reversal of urban decay

and decline with the attraction of investment by middle class homeowners (Freeman, 2005). These middle class or even wealthy property owners are known as the gentry. A pre-condition for gentrification is a demographic and lifestyle shift in an area with a track record of disinvestment. This differs with the notion of succession from the human ecology perspective, in which lower income groups move into more desirable neighborhoods due to their social mobility. Another traditionally accepted aspect of gentrification is the private market force displacement of lower income groups by higher income groups (Marcuse, 2014). With regard to the other term, financialization indicates a shift from industrial production to the monetization of non-finance related products and instruments. An example of such a product would be a property or home. To further explain, at the turn of the twenty-first century, New York City's affordable rental housing became subject to intense private equity investment. This has been deemed "predatory equity" (Fields, 2015). One of the consequences of the 2008 financial crisis was an increase in rents to support a debt-burdened property owner and/or the foreclosure of these rental properties. The deleterious effects, which I will address in the passages to follow, are what links gentrification and financialization.

Pioneer gentry are the first set of individuals to move into a low income area. They are motivated by a desire for diversity — economically, ethnically, and socio-culturally. The emancipatory city thesis argues that gentrification is a unifying experience that develops tolerance (Caulfield, 1994). In fact, the process is seen as liberating for both the new and old residents of a community. Gentrification acts as a force of resistance to the dominant suburban culture. It also provides a space for individuals, such as gays and single women, who may not feel comfortable in other settings (Ley, 1996). Proponents of gentrification argue that their lifestyle choice reduces suburban sprawl, vacancy rates, and deteriorating property aesthetics

while increasing property values, tax revenues, social mingling, and economic development (Atkinson and Bridge, 2005). The first wave of gentry desire social mixing yet initiate the displacement process. Critics contend that gentrification causes the forced removal of residents and commercial enterprises, hikes on rent and cost of local services, homelessness, and community anger. Supporters of gentrification dispute their role in the relocation of residents and other maladies. Rather, these individuals lay blame at the government authorities who fail to produce an adequate number of affordable housing units. Gentrification advocates claim that their actions aid poor communities by paying taxes, purchasing goods from community stores, and stimulating growth for job creation (Byrne, 2003). Lance Freeman (2005) argues that the relationship between displacement and gentrification is not significant. In fact, Freeman (with Branconi, 2004) contends that lower income households in New York City are less likely to depart gentrifying neighborhoods. The implication is that the older residents of a gentrified neighborhood appreciate the change within their community and seek to retain their residence. Even governments, such as in Britain, implement policy actions that support gentrification as a positive process that eliminates segregation (Lees et al, 2007). Positive views of this process promote social mixing as a way to disrupt the negative neighborhood effects that damage lower income communities' ability to be socially mobile.

The revanchist city theory posits that gentrification is a process in which right-wing upper and middle class groups seek to reclaim their communities by moving into the neighborhoods of the individuals who have stolen the city's identity (Smith, 1996). The proponent of this theory, Neil Smith, draws comparisons between gentrification and the bourgeoisie reactionaries of nineteenth century France. Just as the reactionaries sought to enact revenge on the socialists who developed the Paris Commune, the gentry are seeking retribution

for the theft of the city by lower income persons, racial/ethnic minorities, immigrants, leftists, gays, lesbians, and others. The theory can best be described as a “spatial expression of revanchist anti-urbanism.” (Lees et al, 2007). The administration of tough criminal penalties for low level offenses, known as the “broken windows” policing policy, established under New York City Mayor Giuliani is evidenced as an example of the revanchist theory put into public policy practice.

## HISTORICAL OVERVIEW OF SUNSET PARK

Sunset Park is a neighborhood in the Borough of Brooklyn and Kings County within the City of New York. For the purposes of this paper, the area is considered to be located within the confines of 65<sup>th</sup> Street from the south and 15<sup>th</sup> Street from the north. From west to east, Sunset Park stretches from the New York Harbor to 9<sup>th</sup> Avenue. Like in many neighborhoods, it is important to note that in the minds of many residents, the boundaries of Sunset Park differ tremendously. As a result, there are many neighborhood inhabitants that would contend the neighborhood ends at 17<sup>th</sup> Street or even as far south as 39<sup>th</sup> Street (Ment & Donovan, 1980). Others would contend the neighborhood only extends as far east as 8<sup>th</sup> Avenue. However, as previously mentioned, I define the Sunset Park neighborhood as bordering Park Slope to its north, Bay Ridge to its south, and Borough Park to its east.

During the early 1800s, the area known today as Sunset Park was primarily agrarian and served as a source of farming and selling produce to inhabitants within the town of Brooklyn. In 1834, Brooklyn was established as a city and urbanization swiftly followed (Ment & Donovan, 1980). The construction of factories ushered the evolution of the region from an agricultural hub to an industrial center. The Great Potato Famine led to mass waves of migration from Ireland

into the United States. Brooklyn became a beacon for many of those arriving in America. The Irish facilitated the urbanization of the area as they became key cogs within the labor force that helped to construct steam railroad systems. In 1891, a plot of land on Dead Man's Hill was set aside to be developed as park for public enjoyment. Located on a sloping hill with a scenic sunset vista of the New York skyline, the twenty five acre park was accorded the name Sunset Park. During the urbanization of Brooklyn in the nineteenth century, the name Sunset Park was not affiliated with the area as we know it today. The northern section of Sunset Park was known as "South Brooklyn" while Bay Ridge contained the southern portion of the area.

The development of Sunset Park is intrinsically linked with both migration and waterfront development. Polish and Scandinavian waves of migration occurred during the latter part of the 1800s. Both groups found employment as factory and dock workers, primarily in Bush Terminal and the Brooklyn Army Terminal. Bush Terminal was developed by Irving T. Bush's company which purchased land along the waterfront from the Standard Oil Company. Warehouses and factories were developed from the turn of the century into the early 1900s. Meanwhile, the Brooklyn Army Terminal served as a military supply base. Longshoremen loaded and unloaded goods at what became one of the busiest ports in the United States. The Scandinavians, in particular many of the Norwegian immigrants, came from a ship-building industrial background. The industry eventually declined in their native homeland, spurring the movement into the United States. As a result, these immigrants were able to seamlessly transfer into the ship-oriented labor along the waterfront. Both immigrant groups brought their religious and cultural customs to the neighborhood. Many Catholic churches for the Poles and Lutheran and Methodist churches for the Norwegians were built. Religiously affiliated hospitals and health centers became common place. Moreover, ethnic associations, such as Norwegian language

newspapers, were birthed. The early 1900s saw the appearance of Finns and Italians in the area. Like the immigrants before them, these newer arrivals often served as a key component of the labor force along the industrial waterfront (Snyder-Grenier, 1996). The extension of mass transit, the BMT Fourth Avenue line, served as an impetus for thriving housing development in the area. World War II created an economic boom as factory output became a vital component of the war effort.

Numerous development plans in the mid twentieth century, such as the Gowanus Expressway and the Verrazano Narrows Bridge, contributed to the alteration in the aesthetic appearance and spatial layout of the neighborhood. The Port Authority, under the leadership of Robert Moses, constructed the Elizabeth Marine Terminal in 1958. This marked a significant shift as the hub for port activities were relocated from Brooklyn to the Newark and Elizabeth areas in New Jersey. Subsequently, decreasing employment along with deindustrialization greatly altered the demographic makeup of the area. Moreover, social and economic mobility allowed many of the European immigrants to move further away from the industrial zone. The 1960s and 1970s marked a decline in European population and signaled the shift of Sunset Park as a destination for Latin Americans. Puerto Ricans were among the first arrivals from Latin America and were followed in subsequent decades by waves of migration from Central America, the Dominican Republic, and Mexico (Snyder-Grenier, 1996). During this time, the neighborhood became known as Sunset Park. Increasing Chinese immigration patterns started in the 1980s and continues today.

SUNSET PARK QUANTITATIVE DATA ANALYSIS - American Community Survey (U.S. Census)

