

**To Flatbush and Beyond: Brooklyn Housing Development's Expansion Past
Prospect Park**

Mateo Taylor

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Abstract

In this paper, I explore changes in housing and demographics of neighborhoods in Brooklyn to the south and east of Prospect Park. Through combining a quantitative analysis of select neighborhoods between 2010 and 2019 with a historical analysis of gentrification in North and West Brooklyn, I aimed to identify whether state-supported gentrification was taking place. By supporting large luxury housing developers' entry into low and mixed-income neighborhoods in exchange for concessions, the state furthers a campaign of urban redevelopment. Using housing data from the NYC Department of City Planning (DCP) and the U.S. Census' American Community Surveys, my results identified significant new housing development in two neighborhoods: Erasmus and Prospect Lefferts Gardens Wingate. While it's likely that the development occurring in these neighborhoods followed a larger trend of state-supported development, my results could not find any significant evidence that increased gentrification took place between 2010 and 2019.

Introduction: Historical Gentrification in Brooklyn

Webster's dictionary defines gentrification as "a process in which a poor area (as of a city) experiences an influx of middle-class or wealthy people who renovate and rebuild homes and businesses and which often results in an increase in property values and the displacement of earlier, usually poorer residents" (Merriam-Webster). Gentrification is rooted in economic class relations and is not naturally connected to race, but in the case of Brooklyn and many other cities across the United States, post-1990s 'third wave' gentrification follows a trend of middle-class whites gentrifying historically black urban neighborhoods (Chronopolous 2020: 562; Goetz 2010: 1600). Displacement of minority communities is often associated with gentrification, but gentrification can and does occur without changing the racial or ethnic makeup of a neighborhood.

Over the past three decades, Brooklyn has been an epicenter of urban gentrification, specifically in northwestern parts of the borough closest to Manhattan. As prices in these neighborhoods continue to climb, I aim to understand how the housing market is evolving further south and east in the low and mixed-income communities adjacent to Prospect Park. By examining housing changes in these communities, I hope to see how trends of private real estate speculation supported by the public sector might relate to the expansion of gentrification.

To characterize the housing development occurring southeast of Prospect Park, it is necessary to consider its relationship to the park. Since the Prospect Park Alliance formed and began restoration of the park in the 80s, communities around Prospect Park have benefited from being close to one of Brooklyn's largest and most sought-after environmental amenities (Prospect Park Alliance 2024). However, Gould and Lewis's (2012) analysis of the 5 neighborhoods bordering the park found that access to Prospect Park was not distributed equally,

with rising real estate prices pricing out lower-income families in local neighborhoods through “green gentrification”. This green gentrification was particularly noticeable in wealthier neighborhoods to the north and west of the park, like Park Slope, Windsor Terrace, and Prospect Heights, with the first two being predominantly white and the latter shifting from being predominantly black to white during the 2000s (Gould & Lewis 2012). On the other hand, Prospect Lefferts Gardens and Prospect Park South, which lie to the west and south of the park, remained predominantly black and lower-income.

This inequality highlights an important aspect of how gentrification has played out in Brooklyn over the past two decades; incoming higher-income gentrifiers have favored neighborhoods to the north and west of Prospect Park. Northwestern neighborhoods like Park Slope, Windsor Terrace, Brooklyn Heights, and Fort Greene are part of ‘Brownstone Brooklyn’, boasting easy access to downtown Brooklyn and Manhattan via subway, one of the highest concentrations of niche \$16 latte-serving coffee shops on the East Coast, and significantly higher housing prices than southeastern neighborhoods. As Brooklyn real estate becomes increasingly popular, already gentrified neighborhoods like Park Slope have begun experiencing “super-gentrification”, where middle-class residents are progressively priced out by elite upper-class newcomers (Halasz 2018). While gentrification remains an ongoing process, these northwestern Brooklyn neighborhoods have transitioned into either stages of exclusion or super gentrification (Chapple et al. 2021).

