

Conversations with Neighbors:
How residents in the South Dallas neighborhood
understand area change

A Thesis Presented to the faculty of
the Department of Sociology
The Colorado College

In partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Bachelor of the Arts

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March 2021

On my honor,
I have neither given nor received any unauthorized aid
on this thesis.

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March 2021

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This thesis would not be possible without the support of my amazing thesis advisor, Dr. Cayce Hughes. Dr. Hughes introduced me to urban sociology and sparked my love for the subject at the beginning of a truly unprecedented year. Throughout this year, Dr. Hughes has been a consistent mentor and advocate. His advice, revisions, and empathy were fundamental in the completion of this project. I would also like to thank my department advisor, Dr. Rojo, for her guidance throughout my time at CC and the entire department of sociology for continuing to excite me and teach me every day, inside and outside the classroom. Finally, thank you to my family and friends. To my mom and dad, I'm not sure what I would do without your love and consistent article referrals. Your enthusiasm never goes unnoticed. To my roommates, thanks for putting up with another thesis block. All of you inspire me daily. I am so beyond grateful to all the people in the Colorado College community who have helped me grow and learn both as a student and a person these past four years.

ABSTRACT

This study seeks to understand how residents of the South Dallas neighborhood in Dallas, Texas, a rapidly developing area, frame the changes occurring in their community. Applying Erving Goffman's (1974) "frame analysis," I interviewed seven South Dallas residents to hear how they constructed the realities of a neighborhood "on the cusp of change." Using qualitative analysis, I find that residents struggle with internal contradictions between what they value in the neighborhood and what they wish they saw. Although residents often frame their community in positive terms, they also demonstrate an awareness of the less desirable aspects and propose ways to improve them. By examining these tensions, this study contributes to existing literature on urban development and challenges the frequently over-simplified definition of gentrification. The study ultimately suggests that the conversations around urban development and gentrification are limited both in academic settings and popular cultural and argues that further in-depth, qualitative research is necessary to understand how residents create meaning amidst change.

Key Words: urban development, framing, tension, gentrification

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INTRODUCTION

As of October 2020, Texas ranked as the best state in the United States for Business for the 8th consecutive time (Office of the Governor 2020). Texas' favorable business climate with low taxes and low unemployment make its major cities, particularly Dallas, one of the most attractive places in the United States for business according to industry leaders (Forbes 2018). Dallas notably is the fourth largest metro in the United States with an abundance of talent, no state income tax, and affordable real estate that has cemented its reputation as a pro-business city (Forbes 2018). From downtown to suburbia, developers, politicians, and investors view Dallas as a place primed for growth and sprawl.

Given Dallas' reputation as pro-business and its continued and rapid development, it reflects a prime example of what scholars term a "growth machine" (Molotch and Logan 1987:13). The theoretical framework of the growth machine provides one explains of urban development through the lens of land as a commodity and the growth coalition as its traders. While the growth coalition may represent various interests from developers to politicians, the tacit agreement that urban growth is mutually beneficial from the top down has historically been the foundation of urban development. However, some have argued that the "growth at all costs" posture fails to represent the voices and interest of all urban residents, particularly those not involved in the bureaucratic discussions on development. As Jim Shutze (2020) writes for the Dallas Observer website, "the wolf is at the door in South Dallas." But how do residents of South Dallas understand that metaphorical wolf? How do they make sense of the changes around them? In this study, I use interviews with residents in the South Dallas neighborhood to highlight residents' complex, and at times, seemingly contradictory beliefs about South Dallas' change. Ultimately, I argue that regardless of what meaning is made, the tension between oneself and

one's community in that process is the perhaps the most important element to understand residents' experiences.