Figure 1 - Population Change

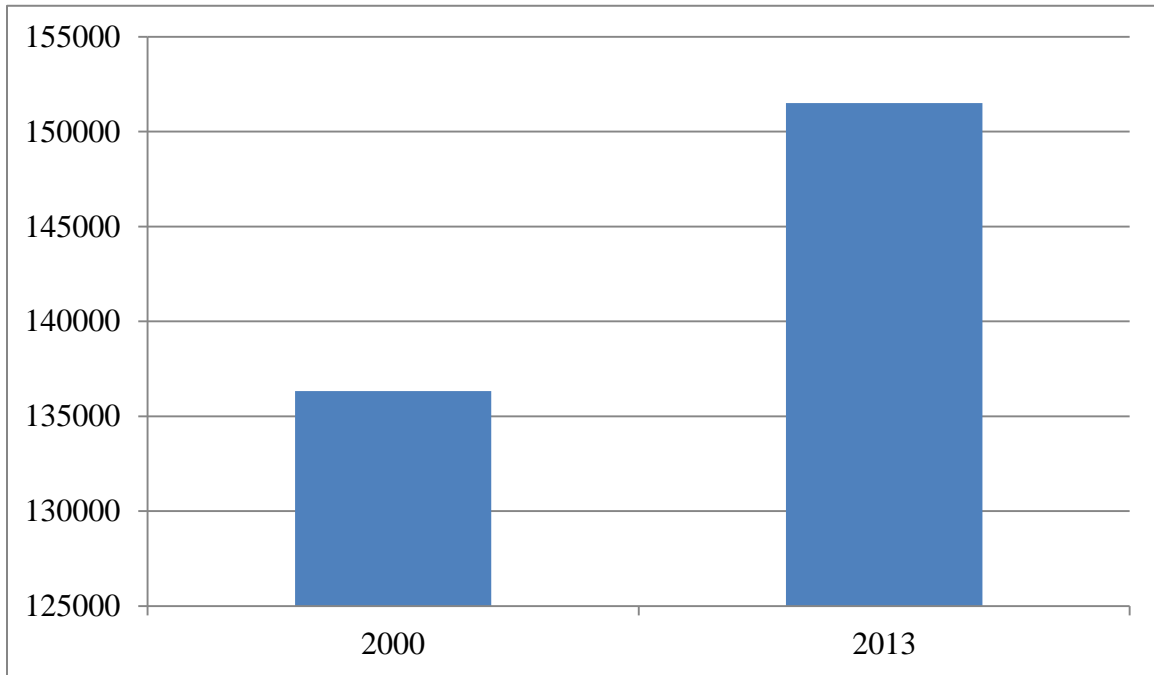




Figure 2 - Age Composition

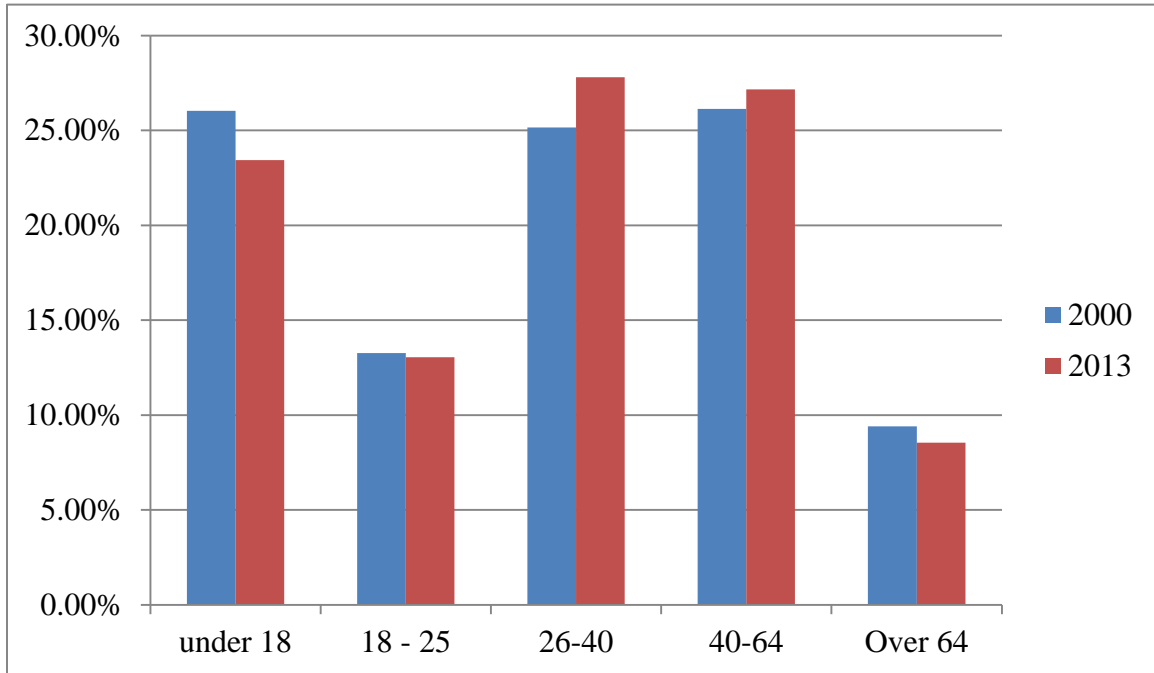


Figure 3 - Ethnic/Racial Composition

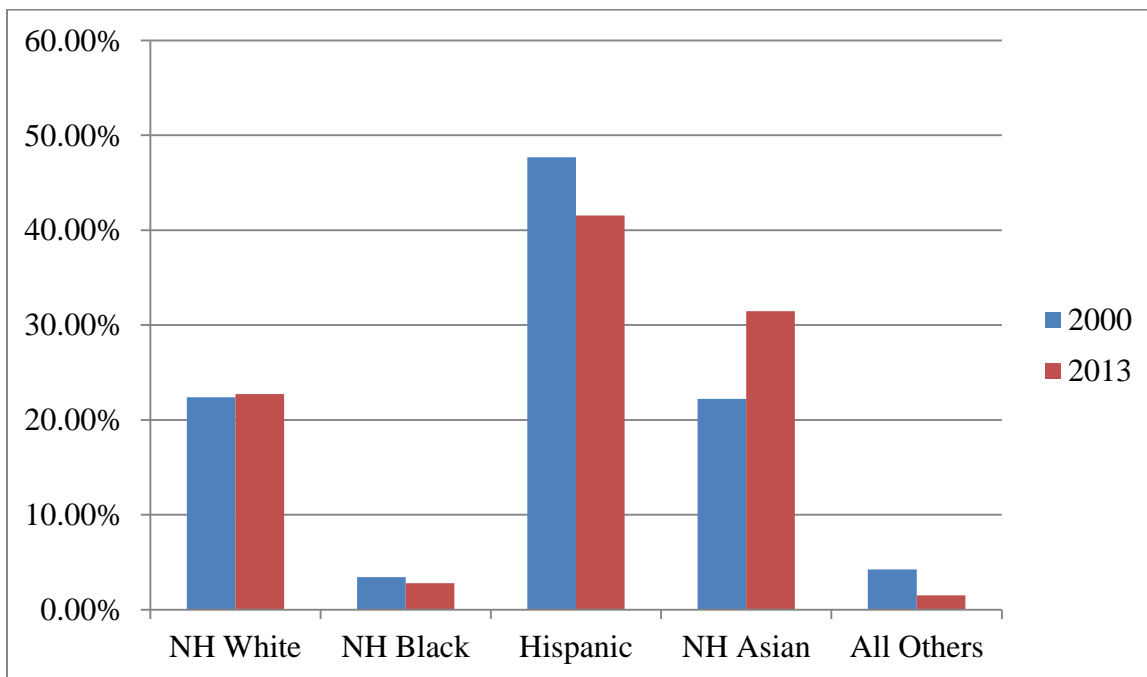


Figure 4 - Percentages of Puerto Ricans, Mexicans, and Chinese vs. All Others

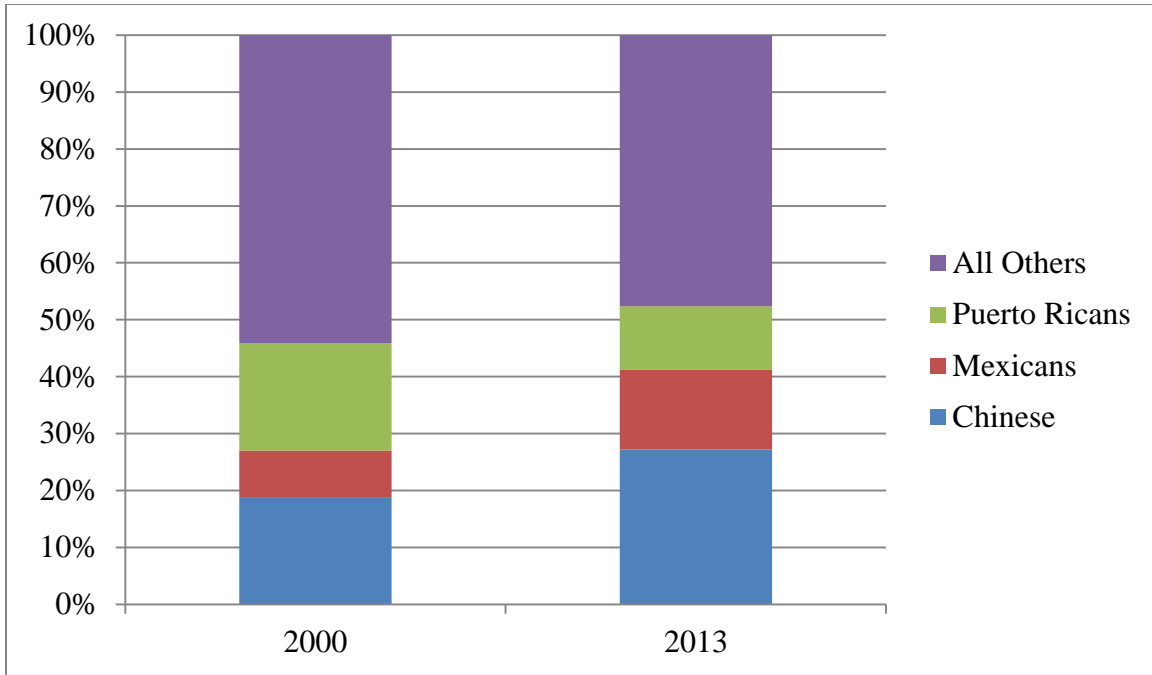


Figure 5 - Nativity and Citizenship

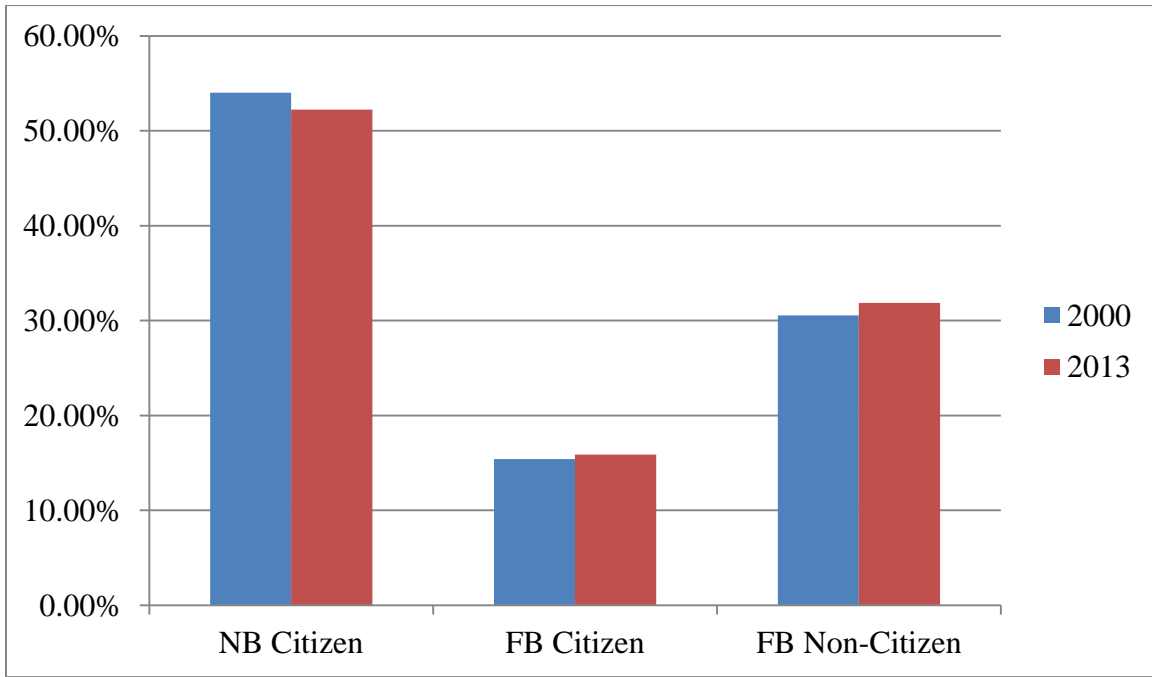


Figure 6 - Immigrant Duration in the United States

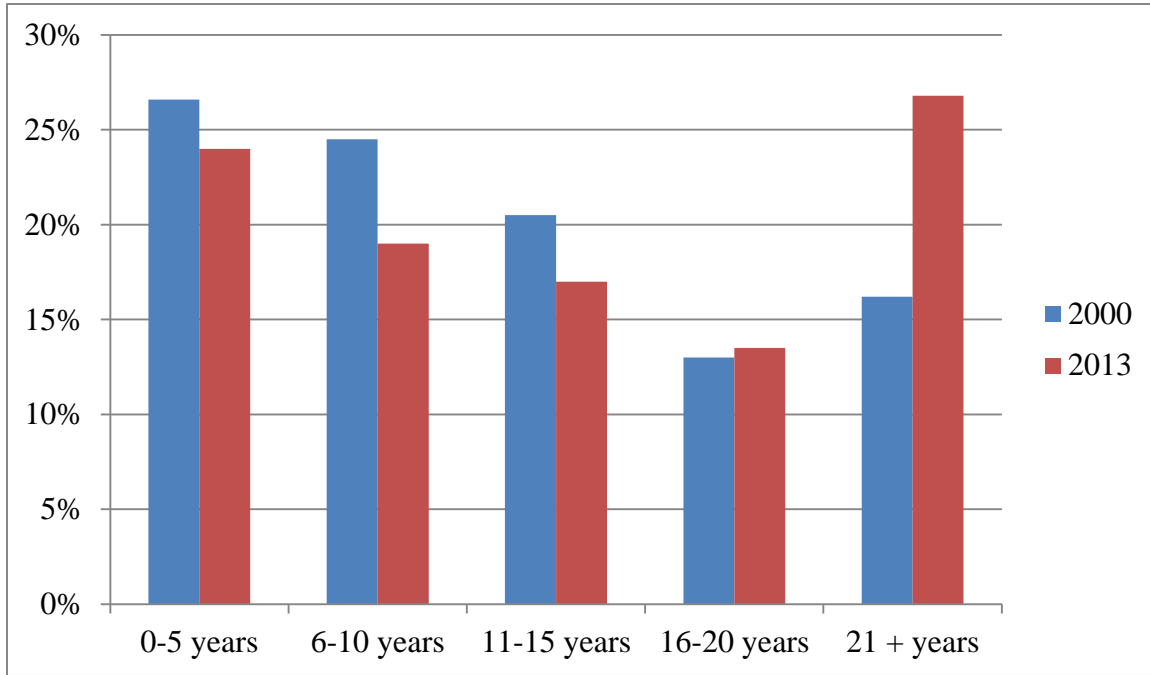


Figure 7 - English Language Ability

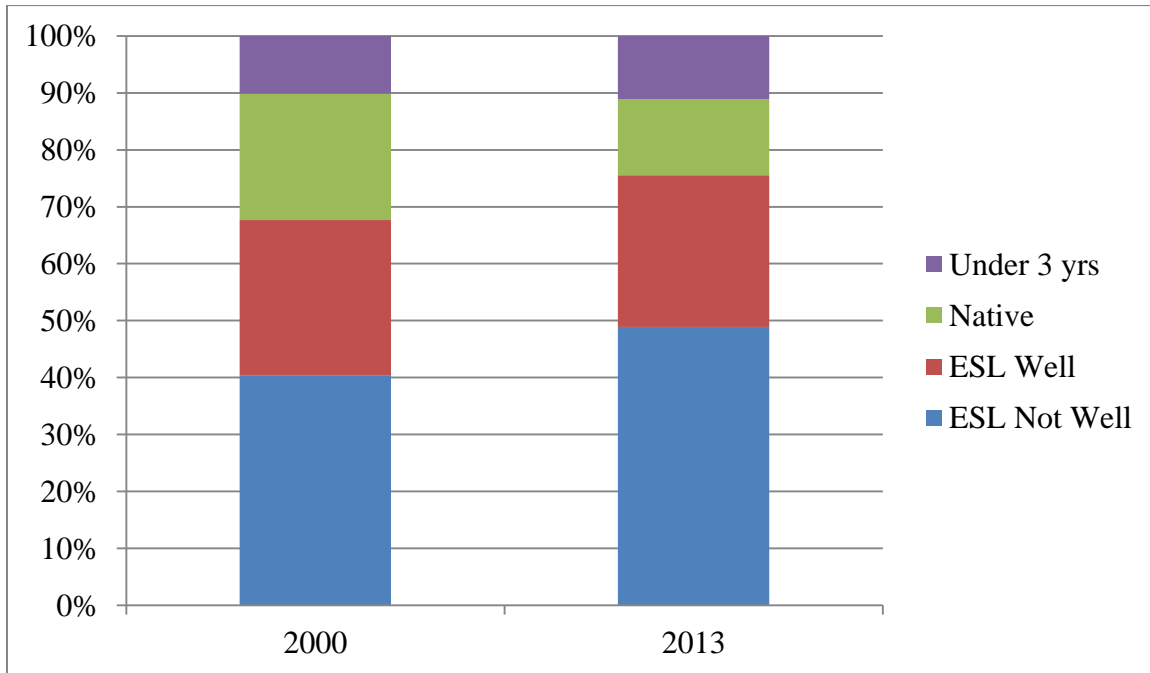
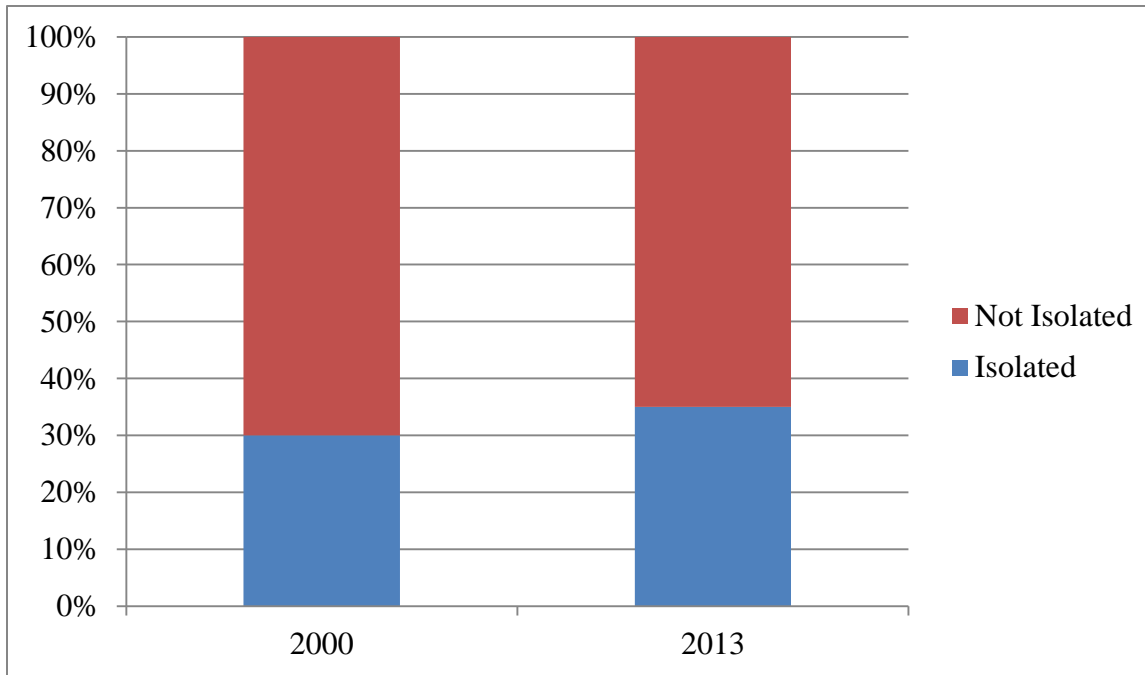


Figure 8 - Linguistic Isolation



The quantitative data gleaned from the American Community Survey indicates an eleven percent increase in the Sunset Park population from the years 2000 to 2013. In raw numbers, it is 15,171 more residents in the neighborhood. New York City's population increased about four percent in the same amount of time. As a result, Sunset Park's population was increasing at a faster rate than the city as a whole. The population increase contributed toward growth in the twenty-five year old to forty year old age category and the forty year old to sixty-four year old age category. The exact percentage shift was from 25.2% in 2000 to 27.8% in 2013 for twenty-five to forty year olds. Forty to sixty-four year olds experienced a one percentage point increase from 26.1% to 27.1%. The under eighteen population dropped from 26.3% to 23.44%. The eighteen to twenty-five year old age category also experienced an insignificant drop of less than a percentage point while those over sixty-four saw a minor increase from 9.41% to 8.54%. With