As middle-class whites looked for more affordable housing, they moved further south and east into Brooklyn (Chronopolous 2020). Between 2000 and 2016, northern neighborhoods like Prospect Heights, Crown Heights, and Bedford-Stuyvesant experienced gentrification and displacement of low-income households (Chapple et al. 2021). These neighborhoods are the

northwestern sector of “Black Brooklyn”, a contiguous group of predominantly black neighborhoods in southeastern Brooklyn (Chronopolous 2020: 563). For incoming upper-middle-class families, these neighborhoods offered an affordable alternative to the six and seven-figure brownstones of Brooklyn Heights and Park Slope, with relatively good access to subways that ran downtown. Chronopolous’ (2020) study of gentrification in Black Brooklyn between 2002 and 2018 found that the Black population in Northwest Black Brooklyn shrank at higher rates than the rest of Black Brooklyn. As Black Brooklynites were displaced in the northwest, these neighborhoods transitioned from predominantly black to white, and racial segregation largely persisted (Chronopolous 2020: 570).

Future Housing Development in Brooklyn

As neighborhoods north of Prospect Park continue to gentrify and housing demand across Brooklyn continues to rise (Halasz 2018: 4), it’s important to understand the details of how future gentrification might play out in neighborhoods to the south and east. More specifically, we need to examine how the current landscape of urban policymaking and regulation of real estate influences housing development.

Broadly speaking, post-90s urban gentrification can be characterized by increased government support for redevelopment (Goetz 2010). New York is no exception to this trend, with policymaking centered around public-private partnerships to redevelop the city. This legislation isn’t necessarily ill-intentioned. For example, the city’s 421a partial tax exemption lowers property taxes for large construction projects that agree to allocate 25% and 30% of new units as affordable or targeted income housing (NYC Department of Finance 2024). 421a plays a huge role in the development of large housing projects, and construction permitting rates

consistently double or triple in years where it's set to expire (NYC DCP 2025; NYU Furman Center 2015). Similarly, inclusionary housing designated areas allow developers to build higher if they allocate affordable housing (NYC DCP). In addition to supporting new housing projects, national and state programs like transit-oriented development are used to direct the flow of industry (US Department of Transportation). In exchange for concessions from private industry, the state supports construction of new housing in urban areas that individual developers might otherwise find too risky (Hackworth & Smith 2002: 464). Mayor Bill de Blasio's tenure from 2014 to 2021 was particularly indicative of this trend of government-supported development, as his Housing New York initiative worked with developers to finance new affordable housing projects across the city (NYC Department of Housing Preservation & Development). By using conditional tax exemptions and public sector support to fuel the expansion of private industry, urban housing development is characterized by an environment of state-sponsored gentrification.

Ultimately, this approach significantly lessens state protections for working-class communities, making it more difficult for organizers to resist incoming housing development (Hackworth & Smith, 2002: 475). So long as private developers make the necessary concessions, the state is willing to give the green light to large housing projects in low-income communities. One specific example of this in southeast Brooklyn was the construction of The Parkline on 626 Flatbush Avenue, a 23-story high-rise rental project in Prospect Lefferts Gardens that opened in 2016. Similar to the One Grand Army Plaza, a 15-story building built by Richard Meier in Prospect Heights between 2005-2009, 626 Flatbush The Parkline marketed its luxury apartments by highlighting their proximity to Prospect Park and transit lines (Hughes 2016). 626 Flatbush Ave is a perfect example of how state-sponsored development allows developers to enter mixed-income neighborhoods like Lefferts Gardens. The building was financed with \$72 million

in state bonds and allocated 20% of its units as affordable housing through 421-a (Hughes, 2016). It made up for those concessions by starting rents for single bedrooms at \$2,500, close to double the neighborhood's average rent in 2010 (Hughes 2016; Table 1). When local community organizers briefly halted the building's construction in 2014, a judge ultimately allowed construction to resume on the grounds that the building had passed its environmental review and thus was not a significant risk to the neighborhood (PPEN 2014). While 626 Flatbush Avenue is just an individual case study, it shows how future gentrification and private housing development in Brooklyn will likely be a product of coordination between public and private industry.