LITERATURE REVIEW

According to Molotch and Logan (1987), the growth machine is a set of actors that together encourage the public to favor growth and support “value-free development” that lets the market decide the value of the land (115). This theory suggests that the key actors at the core of the growth machine are city politicians, land elites, journalists, and investors who control the urban development agenda (Molotch and Logan 1987). Applied to the 21st century, the growth machine theory explains neo-liberal urban development that prioritizes capital potential such as multi-million-dollar parks lined with boutiques in already well-developed areas over less lucrative investment in needier communities (Knapp and Vojnovic 2013, Loughran 2014,). Rather than empower already existing neighborhoods, growth machine actors squeeze residents out of urban land to create capital gain for developers through low-cost land acquisition and building residences with proximity to downtown areas for future profit (Knapp and Vojnovic 2013).

One of the known byproducts of this kind of profit-driven urban development is gentrification. However, the concept of gentrification is notoriously difficult to define. Various academic conceptualizations range from generally positive associations of improvement to claims that gentrification reflects racism and facilitates displacement of disadvantaged groups (Doucet 2019, Keels et al. 2013). Historically, sociologists have framed gentrification in primarily negative terms that focus on social justice issue and unwelcome change. However, scholars disagree on what exactly “counts” as gentrified, and therefore which areas should be classified as gentrified (Badger 2014). For example, Michael Barton (2014) argues that there is a

lack of clarity in terms of which neighborhoods have been gentrified, what they look like, and how to identify them. Barton applies various academic definitions of gentrification to areas already labeled “gentrified,” to show how these definitions are imprecise. This work reveals the ways that even within urban sociological scholarship, our understandings of gentrification and urban growth, have multiple meanings (Barton 2014).

Outside of sociology, scholars in urban planning and anthropology have focused on “positive” aspects of gentrification that emphasize increased opportunities for racial minorities through more residential options, conceiving of gentrification as a necessary evil for improvement (Doucet 2019, Fairbanks 2020). Conflicting academic conceptualizations are informed by popular and cultural ideas and vice versa. Newspaper articles with titles such as, “The White People are Coming” promote stereotypes around new restaurants and organic grocery stores as signs of gentrification that are then utilized in academic spheres when looking for where gentrification is happening (Badger 2014, Harriot 2017). Pieces such as “5 Trendiest Dallas Neighborhoods,” exhort city residents to move to historically disinvested areas with the promise of independently owned boutiques and “lively social calendars,” all without acknowledging the history of the areas (Bennett 2019). In essence, no two people, academic or otherwise, define gentrification exactly the same way, and the connotation of the word makes people think of everything from displacement to improvement (Strong Towns 2018). While these associations are not necessarily wrong, they are limited in displaying the full complexities of urban development, particularly with regard to how urban residents understand these changes.

Among these complexities, there is a high level of variation in terms of how urban growth actually looks on the ground. On the one hand, urban growth- especially when it results in displacement- can have devastating effects on communities. Richard Appelbaum suggested in

1976, before the growth machine framework had even been articulated that urban growth has consequences including taxes, pollution, and social costs. He claims that these consequences are frequently ignored under a narrative that growth is a long-term investment for a city and ultimately beneficial; thus allowing large income differentials to be maintained among residents. Ten years later, Kirby and Lynch (1987) utilize a case study of Houston to show that the aftermath of rapid population includes pollution and hurricane vulnerability, both of which disproportionately impact low-income residents. Finally, more recently, Derek Hyra (2016) argues that the growth machine's demolition of public housing in order to create new urban developments is a direct cause of gentrification, which he argues has displaced many low-income residents of color.

However, on the other hand, urban growth can be promising for residents of changing neighborhoods. Positives of urban growth can include community investment, new resources and amenities, and even health benefits from newly developed spaces such as parks (Cole et al. 2019). Brian Doucet's (2019) case study of Detroit revealed that a city once seen as an urban failure now was called the "comeback city" thanks to pockets of gentrification. Yet even here, Doucet's work highlights contradictions. Doucet's in-depth analysis based on interviews with community leaders demonstrates two distinct narratives that community leaders espouse: one of gentrification as important for growth but with consequences needing to be managed, and the other, predominantly among Black activists, of gentrification as a "long continuum of racism and injustice" (646). Doucet also criticizes the tendency to declare Detroit as either an "urban failure" or a "comeback city," which he argues limits the possibility for critical analysis (634). Most importantly though, Doucet's article does not take a strong stance on either side and

concludes that there is a need for socially-just solutions while acknowledging the potential for improvement.