regard to ethnic and racial demographics, Sunset Park has seen a dramatic increase in the Asian population. From 2000 to 2013, the Asian populace increased from about 22.2% to 31.4%. In raw numbers, the Non-Hispanic Asian population went from 30,293 to 47,643 residents. The Hispanic population has seen an approximately six percent decrease in its population. Specifically, the numbers have decreased from 47.7% to 41.5%. Within the racial/ethnic groups, the Chinese population has jumped from 18.7% in 2000 to 27.2% in 2013. The Puerto Rican population has decreased from 18.9% in 2000 to 11.2% in 2013. The Mexican population has nearly doubled from 8.3% in 2000 to 14% in 2013. The Non-Hispanic Black population has decreased infinitesimally while the Non-Hispanic White population has increased less than a percentage point. Both foreign-born citizens and foreign born non-citizens have increased in population while native born citizens have decreased. Specifically, native born citizens decreased from 54% to 52.24%. Foreign born citizens and foreign born non-citizens increased from 15.40% to 15.89% and 30.56% to 31.87% respectively. This indicates a surge in the immigrant population in Sunset Park. Many of these immigrants are long-term residents in the United States. From 2000 to 2013, the share of long term residents who have lived in the U.S. twenty-one or more years increased from approximately 16% to about 26%. This likely indicates that many of the Asian immigrants moving into Sunset Park have lived elsewhere in the United States. The English language ability of Sunset Park's residents has decreased from 2000 to 2013. In 2000, 27% of neighborhood inhabitants spoke English very well. In 2013, this number decreased three percent to approximately 24%. Those who did not speak English well increased from 40% in 2000 to 44% in 2013.