Data and Methods: Analysis of Housing Development South of Prospect Park

My analysis draws on the 5-year American Community Surveys of 2014 and 2019 (U.S. Census Bureau, 2015; U.S. Census Bureau, 2020), as well as the NYC Department of City Planning's housing database from 2010 through 2019 (NYC DCP: Housing Database)¹. Housing data from the DCP was aggregated into two timeframes, 2010-2014 and 2015-2019, to match the periods of the ACS. Additionally, all dollar values in the 2010-2014 timeframe were adjusted by a factor of 1.08 to account for inflation between 2014 and 2019.

I used the DCP's 2010 neighborhood tabulation areas, or NTAs, to compile tracts in the neighborhoods south and east of Prospect Park, labeled Flatbush, Erasmus, Crown Heights South, and Prospect Lefferts Gardens-Wingate (Fig. 1). These neighborhoods approximately cover the southeast corner of what Chronopolous (2020) defines as Black Brooklyn, with the exceptions of tracts 480, 482, 462.01, 460, and 528 in the southwest corner of Flatbush.

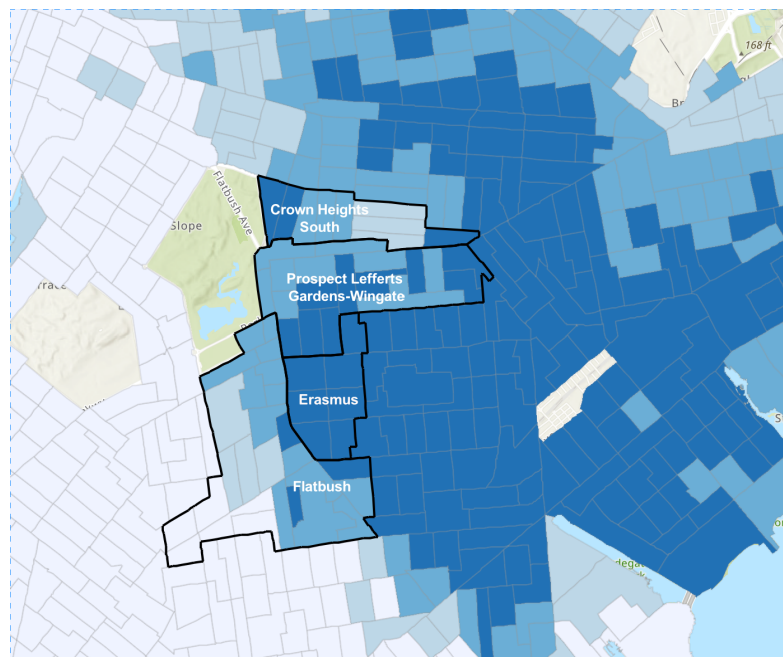


Fig 1, Selected Neighborhoods to the South & East of Prospect Park.

Source: American Community Survey 5-year Estimates 2010-2014.

¹ Python scripts used to gather and format these two datasets can be found at https://github.com/MateoTaylor/SOCL215_FinalPaper.

In comparison to neighborhoods north of Prospect Park, like Prospect Heights, Fort Greene, and Clinton Hill², these four neighborhoods to the southeast had experienced less gentrifying pressure before 2014. Between 2010 and 2014, the median rent, household income, and home values of tracts within these neighborhoods were lower than the rest of the borough and neighborhoods to the northeast (Table 1, Fig. 2.1-2.3).

	Median Rent	Median Household Income	Median Home Value
Neighborhood			
Clinton Hill	1676.16	78135.3	775602
Prospect Heights	1902.42	99136.98	795798
Fort Greene	1504.98	70812.36	918648
Erasmus	1258.2	48550.32	426060
Flatbush	1319.22	49636.8	623052
Prospect Lffrts Gdns Wingate	1273.32	43689.24	482382
Crown Hts South	1323	44381.52	721224
Total	1346.76	52270.38	637848

Table 1. Median Rent, Household Income, and Home Value in 2019 dollars.