Similarly, in Lance Freeman's (2006) book *There Goes the 'Hood*, he writes that residents in gentrifying neighborhoods talk about the benefits that community investment brings such as grocery stores, increased values on their homes, new stores, and better restaurants. Contradicting prevailing assumptions about gentrification harms, residents in Freeman's study are pleased with some of the changes they observe in their neighborhood. They feel like their community had been neglected and the positive changes, such as drug stores, sushi restaurants, and retail, were beneficial for themselves and their neighbors. An important element of Freeman's book is that unlike many other more rigid approaches, Freeman comes in with the research agenda of understanding nuance and examining different perspectives. He writes, "despite the voluminous literature that has developed on gentrification in the past few decades, this is a vantage point that has been overlooked so far" (2006:2)." In taking this approach, Freeman allows residents to explain their own situations and discovers that where some scholars focus on the pure positive or the pure negative, the reality is fundamentally complex and requires an extremely detailed look at the context in which development is occurring. Following both Freeman and Doucet, I suggest that in order to truly understand the impact of urban development on communities, we must talk to residents.

Taking a ground-up approach to understand how urban residents make sense of development also sheds light on the ways people collectively resist development. Though the growth machine is powerful, instances of resistance to these phenomena and to the disruption that development can bring to existing communities come in various forms. For example, in the development of the Oceanside Resort project in Hawai'i, community members used state-level

preservation laws, native burial protections, and social justice focused ways of understanding the land as sacred to resist the project (Darrah-Okike 2017). By altering the way the community understood the project, local resistance movements were able to highlight that Oceanside was not ultimately a development for community good but rather a growth machine project that threatened to destroy sacred lands and bring tourism to the still-rural side of the big island (2017). By challenging the “well-recognized growth machine strategy that development is broadly beneficial for the community while hiding the private benefits” (2017:444), the community changed the collective understanding of the Oceanside project from value-free development which is market controlled to a collective understanding based on native Hawai’ian social movements, and ultimately impacted the outcome of the entire project. The use of community benefits agreements and value-conscious growth are additional alternative approaches that residents have utilized to disrupt the growth machine and challenge displacement (Cain 2014). For example, residents can use legally binding contracts with developers that are not just intended to oppose an urban project but rather to shape it (Cain 2014:943). While community benefits agreements are steps in challenging the value-free framework to a more value-conscious framework, they do not fundamentally change the urban growth machine; rather, they attempt to move its consciousness away from the market and towards the community (Cain 2014).

The previous examples demonstrate the importance of looking at how communities make meaning in terms of urban development and the ways communities use these particular frameworks to make sense of- and at times to alter the outcomes of-- urban projects. In this project, I draw on Erving Goffman’s (1972) frame analysis to examine how residents and other stakeholders in South Houston frame development. Goffman argues that people understand and

organize their experiences in terms of a variety of frames of reference. According to Goffman, social situations and occurrences are understood through frames that help us create meaning. Frames can vary depending on context and transform in different situations meaning they may represent a different understanding of the same reality. Similar to how a person is made up of “loosely integrated characters and roles,” society and reality are as well “loosely integrated frames-- traffic systems, ritual systems, bodily manipulatory systems, religious systems, etc.” that work together to create the whole we perceive as reality (Davis 1975:601). The value in understanding the frames others use is that it helps us to understand how people make sense of complexities. By contextualizing frames in light of the external forces that shape these realities, it is possible to evaluate and even potentially subvert existing systems of power and influence in society. As in the example of the Oceanside project, when the frames of the Hawai’ian residents shifted due to new information about the truth of the development, the outcome of the resort project changed. Frames are thus valuable because they allow us to understand the shared understandings among groups and how they arrived at that understanding, which paves the way for examining possibilities for a shift in that understanding that could lead to a different outcome.