Figure 9 - Average Household Income (NYC vs. Sunset Park) in Dollars

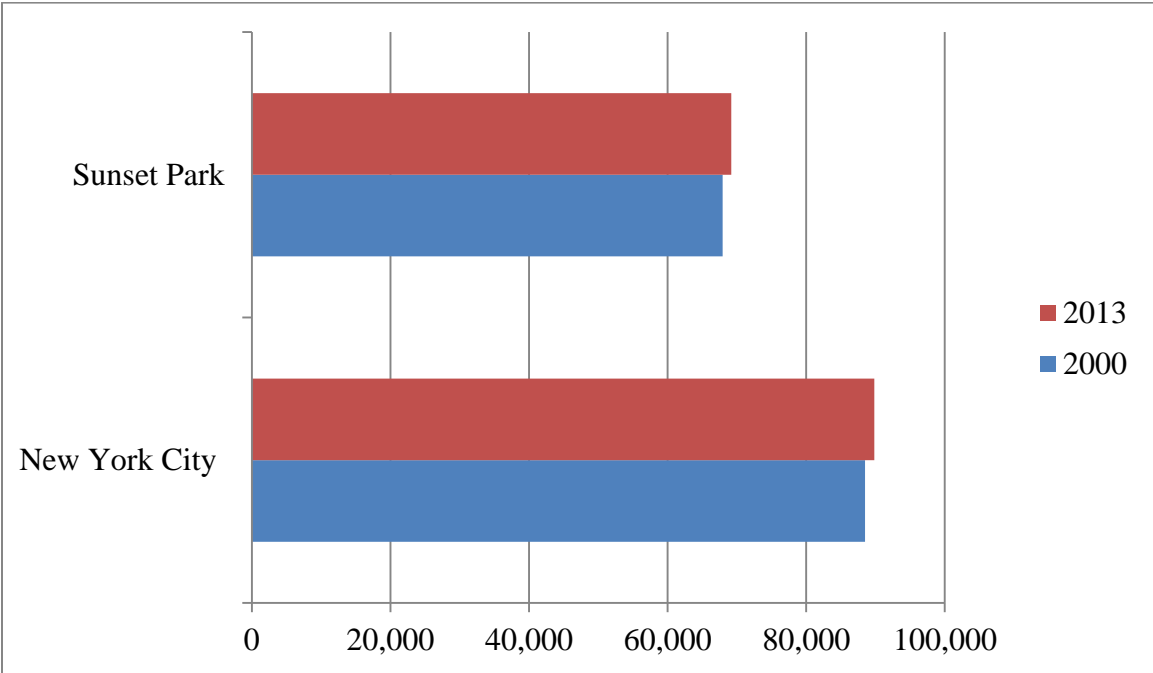


Figure 10 - Household Income in 2013 Dollars in Sunset Park, Year 2000

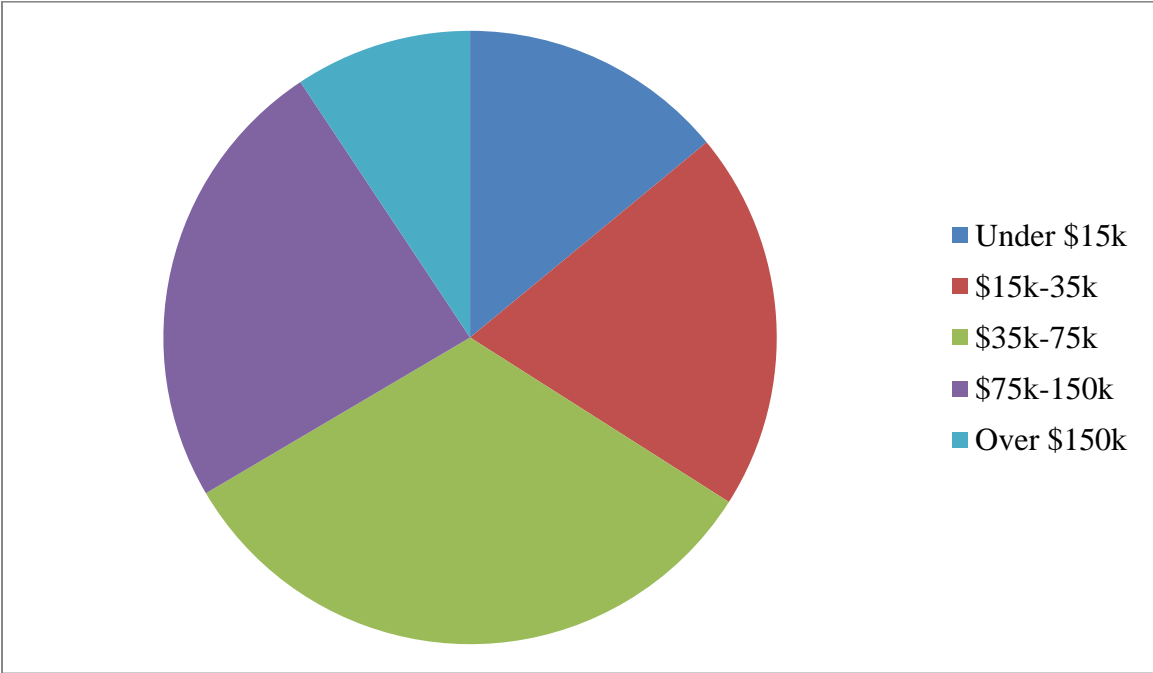


Figure 11 - Household Income in 2013 Dollars in Sunset Park, Year 2013

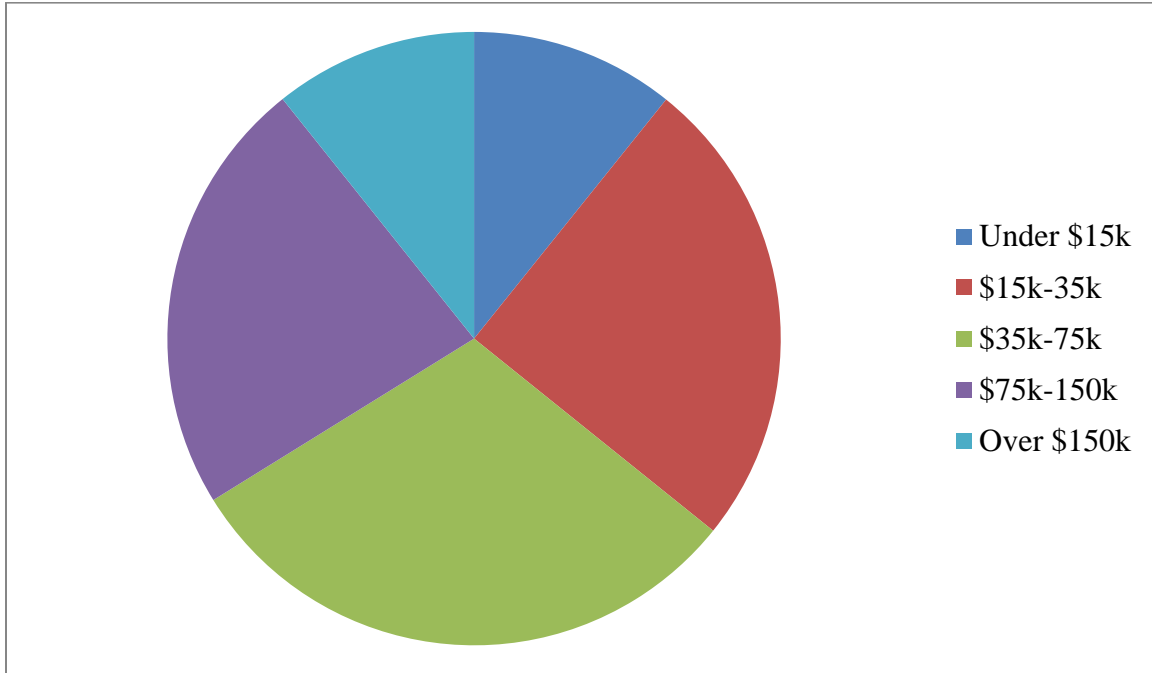


Figure 12 - Poverty Levels, Year 2000