Source: American Community Survey 5-year Estimates 2010-2014.

² These NTA's approximate the tracts used by Chronopolous (2020) to describe Northwest Black Brooklyn. The main difference is they do not include the some tracts encompassed by Crown Heights North and Bedford, which extend further west and north into Brooklyn than Chronopolous' measure.

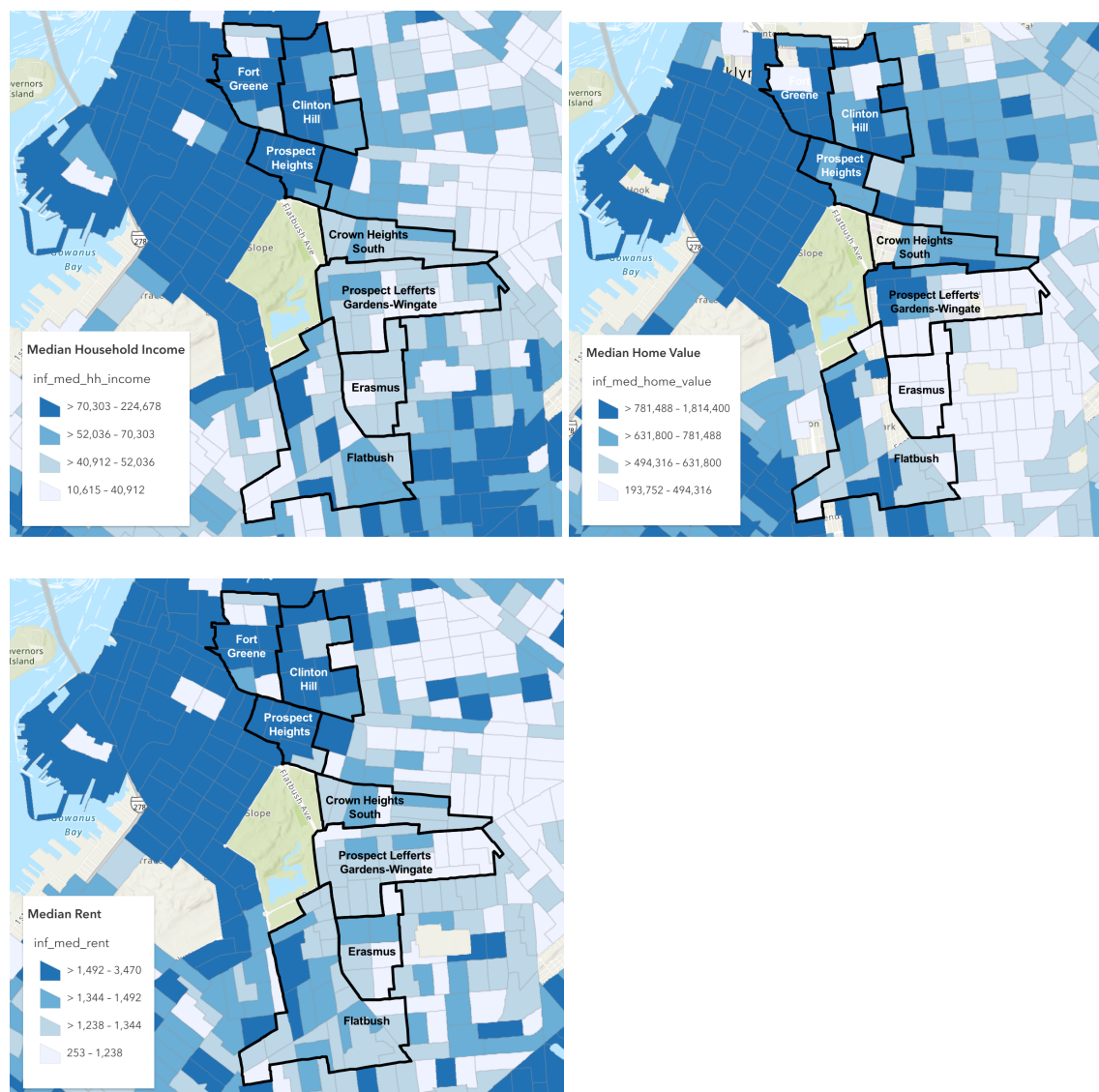


Fig 2.1-2.3, Median Rent, Median Household Income, and Median Home Values in 2019 dollars.