Goffman’s frame analysis an especially useful approach to study how communities understand the complexities of urban developments and gentrification. In Saracino and Rumpf’s (2011) study on the “Diverse Imageries of Gentrification,” they found that the representations of gentrification in newspapers were extremely varied depending on a variety of factors including the time period, who the residents and the gentrifies were, and the stages of gentrification. Their study demonstrates the variances among meaning making in terms of gentrification based on who the frame holder is, what their interests are, and the extent to which they were involved in

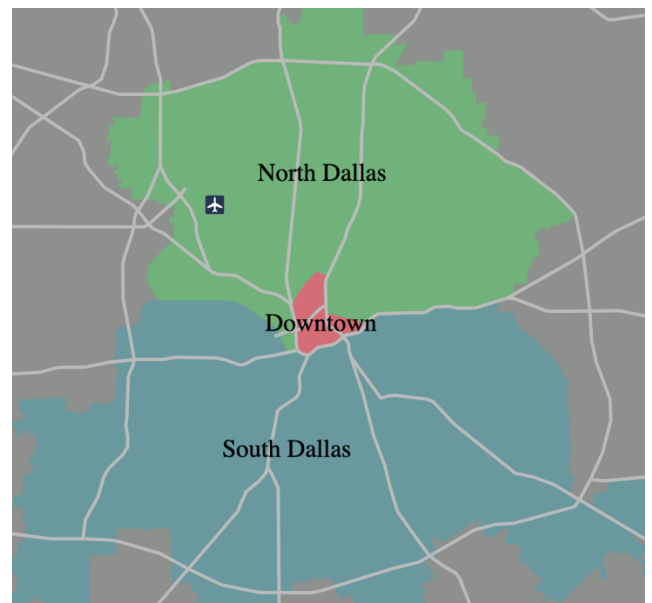
the community. Through frame analysis, it is possible to identify a narrower set of social understandings even among groups with high levels of variation in personal identity.

In Dallas, agents of the growth machine, specifically developers and realtors, have set their sights on Dallas’ oldest historically Black neighborhood: South Dallas. The South Dallas neighborhood is far poorer, has a higher Black population, and disinvested than the rest of Dallas (Census Reporter 2020). However, its land value has risen astronomically in the past 5 years (Schutze 2019). As the “last place to develop” in Dallas. South Dallas is on the brink of massive buy-outs, an influx of new residents, and property tax increases. In this study, I aim to understand how current residents of South Dallas frame the rapidly changing neighborhood in which they live. As change becomes more imminent and the perceived risk of displacement increases, what frames do residents of South Dallas use to understand these changes, what do these changes mean to them, and how are the tensions and complexity of urban development expressed by each resident?

BACKGROUND

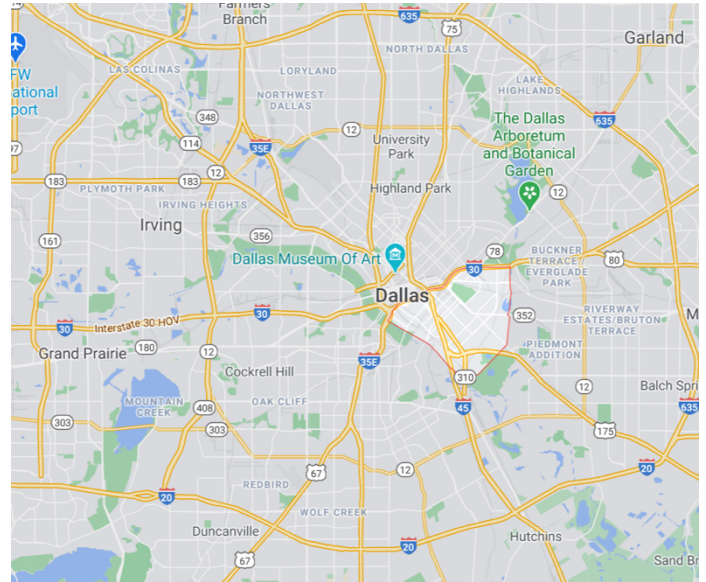
South Dallas, bordered to the North by I-30 and on either side by the Trinity River and the Trinity Forest, is an expansive area that consists of roughly six unique neighborhoods belonging to the “southern sector.” Though incorrectly, many Dallas residents and the media refer to South Dallas as the entire southern half of Dallas (Black

Figure 1: Map of Dallas



in Dallas N.d.) However, true South Dallas, also known as “South Dallas Proper,” is just south east of Downtown and contains fair grounds for the State Fair of Texas. The area is bordered by other southern sector communities that reflect similar demographic make-up in terms of largely low income and Latino and Black residents.