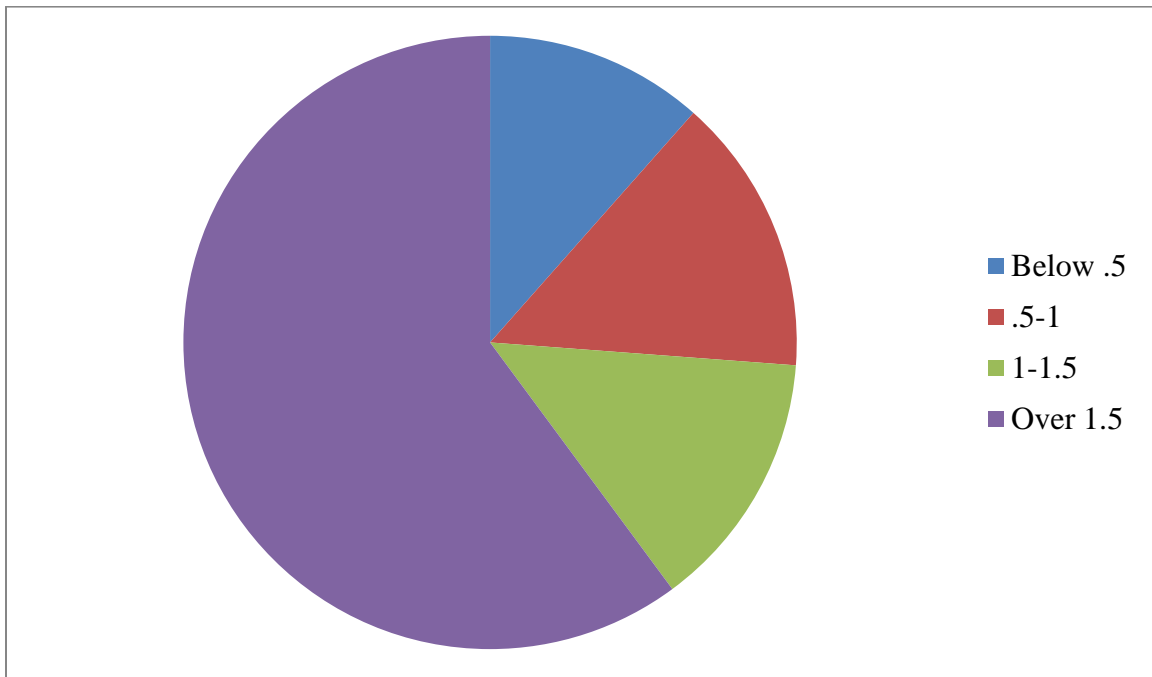


Figure 13 - Poverty Levels, Year 2013

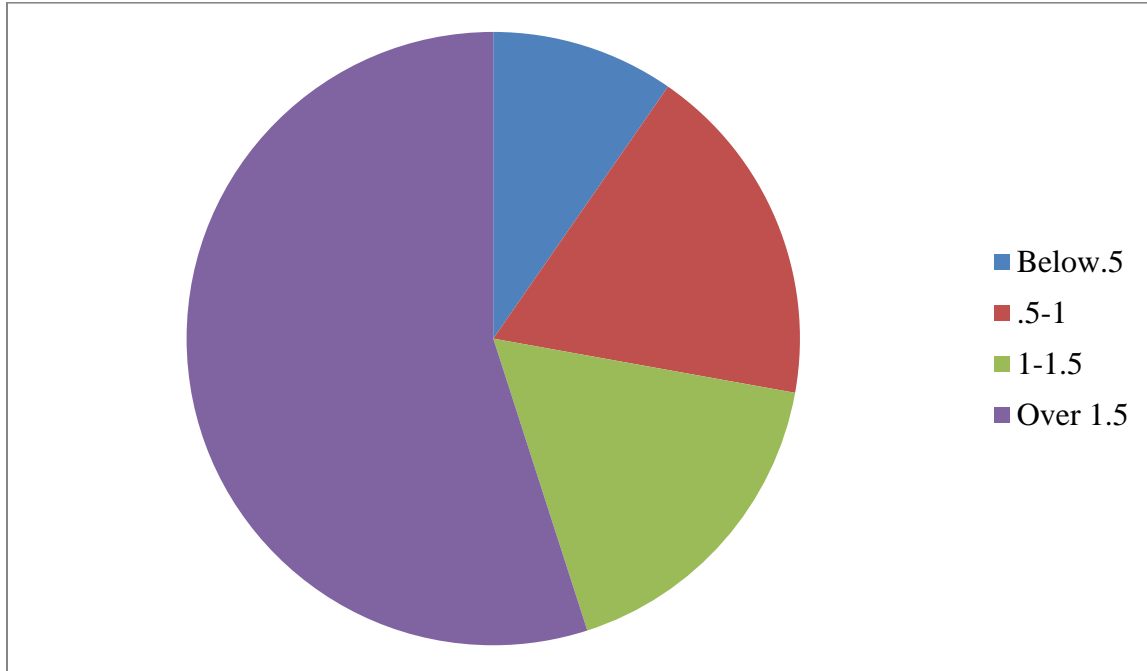


Figure 14 - Educational Attainment

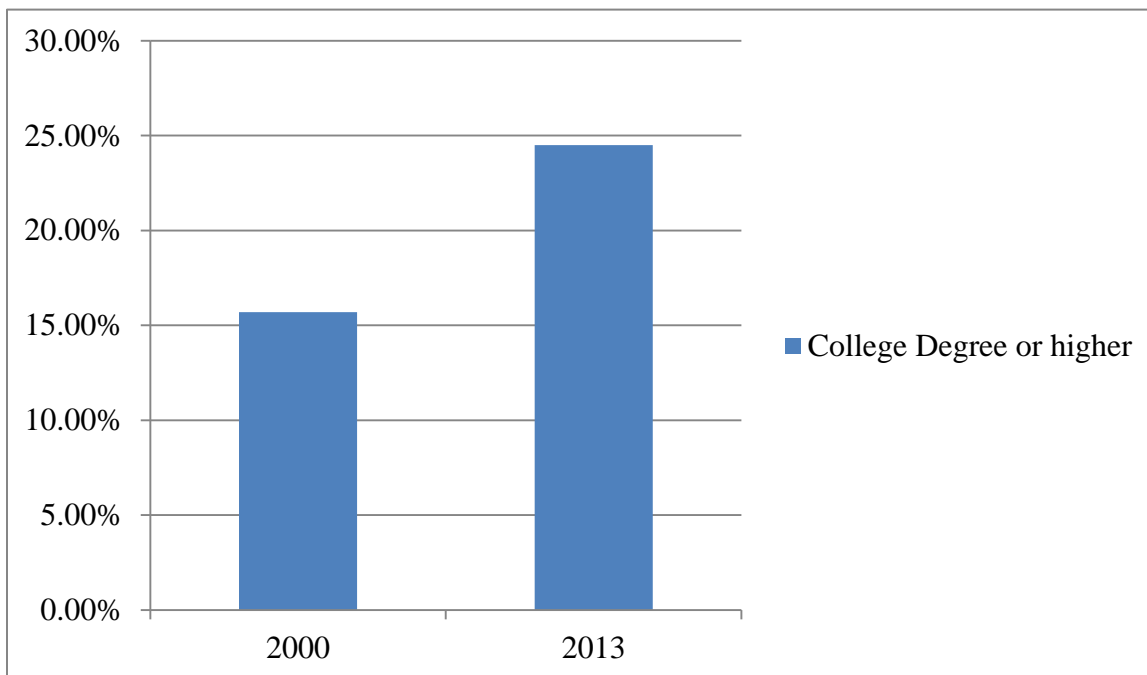




Figure 15 - Employment Rate

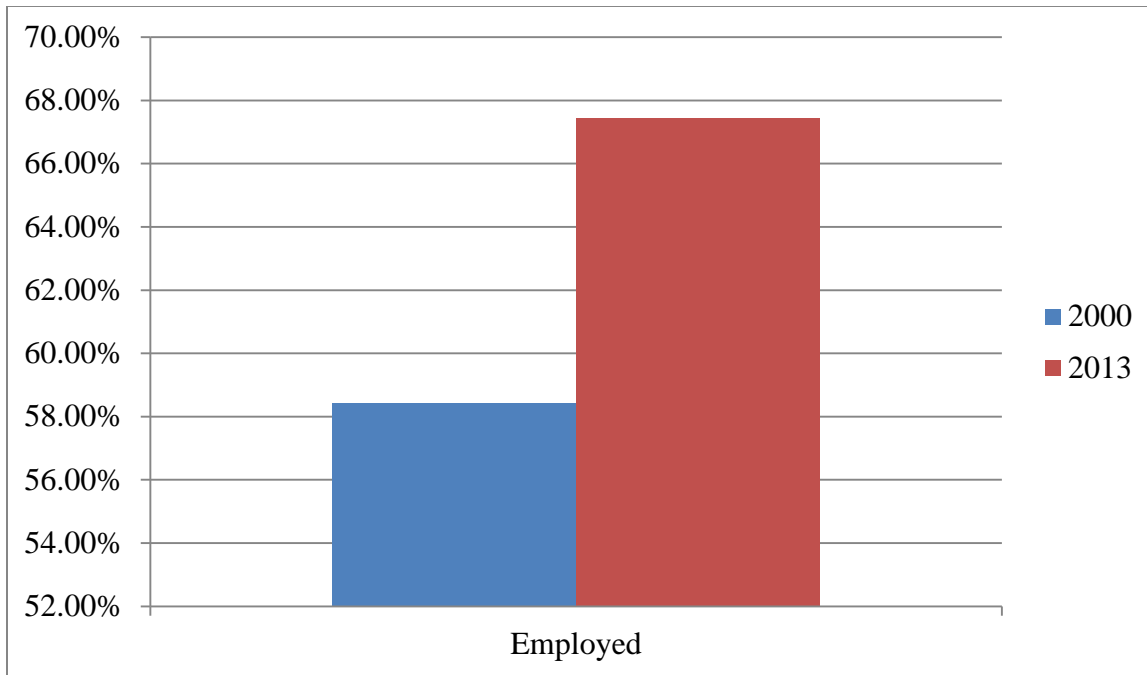


Figure 16 - Unemployment Rate

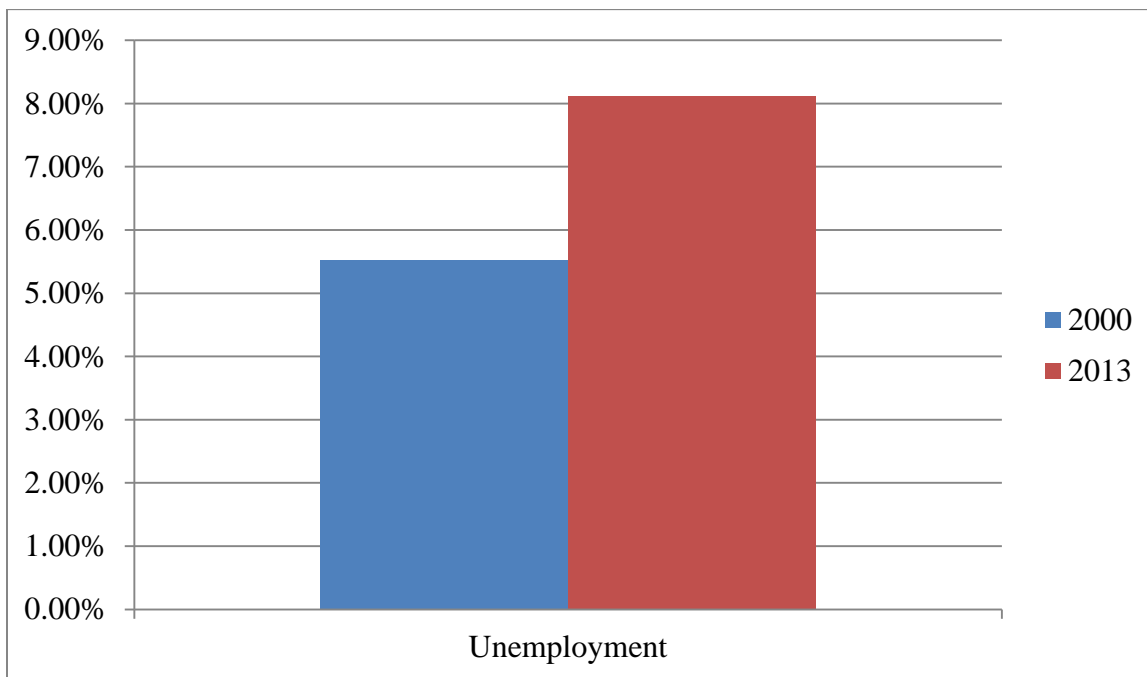
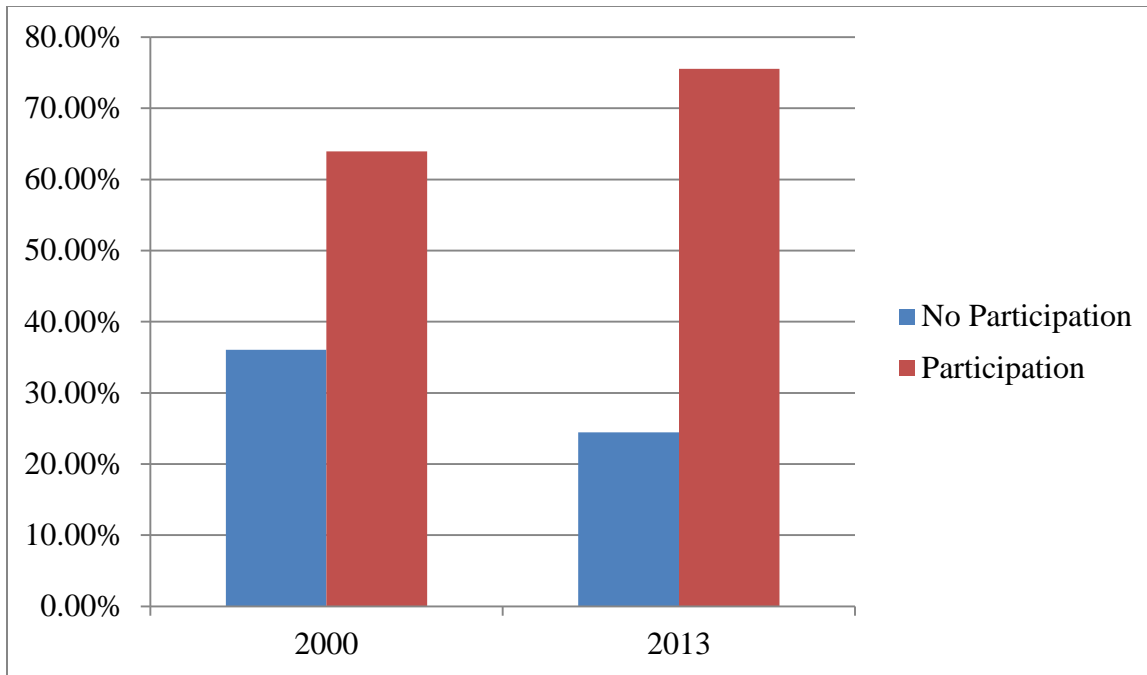