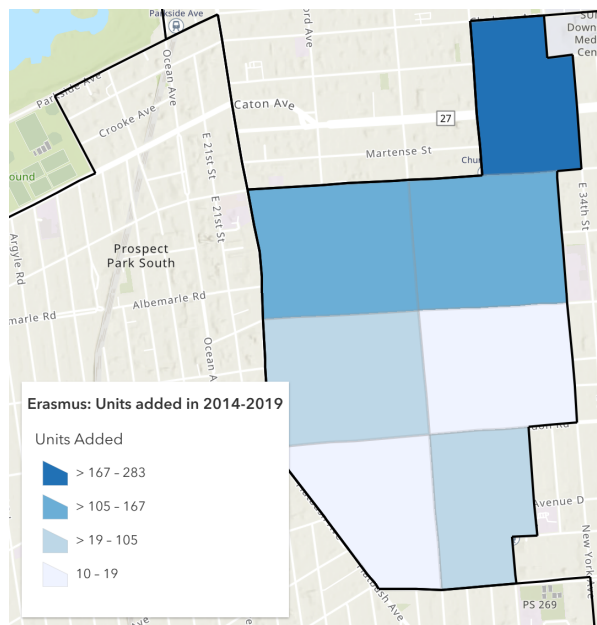
Source: American Community Survey 5-year Estimates 2010-2014.

Results:

All four neighborhoods saw varying levels of housing development between 2010-14 and 2015-19. After comparing the average numbers of units added per household and average number of completed projects per census tract with all of Brooklyn, Black Brooklyn³, and the

³ The area encompassed Black Brooklyn defined by Chronopolous (2020) was approximated with NTAs. The Main differences along the boundaries are Bushwick South (BK78), Flatbush (BK42), and the Flatlands (BK58), whose boundaries all extend slightly further out of Black Brooklyn than Chronopolous' boundary.

neighborhoods northeast of Prospect Park (Table 2), Lefferts Gardens and Erasmus had noticeable housing growth between 2010-2014 and 2015-2019, while Crown Heights South and Flatbush both remained below the average for both Brooklyn and Black Brooklyn. Paired t-tests for statistical significance found that the increases in completed projects in Lefferts Gardens and Erasmus were statistically significant at a p-value of 0.01, meaning that there was less than a 1% chance these results could have occurred naturally. The increases of added units in Lefferts Gardens were also significant at a p-value of 0.01, but they were not statistically significant in Erasmus.



While units added in Erasmus did increase by around 683% over this period, the standard deviation of units added between tracts was very high at 98.38 in 2015-2019, resulting in a nonsignificant p-value of 0.021. While the northern tracts of Erasmus had high amounts of development, with over 100 new units each, the neighborhood's southern tracts had little to no new units added (Fig. 3).

Fig 3. Units added in Erasmus. Source: American Community Survey 5-year Estimates 2010-2014.

	period	
	2010-2014	2015-2019
Crown Heights South		
Mean Units Added	13.11	28.89
Mean Completed Projects	2.67	4.11
Erasmus		
Mean Units Added	15.14	103.43
Mean Completed Projects	3.71	17.29
Flatbush		
Mean Units Added	23.96	40.27
Mean Completed Projects	2.92	5.16
Prospect Lffrts Gdns Wingate		
Mean Units Added	27.06	150.67
Mean Completed Projects	4.44	11.33
North of Prospect Park		
Mean Units Added	89.62	227.60
Mean Completed Projects	13.27	19.15
Black Brooklyn		
Mean Units Added	41.75	62.08
Mean Completed Projects	9.27	10.20
Brooklyn		
Mean Units Added	38.55	68.16
Mean Completed Projects	8.13	10.06

Table 2. Housing Changes in Brooklyn 2010-2019. Source: NYC Department of City Planning

So, why did Erasmus and Lefferts Gardens experience so many new projects in comparison to their northern and eastern neighbors of Flatbush and Crown Heights South, and did these differences in development affect neighborhood demographics? By examining the

housing and demographic changes of these neighborhoods and comparing them with the rest of Brooklyn, I hoped to see if these large housing projects were creating an influx of ‘state-sponsored gentrification’ in Lefferts Gardens and Erasmus.