Figure 2: Map of Dallas- South Dallas Proper Highlighted



South Dallas, a historically Black neighborhood, is filled with a rich history far beyond the grounds of Fair Park and the current stereotypes of blight and despair. Due to the conscious placement of railroads (and now freeways), South Dallas was and still is quite literally cut off from predominantly white neighborhoods (Holliday 2017). The influence of the Ku Klux Klan and racist city government dominated Dallas in the early 1900s and gave Black citizens little to no opportunity to participate in white life in North Dallas. Though highly segregated into the 1950s, South Dallas was a vibrant community that prospered from the internal patronizing of Black business within the community, which created a vital urban area with streets filled with music and nightlife (Weflen 2016). However, as enforced integration arrived, money that could have been reinvested into the area was instead used in the Downtown area to support businesses and individuals living whiter, more affluent North Dallas. Rather than shopping at local stores with limited assortments, South Dallas residents began to gravitate towards Downtown resources (Weflen 2016). Due to the

¹Figure 1 and Figure 2 both show maps of Dallas. Figure 1 shows the area commonly referred to as South Dallas, everything under I-30 (the middle road traveling east to west.) Figure 2 shows Dallas with an illuminated portion. That area is the South Dallas Proper neighborhood and includes a green patch which is fair park.

decline of the neighborhood as a result of economic withdrawal, the introduction of drugs, and the growing number of home vacancies, the city of Dallas chose to invest in the North and thus, as collateral, South Dallas was left behind.

From floods in the late 1980s to housing project destruction in the 2000s and illegal dumping as recently as last year, the city of Dallas has to this point failed to redevelop South Dallas in a meaningful way for existing residents (Fears 2020, Weflen 2016). The catalyst for positive community reform came from residents within. Neighborhood organizations, community developers, churches, and non-profits have led the charge for revitalization and the celebration of historic citizens from Juanita Craft to members of the Ray Charles band. However, as South Dallas and its surroundings work to maintain and improve the existing community, many say that change from the outside is on the horizon or already happening. Pockets of gated housing communities and massive land redevelopment signal that new residents and new priorities are coming (Weflen 2016). As Reverend Gerald Britt, the founding leader of Dallas Area Interfaith noted in a documentary on Bonton, a neighborhood in the southern sector, revitalization and changing the neighborhood requires new people, new blood, and new green (Weflen 2016). Though opinions are mixed on feelings towards this potential, the overwhelming sentiment is that change is coming to South Dallas whether residents like it or not.

METHODS

This study draws on 7 in-depth, semi-structured interviews that I conducted with South Dallas residents and organizers connected to the South Dallas neighborhood (Table 1). I chose semi-structured interviews because this method gave participants room to emphasize topics most pertinent to them as well as dive into deeper detail on questions that they felt needed more expansion. By conducting in-depth interviews, I was able to explore complicated issues with

individuals and gather information about what shared perspectives and frames people used to understand topics around urban development and gentrification. Due to the inductive nature of the study, the in-depth interviews also presented the opportunity for new information to reveal itself that had not been thought of before or known to me as a researcher (Lofland 2006). As Small (2009) writes, one of the biggest benefits to qualitative work is the “possibility of truly emergent knowledge” (24). In-depth interviews are effective for understanding complexities, particularly related to difficult subjects, like gentrification, because they give participants space to voice nuances that would not be captured in close-ended survey responses (Freeman 2006).