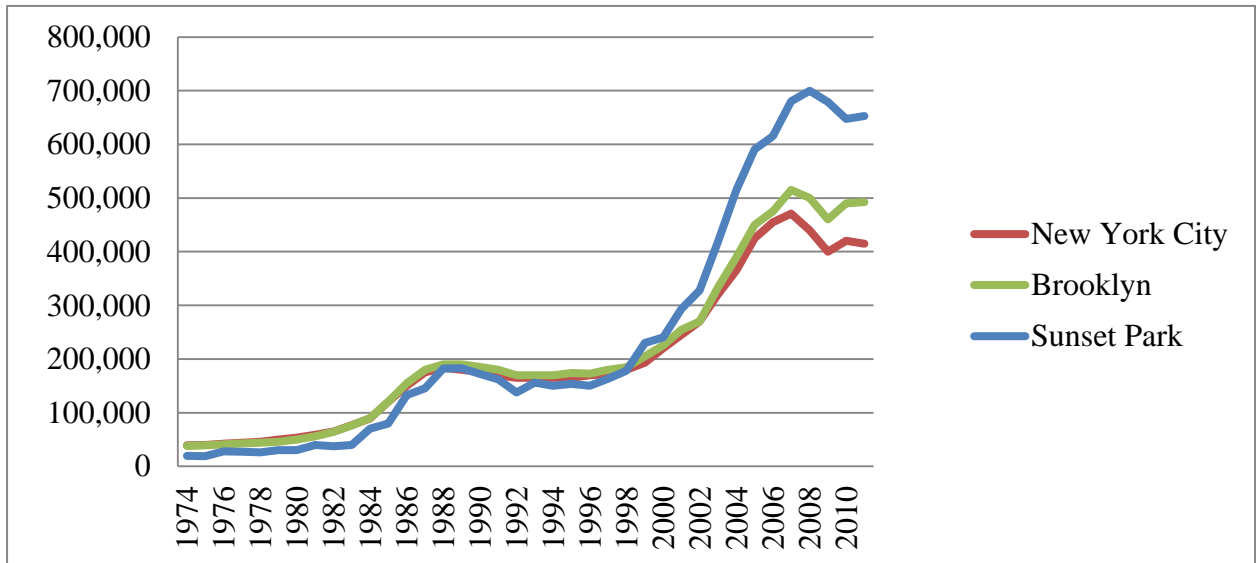
Figure 17 - Labor Market Participation



The average household income did not change significantly between 2000 and 2013 for Sunset Park. The average household income in 2013 dollars for the year 2000 was \$67,939. In 2013, the average household income for Sunset Park was \$69,178. The difference in average household income between New York City and Sunset Park is significant. The difference in average household income between New York City and Sunset Park in 2013 dollars for the year 2000 was \$20,535. For 2013, the difference in average household income between New York City and Sunset Park was \$20,644. The difference has remained steady. The lowest income bracket of less than fifteen thousand dollars decreased approximately four percent from 14.02% to 10.77% between 2000 and 2013. The highest income bracket of over one hundred fifty thousand dollars increased about a percentage point from 9.33% to 10.77% between 2000 and 2013. This indicates a slightly wealthier group of individuals moving into the neighborhood — indicating perhaps, early stages of gentrification. Households earning between fifteen and thirty-

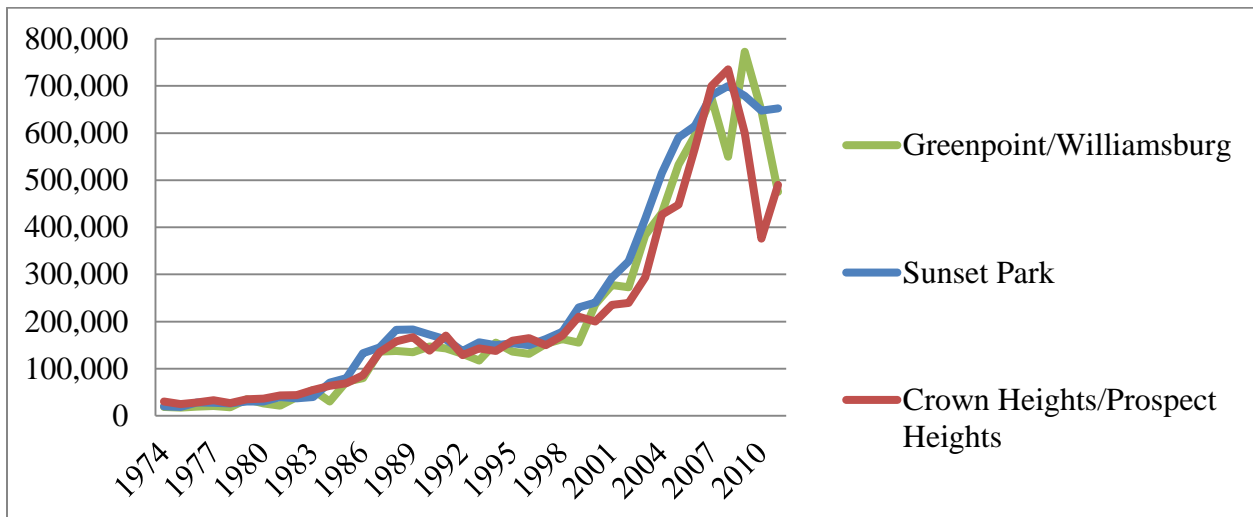
five thousand dollars increased from 19.99% to 25%. The other two income brackets, households earning between thirty-five and seventy-five thousand dollars and those earning between seventy-five and one hundred fifty thousand dollars, experienced declines from 32.51% to 30.40% and 24.15% to 23.09% respectively. Total poverty increased from 27% to 29% between 2000 and 2013. Poverty is measured by the Census Bureau based on family size and composition with any family scoring less than a measure of one being counted as impoverished. Between 2000 and 2013, the most impoverished with a score below .5 decreased from 11.54% to 9.65%. The impoverished who are rated as .5 to 1 poverty level increased from 14.65% to 18.18% between 2000 and 2013. Poverty levels from 1 to 1.5 increased from 13.68% to 17.21% between 2000 and 2013. Those above 1.5 decreased from 60.13% to 54.96%. With regard to educational attainment, college degree recipients increased from 15.7% to 24.5%. The statistics indicate a well-educated Sunset Park. From 2000 to 2013, both employment and unemployment rates increased while those not in the labor force decreased. The employment rate increased from 58.43% in 2000 to 67.44% in 2013. Unemployment also increased from 5.52% in 2000 to 8.12% in 2013. Labor market participation increased from 63.96% in 2000 to 75.55% in 2013. Those who did not participate in the labor force decreased between 2000 and 2013 from 36.04% to 24.45%. It is unclear how this shapes the portrait of the neighborhood amidst the financial crisis.

Figure 18 - Median Sale Price in Dollars — Single Family Homes



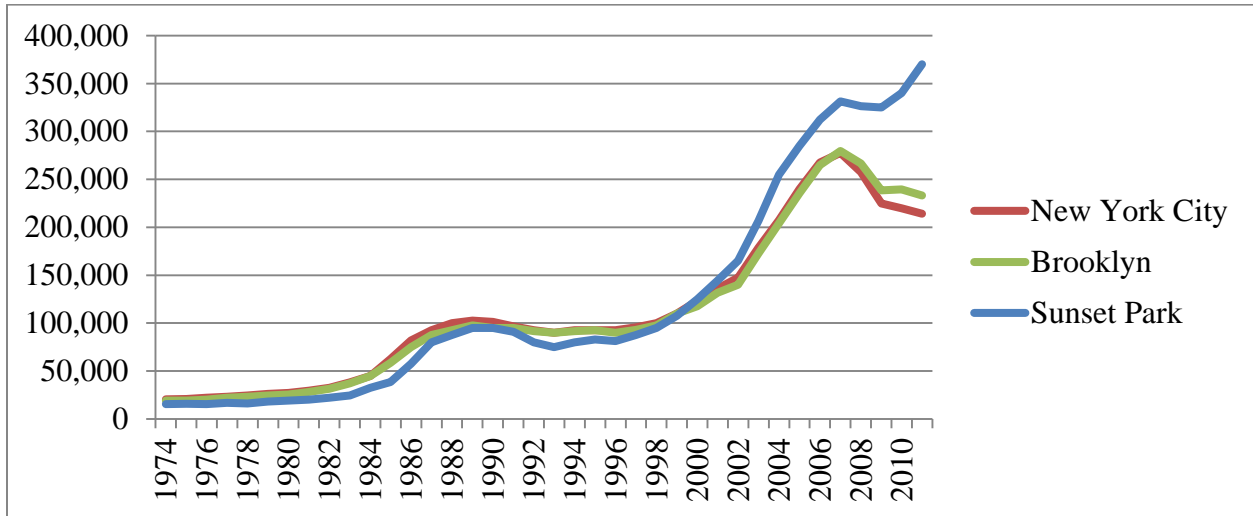
Source: The Furman Center for Real Estate and Urban Policy

Figure 19 - Median Sale Price in Dollars — Single Family Homes



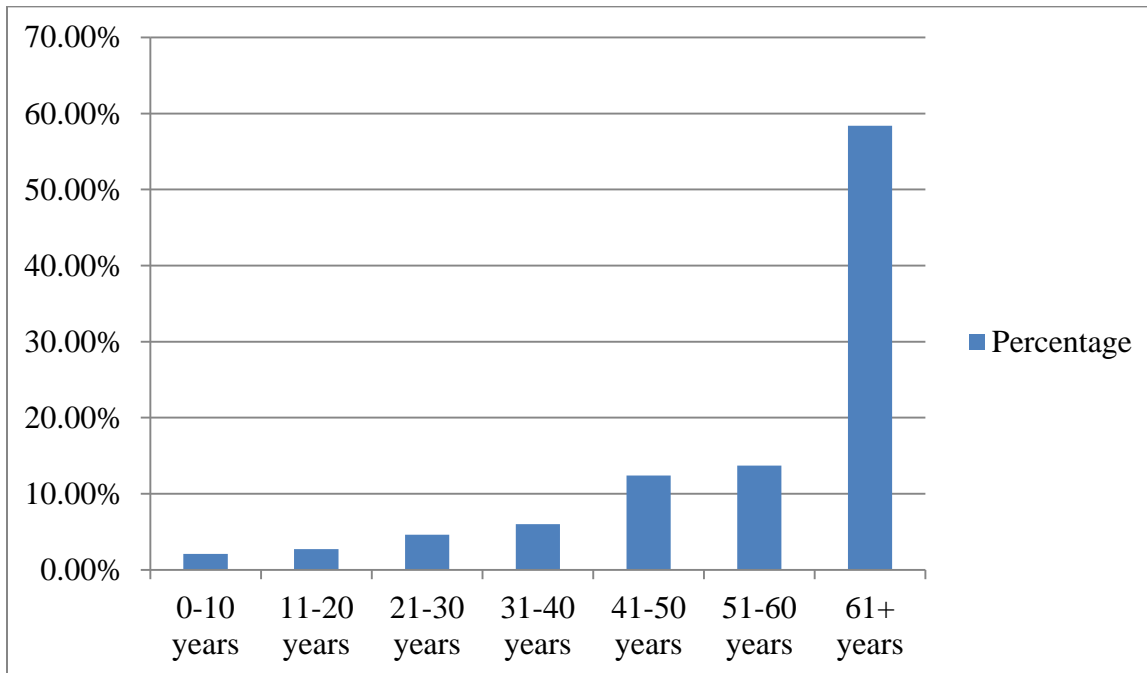
Source: The Furman Center for Real Estate and Urban Policy