The housing demographics of Lefferts Gardens and Erasmus are both interesting in comparison to their neighbors. Both are predominantly zoned as R6 districts, which allow medium-density housing from rowhouses to larger apartment buildings. They also contain some R7 zoning, which allows larger high rises, around commercial areas like Flatbush Ave. Lefferts Gardens contains some additional R2, R3, and R4 districts, which are more strict and restrict home sizes to one to two-family residences (NYC DCP: ZoLa). In comparison, Crown Heights South is also mainly R6, while Flatbush is largely R2 through R5 with some R7 near its side of Flatbush Ave. Zoning plays a huge role in where developers are allowed to build; almost all tracts in these 4 neighborhoods with more than 200 units added in 2015-2019 were variations of R7 or R6 (NYC Department of City Planning: ZoLa). Subway lines run through all four neighborhoods, with the 2 and 5 lines cutting through Crown Heights South, Lefferts Gardens, and Erasmus while the B and Q lines cover the center of Flatbush and the eastern sides of Lefferts and Crown Heights South. New developments tended to remain close to transit, with both completed projects and added units being higher in tracts adjacent to subway lines (Fig. 4).

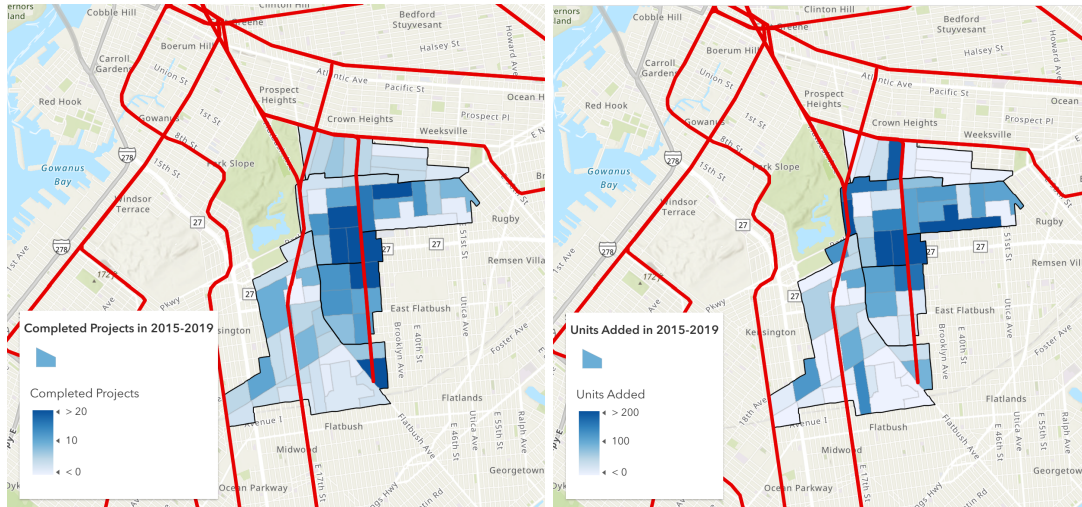


Fig 4.1-4.2. Completed projects and units added in relation to subway lines. Source: NYC Department of City Planning.

In addition to being clustered around housing and neighborhoods with more lenient zoning districts, the initial units of buildings constructed remained low across all neighborhoods, so likely, much of the large projects being seen in Erasmus and Lefferts Gardens were new construction rather than expansions of existing buildings (Table 3). This suggests that large construction projects tend to be targeted in a way that appeals to city policy, leveraging 421-a's tax credits for new buildings alongside consumer and legislative support for transit-oriented development.

	2010-2014	2015-2019
Crown Hts S	3.67	2.20
Erasmus	1.33	1.45
Flatbush	1.50	1.73
Prospect Lffrts Gdns Wingate	0.86	1.09

Table 3. Average initial projects completed between 2010-2019.

Source: NYC Department of City Planning

To understand the relationship between new housing developments and changes in demographics, I started by looking at changes in median home value and rent to understand if the neighborhoods had begun to price out their residents.

Median home values increased across the board, with all four neighborhoods experiencing growth higher than both Brooklyn and Black Brooklyn, which grew by 18.12% and 17.02%, respectively. While none of the neighborhoods south and east of Prospect Park surpassed the 27.51% growth of neighborhoods to the north, Crown Heights South and Flatbush came close with 26.01% and 24.38%, respectively (Table 3). However, t-tests comparing neighborhood growth to that of Brooklyn found that none of these neighborhoods displayed any significant increase.

	Period		
	2010-2014	2015-2019	Percent Change
Crown Hts S	721224	908800	26.01
Erasmus	426060	522600	22.66
Flatbush	623052	774900	24.38
Prospect Lffrts Gdns Wingate	482382	592750	22.88
North of Prospect Park	812376	1035900	27.51
Black Brooklyn	510516	603000	18.12
Brooklyn	637848	746400	17.02

Table 4. Change in median home value between 2010-2019 adjusted to 2019 dollars. Source: American Community Survey 5-year Estimates 2010-2014 2015-2019.

Similarly, all neighborhoods saw an increase in rent prices between periods. Erasmus and the neighborhoods north of Prospect Park saw the largest increase at 12.86% and 16.31%, respectively. Flatbush and Black Brooklyn both increased slightly more than all of Brooklyn, and Lefferts Garden and Crown Heights South increased less than all of Brooklyn (Table 4). Yet again, t-tests comparing the growth of individual neighborhoods to Brooklyn overall were not significant, indicating that these trends of higher growth could have occurred naturally.

	Period		
	2010-2014	2015-2019	Percent Change
Crown Hts S	1323	1391	5.14
Erasmus	1258.2	1420	12.86
Flatbush	1319.22	1431	8.47
Prospect Lffrts Gdns Wingate	1273.32	1348	5.86
North of Prospect Park	1753.92	2040	16.31
Black Brooklyn	1301.4	1412	8.50
Brooklyn	1346.76	1454	7.96

Table 5. Change in median rent between 2010-2019 adjusted to 2019 dollars. Source: American Community Survey 5-year Estimates 2010-2014 2015-2019.

Household incomes in all four neighborhoods remained below the average in Brooklyn, but increased substantially across the board. Lefferts Gardens had the largest increase at 25.01%, performing better than even the neighborhoods north of Prospect Park (Table 5). Yet again, none of these growths were significant in comparison to Brooklyn's overall growth, meaning that there was a greater than 1% chance that the differences in income increases could have occurred naturally.

		Period		
		2010-2014	2015-2019	Percent Change
Crown Hts S		44381.52	52885	19.16
Erasmus		48550.32	59470	22.49
Flatbush		49636.8	60222.5	21.33
Prospect Lffrts Gdns Wingate		43689.24	54653.5	25.01
North of Prospect Park		83721.06	100770.5	20.36
Black Brooklyn		48834.9	58875	20.56
Brooklyn		52270.38	61192	17.07

Table 6. Change in median household income between 2010-2019 adjusted to 2019 dollars. Source: American Community Survey 5-year Estimates 2010-2014 2015-2019.