Figure 20 - Median Sale Price in Dollars — 2 to 4 Family Homes



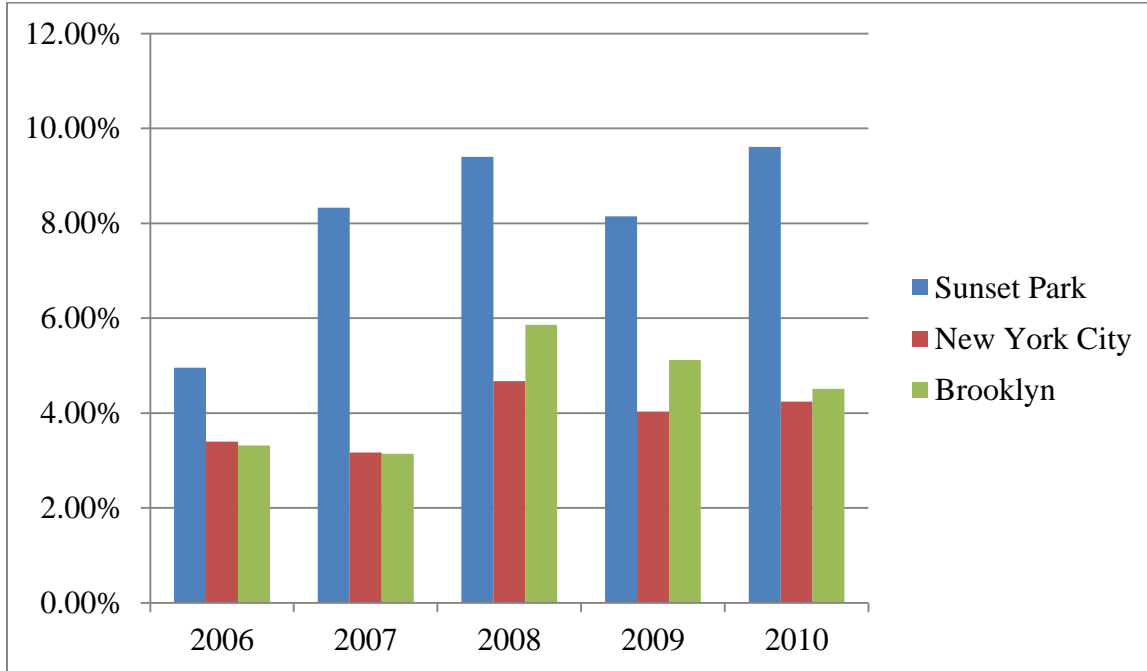
Source: The Furman Center for Real Estate and Urban Policy

Figure 21 - Age of Housing Stock



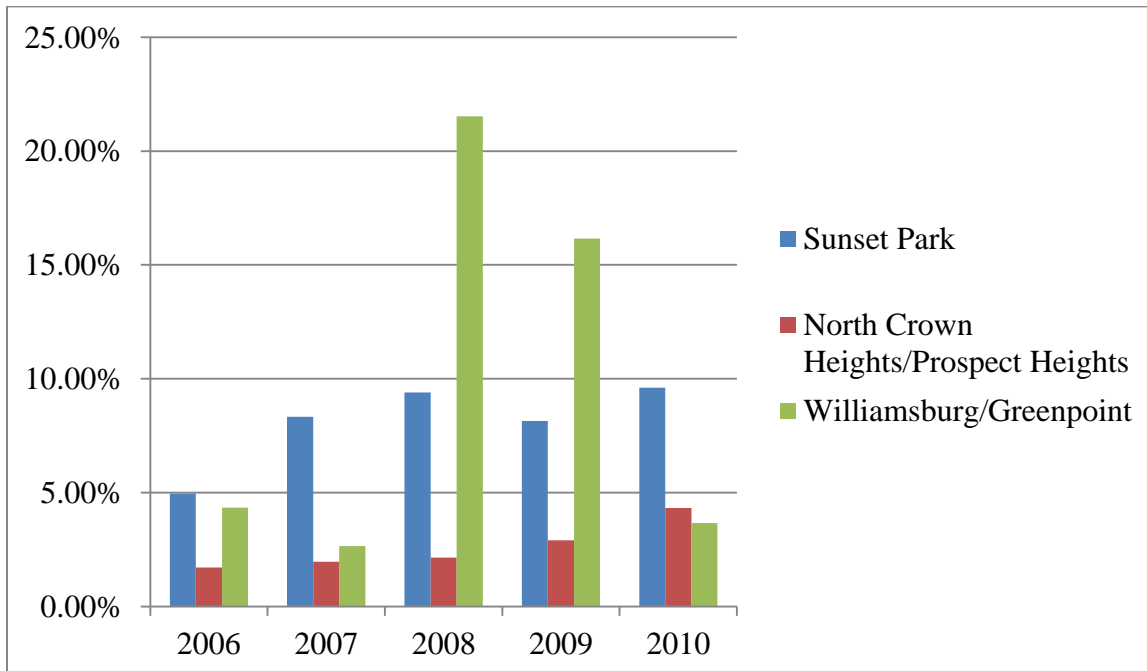
Source: ACS

Figure 22 - Crowding Rate — Sunset Park, Brooklyn, and New York City



Source: The Furman Center for Real Estate and Urban Policy

Figure 23 - Crowding Rate — Sunset Park, North Crown Heights/Prospect Heights, and Williamsburg/Greenpoint



Source: The Furman Center for Real Estate and Urban Policy

The median sale price of a single family home in Sunset Park was consistently lower than that of either Brooklyn or New York City from the 1970s through the late 1980s. For example, in 1976, the median sale price of a single family home in Sunset Park was \$28,000 while Brooklyn's median sale price was \$41,000. In the late 1980s, Sunset Park's median sale price of a single family home started to match that of both Brooklyn and New York City. In 1988, Sunset Park's median sale price of a single family home was \$182,500 while Brooklyn's median sale price of a single family home was \$190,000. By the late 1990s and into the early 2000s, Sunset Park surpassed both Brooklyn and New York City. In the year 2000, Sunset Park's median sale price of a single family home was \$240,000 while Brooklyn's median sale price was \$225,000. From the late 1990s onward, Sunset Park's median sale price of a single family home has increased dramatically. In the six years between 2000 and 2006, the median sale price of a single family home in Sunset Park increased \$72,494 to \$312,494. The financial crisis of 2007-2008 did affect housing prices in Sunset Park, but seemingly not for the long term. While there was a dip of \$52,500 between 2008 and 2010, the single family housing market in Sunset Park has leveled out since then. In 2010, the median sale price of a single family home in Sunset Park was \$647,500 — significantly greater than New York City's median sale price of \$420,000 and Brooklyn's \$490,000. When compared to other Brooklyn neighborhoods Williamsburg/Greenpoint and Crown Heights/Prospect Heights, Sunset Park exhibits similar parallels. All three aforementioned areas showed steady median sale price increases from the 1970s through to the mid-2000s. The median sales price for a single family home in 1976 for Crown Heights/Prospect Heights and Williamsburg/Greenpoint were \$28,200 and \$19,670. This is a favorable comparison with Sunset Park's median sale price at the time, \$28,000. Mimicking Sunset Park's increase to \$182,500, both Crown Heights/Prospect Heights and

Williamsburg/Greenpoint saw tremendous growth to \$158,000 and \$137,500 respectively. The key difference between the three neighborhoods is the more stable sale price in Sunset Park when compared to the volatility of fluctuations in both Crown Heights/Prospect Heights and Williamsburg/Greenpoint from the mid-2000s onward. In the span of one year, from 2007 to 2008, Williamsburg/Greenpoint's median sale price of a single family home exhibited a decline from \$700,000 to \$550,000. In 2009, the median sales price rebounded to \$772,500 but has since decreased to \$475,000 in 2011. The median sale price of a single family home in Crown Heights/Prospect Heights dramatically fell from \$735,000 in 2008 to \$375,900 in 2010. In 2011, the median sale price increased to \$490,000. The effects of the financial crisis were much more pronounced in Crown Heights/Prospect Heights and Williamsburg/Greenpoint which saw volatile dips of \$359,100 and \$150,000 respectively. On the other hand, Sunset Park's single family home median sale price has remained relatively stable whereas the other two neighborhood's fluctuations make foreseeing housing trends infinitely difficult. With regard to two to four family dwellings, Sunset Park has shown a similar trajectory to that of its single family homes. The surge in median sale price occurred in the 2000s. In the year 2000, Sunset Park's median sale price of a two to four family home was \$125,000 compared to Brooklyn's \$117,000. In 2006, Sunset Park saw an increase to \$331,250 while Brooklyn saw growth to \$265,000. In six years, the difference between Sunset Park and Brooklyn's median sale price of a two to four family home increased from \$8,000 in 2000 to \$66,250 in 2006. Interestingly, Sunset Park's median sale price of a two to four family home remained very stable in the midst of the financial crisis and saw an increase from \$326,250 to \$340,000 in the years between 2008 and 2010.



With regard to the age of the housing stock, 58.4% of the homes are more than sixty one years old. Sunset Park's housing stock consists primarily of properties older than thirty years, specifically 90.5%. Only 2.1% of Sunset Park's housing stock is between zero to ten years old. The crowding rate in Sunset Park far surpasses that of either Brooklyn or New York City. Crowding is defined as having more than one person per room in a property. Sunset Park's crowding rate was 4.96% in 2006, compared with New York City's 3.4% and Brooklyn's 3.32%. Sunset Park also exhibited greater crowding than either Williamsburg/Greenpoint with 4.34% and Crown Heights/Prospect Heights with 1.71%. In 2007, Sunset Park's crowding rate surged to 8.33% — nearly double. From 2007 to 2010, Sunset Park's crowding rate consistently hovered between 8% and 10% — far exceeding that of Brooklyn which ranged from 3.14% to 5.86% and New York City which ranged from 3.17% to 4.67%. Williamsburg/Greenpoint experienced a significant increase in crowding during the years of 2008 and 2009 with 21.53% and 16.16% respectively. Sunset Park had much less of a crowding rate with 9.40% and 8.15%. However, with the exception of 2008 and 2009, Sunset Park exhibited more crowding in the five years between 2006 and 2010 than either Crown Heights/Prospect Heights or Williamsburg/Greenpoint. In 2010, the aberration of 2008 and 2009 ended and Sunset Park's crowding rate of 9.61% exceeded the 3.66% of Williamsburg/Greenpoint.