Similar to the economic profile of these neighborhoods, the racial profile of neighborhoods to the south and east did not change significantly in comparison to Brooklyn. The percentage of the black population decreased the most in Crown Heights South by 7.06%, and decreased the least in Erasmus by only 2.76% (Table 6). Erasmus and Lefferts Gardens both had the highest percentage of black residents, but t-tests found their decrease to be non-significant in comparison with the rest of Brooklyn. A geographic view of the neighborhoods shows that the black population decreased by over 20% across many tracts, suggesting that the distribution might not be normal (Fig. 5). This prompted me to conduct rank sum tests for significance, which verified that the increases were still not statistically significant.

	2010-2014	2015-2019	Percent Change
Crown Hts S	63.90	56.84	-7.06
Erasmus	86.23	83.42	-2.79
Flatbush	48.51	46.30	-2.26
North of Prospect Park	37.81	32.31	-5.50
Prospect Lffrts Gdns Wingate	74.61	68.97	-5.64
Black Brooklyn	67.06	63.06	-4.00
Brooklyn	33.54	32.19	-5.64

Table 7. Change in total black population between 2010-2019. Source: American Community Survey 5-year Estimates 2010-2014 2015-2019.

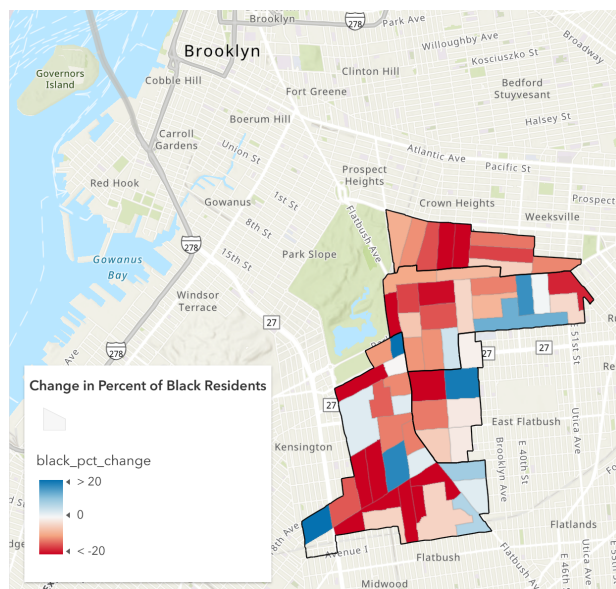


Fig 5. Change in percent of Black residents between 2010-2019. Source: American Community Survey 5-year Estimates 2010-2014 2015-2019.

Discussion

The lack of significant growth in comparison to Brooklyn across median home value, income, and rent highlights that the economic makeups of the neighborhoods south and east of Prospect Park have not dramatically changed in comparison to the rest of the borough. Even

neighborhoods with significant housing development, Lefferts Gardens and Erasmus, had relatively similar increases in household income and home values to Brooklyn overall.

Housing development did increase significantly in two neighborhoods, with the tracts that had the most added units and completed projects predominantly in the neighborhoods of Lefferts Gardens and Erasmus. While the zoning of these neighborhoods was varied, new construction clustered around subway lines and in zoning districts that allowed large multifamily buildings.

Ultimately, while the increased housing in Lefferts Gardens and Erasmus might indicate new developer activity, that activity did not express a significant effect on the neighborhoods' demographics. Average rent, home prices, and incomes increased in all selected neighborhoods, but not in a way that indicated a difference from the general trends of Brooklyn as a whole.

This study was limited by many issues, chiefly being that housing data on both units added and completed projects tends to have a significant amount of variance, with zoning laws, changing policy, and geographical differences within neighborhoods making it difficult to conduct inferential statistics, especially with a small number of observations. In practically every case, I struggled and was largely unsuccessful in trying to use methods like regression to examine relationships between variables. A larger dataset, through taking entries by census block or examining larger combinations of neighborhoods, might help to better identify relationships between new housing and a neighborhood's economic profile.

Furthermore, it's possible that a similar study with a larger time frame, for example, adding in 2020-2024 when the ACS is released this December, might be able to better understand the long-term effects of housing developments in these neighborhoods, especially if construction continues at the rates captured in this study. As it currently stands, I cannot

conclude that there exists a relationship between an observed growth in state-supported private development and gentrification.

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