## QUALITATIVE DATA ANALYSIS

Sunset Park is spatially divided along racial/ethnic lines. The Hispanic community, which comprises mostly Mexicans, inhabits the western portion of Sunset Park. Meanwhile the Asian community, the overwhelming majority of who are Chinese, lives in the eastern section of the area. The distribution of businesses mimics this pattern. Businesses owned, operated, or

targeted to the predominantly Mexican population are centered in the west, in particular northwest section of Sunset Park. Among the types of businesses are restaurants, taquerias, a sports store, and chain stores. Most of the restaurants serve Mexican cuisine. Meanwhile the sports shop (EuroMex Sports) sells soccer merchandise. Soccer is the dominant sport in Mexico and South America — indicating a large presence of that population in the area. Upon further inspection, one can see that the majority of the soccer jerseys are Mexican league teams such as Cruz Azul, Chivas, and Tigres. While the store alludes to European soccer items as well, it is quite evident that the most popular jerseys are the Latin American ones. Interestingly, many of the European team merchandise tend to be clubs that either feature or at one point featured Mexican soccer players. For example, Barcelona was very well represented in terms of merchandise availability. One could point to Barcelona's winning achievements on the field as to the reason for the popularity. Of course, the other explanation is that Barcelona shirts/jerseys are sought after because the team once featured the extremely well known Mexican national team captain Rafa Marquez. Baseball, the favorite sport of most Caribbean Hispanics, is missing from the store — paralleling the overall lack of representation on the business front. Puerto Ricans, whose population is on the decline in the neighborhood, do seem to have next to no businesses owned, operated, or targeted toward them. The only business that had such a reference was a restaurant called the "Café Caribe" or Caribbean Café. While one could see Puerto Rican flags adorn the sides of buildings, one feels as if the Mexican population has overtaken the older Puerto Rican residents. In common parlance, there is a tendency to refer to the neighborhood or community as Hispanic. However, considering the preponderance of Mexican businesses and the increase in population gleaned from the Census data, it is safe to say that this community can be labeled as predominantly Mexican. The presence of non-Mexican

small businesses is significant along Fifth Avenue. Chain stores have a strong foothold in the community as a Sprint, Subway, GNC, Foot Locker and GameStop stores all take residence along the business route. Few remnants remain of the older European immigrant communities. Norwegian/Scandinavian businesses are practically non-existent. Italian Americans also made up a sizable portion of Sunset Park. The only reference to their former habitation in the neighborhood was the Generoso Bakery. Spatially aligned with the Mexican section of the community, the small business sells Italian pastry items. The Generoso Bakery makes overtures to the surroundings by featuring an American flag, an Italian flag, and a Mexican flag in their property. On the overall, the shopping district on the Mexican side of Sunset Park feels more downtrodden, economically insecure, and price conscious. The items sold tend to be on the affordable side. The foot traffic is significantly less than in the Chinese section of the neighborhood.

On the other hand, Chinese businesses have a strong presence in the southeastern section of the area, most notably on 8th Avenue. Unlike the Mexican area, the business district features multiple types of establishments from restaurants and groceries to pharmacies and adult day care facilities. Koong Wing Restaurant, Tang's Stationary, and J.W. Golden Bakery are among the popular establishments. 8th Avenue bustles with heavy foot traffic. The walkways can be quite crowded at peak times of the day. Almost all of the small business signage is bilingual with dominant Chinese characters. The Chinese text tends to be larger, bolder and more prominent on the sign/awning. Meanwhile, the English text tends to be smaller, less bold, and contain less information. Houses of worship are spatially divided along ethnic lines as well. The Chinese Christian Church of Grace is located on the southernmost portion of Sunset Park's boundaries on Fourth Avenue. This contrasts with the Iglesia Adventista (Seventh Day Adventist Church) also

on Fourth Avenue but further north — in an area with more Mexican businesses. There is very little overlapping between the two ethnic communities. In between the predominantly Mexican and Chinese sections is a small mixed area. A Pioneer supermarket and a Chinese/Spanish restaurant are among the businesses located in this zone.

A requirement of the New York City Charter, Statements of Community District Needs offers a milieu for budget urgencies and improvements. The document is composed by a Community Board and features population counts, income support program levels, and land use information. Community Board 7 oversees the Sunset Park neighborhood. An examination of this Community Board's needs statement reflects the day-to-day issues that affect the community. Typical concerns of Sunset Park are like those in many neighborhoods — cleaner walkways, repair of damaged streets/potholes, and pedestrian safety. A community push for bike lanes, something found in the borough of Manhattan, has started to take hold. Many of the aforementioned concerns are not related to community or neighborhood change. However, the great majority of the concerns are at least indirectly related to the ongoing area's transformation. The development along the waterfront proves to be a significant bone of contention. Many in the community feel as if the economic development will be great for the political actors, real estate developers, and business owners. However, there is a feeling amongst residents that they will be left out of this rising tide. Sunset Park residents want to share in the spoils of economic development, in particular access to the jobs created by activity along the waterfront. Industry City, formerly Bush Terminal, is becoming home to high end white collar businesses and expensive rental properties for creative class workers such as artists' loft spaces. Other concerns are the strains the increased population has placed on housing and education. According to the document, the community's population has grown by about fifty percent in the past twenty five

years with few new schools and additional housing. Many of the newest residents are young families with school-age or near school-age children. While there has been success in getting four schools built in the past six years, this has not kept pace with growth. Sunset Park activists had lobbied for a neighborhood high school for years. After much effort, Sunset Park High School opened in 2009. While a great accomplishment, there is still a need for the city to meet. Sunset Park has the second highest overcrowding problem in the five boroughs and according to a New York University study cited by Statement of Community District Needs, the second oldest housing stock in New York City. My earlier quantitative and spatial survey was echoed by the document — the majority of the incoming immigrant population is from Mexico and rural China. As a result, language appropriate ESL (English as a Second Language) instructors are in desperate need. This becomes a more pressing fact when one considers that nearly fifty percent of the population is foreign-born.

The spatial layout seems to echo the Human Ecology/Chicago School in which multiple demographic groups compete for limited housing and resources. There is little overlap or mingling between the Hispanic and Asian communities. Walking through Sunset Park, one feels as if the Chinese community is decidedly different from the Mexican community. It doesn't seem as if they are really located within the same "neighborhood/community." While there is some mixing, as even evidenced by the location of a Chinese/Spanish restaurant in between the predominant Mexican and Chinese communities, it seems as if the spheres of habitation between the communities are distant at best. Perhaps, this is a sign of the tension in the area — movements have sprouted against the increasing Chinese population.

The schools of thought are challenged by the investment of Chinese capital in Sunset Park. The growth machine, as based on the review of the literature, has been described as the

involvement of local political actors and the real estate sector in a coordinated effort to stimulate the economic development of a particular neighborhood/community. Sunset Park differs entirely as the presence of Chinese banks has contributed to the growth of the business sector (Hum, 2014). This seems to contradict the predominant perspective on urban political economy.

A contemporary trend in the housing market has been the increase in purchasing of multi-family homes by what is described as the younger, “hipster” generation (Bonislowski, 2015). The neighborhood is quickly becoming one of the most sought after neighborhoods in Brooklyn. Sunset Park’s popularity can be attributed to its proximity to Manhattan, conveniently located access to transportation, and a trendy atmosphere. In addition to multi-family homes, properties with store fronts, backyards, and brownstones are in high demand. While the quantitative data has yet to yield a significant increase in the Non-Hispanic White population, it is important to note that this is a very recent trend, one which perhaps has yet to be quantified by U.S. Census data. Moreover, the increase in the twenty-five to forty year old population in combination with decreasing poverty and increasing higher income brackets indicate modest signs of gentrification. This is particularly the case along the northern section of Sunset Park, which borders the more affluent Park Slope neighborhood. Another trend is the tremendous increase in buyers from Asia, in particular China. Chinese immigrants are now the second largest foreign born group in New York City and are set to overtake Dominicans (Robbins, 2015). As for the future of Sunset Park, a prevailing notion is the claim that the neighborhood is the next Park Slope. Journalistic observations indicate a younger, more artistic presence along the perimeter of the park, in particular 44<sup>th</sup> Street between 5<sup>th</sup> and 7<sup>th</sup> Avenue. It would be safe to say that this development more closely aligns with the traditional perspective of the gentrification literature.

## CONCLUSION

The influx of Chinese immigrants into Sunset Park and the U.S. at large comes at a very curious time historically speaking. Mass waves of immigrants into the United States have generally been spurred by economic difficulties in the ethnic groups' country of origin. The Irish were motivated by the Great Potato Famine while many southern Italians were compelled to leave for the U.S. due to the poverty in that region of Italy during the country's early years of unification (Mangione & Morreale, 1993). In contemporary times, the increase in the Mexican population comes when Mexico faces tremendous governing challenges on the frontline of the drug war and rampant corruption (Borjas, 2007). However, China's economic situation has improved dramatically over the previous decades. China is now one of the largest economies on the planet. The chasm in wealth attainment, in particular between rural poverty and elite urban circles, creates the desire for an American migration (Yin, 2013). However, with Chinese economic power at its peak, it seems as if the market for Chinese foreign financed businesses with a great supply of foreign capital is ripe. This is perhaps a new development in neighborhood and community change. The globalized market place in combination with immigration from an economically powerful nation creates a decidedly different scenario than previous waves of immigration. Chinese ethnic neighborhoods in the U.S. are now open for business to Chinese developers, Chinese business owners, and Chinese clientele. The effects of this new form of neighborhood and community change are quite visible. Walking down 8<sup>th</sup> Avenue, one can see the bustling ebb and flow of the Chinese business community in Sunset Park. Contrast this with the Hispanic/Mexican businesses on 5<sup>th</sup> Avenue, which seem to be less frequented, cheaper priced, and certainly less numerous in stores than their Chinese counterparts. Moreover, the business corridor on Fifth Avenue seems to be increasingly dominated by chain stores such as

GameStop, GNC, Subway, and Sprint. This chasm of business success may speak to the great influence that Chinese foreign investment has in establishing a thriving ethnic enclave in New York City. I believe a new model/school of thought incorporating the foreign investment model could be established. Certainly, Tarry Hum has started that development with research on Sunset Park. It would be interesting for future research and to help further develop this model, if a survey of the success of foreign investment in other Chinese ethnic enclaves in the United States would be conducted. This could perhaps lead the way for either a re-examination of urban political economy or maybe the establishment of a new model.

To conclude, the realities of Sunset Park do exhibit convergence with the theoretical perspectives. With regard to human ecology and the Chicago School, a rising tide of Chinese and Mexican immigrant groups are supplanting a former working-class European immigrant population hub. Waterfront rezoning and the investment of foreign national banks can be seen as jelling with the concept of urban political economy's growth machine. A slow increase in property values at the northern section of Sunset Park, near Park Slope, also belies the gentrification phenomenon. A key divergence is the role that the newest wave of Chinese immigrants will play. Time will tell as to whether foreign investment falls in line with traditional conceptions of a pro-growth coalition or if a new model or way of looking at neighborhood and community change must be forged in light of China's rising economic clout.



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