Positionality

Even though I am a Dallas native, I was not born in South Dallas. I grew up in University Park which is an extremely affluent, predominantly White neighborhood in North Dallas. In all of my interviews, I disclosed this information if I was asked and explained that while these were my roots, my intentions with the project were to expand my understanding of South Dallas and give residents an opportunity to tell me about themselves and their neighborhood through their eyes. I was able to build rapport through sampling through mutual connections and attempted to mitigate any assumptions residents might make of me based on my background through intentional honesty. In order to create a relationship, I always introduced myself and gave each participant time at the beginning to ask about my motivations. As I wrote my results, I focused on what I was told and what I learned to maintain as much objectivity as possible and to not allow any preconceived notions of what I *thought* South Dallas was cloud my research.

Sample

I utilized both convenience and snowball sampling in order to find residents of South Dallas who were able to participate. I looked for residents over the age of 18 who lived in South

Dallas proper, particularly around Fair Park, and South Dallas proper. I prioritized finding residents of diverse backgrounds including but not limited to race, socioeconomic status, education and hometown in order to hear opinions that differed and represented distinct opinions due to influencing factors of identity. I recruited participants by posting in community Facebook groups that were geared towards social issues as well as through contacts from a former boss who worked with a South Dallas community organization. This person connected me with parents of students in her program and from those initial interviews, I was referred to others who were potentially interested in being interviewed. While the sample was not random and the N was small, my method is appropriate given my interest in depth of meaning as opposed to generalizability.

Data Collection

I divided the interview into two sections. The first was focused on who each participant was and their connection to South Dallas other than simply being a resident: for example, if they worked for a non-profit in the area, had kids, or went to church in South Dallas. The second section focused on what changes they observed, how they interpreted these changes, and what else they desired to see happen in the neighborhood. I deliberately did not use the word “gentrification” in my questioning, because I felt like it is a word connected to strong opinions that could potentially shape the way my respondents responded. The semi-structured interview guide also allowed me to abandon questions that felt less important based on each interview. While I initially wrote an interview guide that was different between residents and community organizers, I found that the community organizers I spoke to were also community residents so I used nearly the same guide for all participants and included additional questions such as “what is your work in the community?” for those who identified with the community organizer/activist

title. The use of snowball sampling helped me create rapport before even meeting participants by sharing a mutual connection between the new participant and the old participant that recommended my study (Vargas 2016). This study was approved by the IRB and all participants voluntarily agreed as documented by a consent form. The interviews were conducted in a two-month period between January and March 2021 via zoom due to the COVID-19 pandemic. All interviews were recorded on a laptop and cellphone and then transcribed verbatim.

Data Analysis

Due to the small sample size, I chose to code all interviews by hand on paper. After open-coding the transcribed interviews by hand, I put them into Microsoft Word and used the comments feature to code. I used open coding initially to examine general “themes, ideas, [...] and concepts” so that I could later refine the analysis (Taylor, et al. 2015:172). I conducted three rounds of coding. The first round generated 27 total codes broken into a few major categories: physical space (public spaces, blight, housing), neighborhood resources (food, education), people (age, finances, race, family), and perceptions (of new places, infrastructure, change). The second round of coding used the existing codes but I added “positive” and “negative” which allowed me to distinguish how people felt about the initial codes. While all 7 interviews were transcribed, in the second round of coding I listened to the interviews simultaneously so that I was able to code for the opinion of the neighborhood based on voice inflection, connotation, or laughing that I was not able to capture in the transcription. After coding all of the interviews, four major themes emerged: residents’ values, perceptions of what needed to be changed, perceptions about existing changes, and residents’ visions for the future. After identifying these themes, I re-coded the interviews a third and final time to examine these themes across and within participants. In order to protect anonymity, I changed all names and minor details of participants.

RESULTS

Getting to Know the Residents

The residents I spoke with had roles as teachers, judges, pastors, nail techs, dental assistants, artists, mothers, fathers, daughters, non-profit managers, and community activists. Nearly all participants filled more than one of these roles as a primary part of their lives and lived or worked intimately with South Dallas proper. For those who lived in South Oak Cliff or a bit farther West, their work, children, or property kept them connected to the area. From those living pay-check to pay-check to those in the top 10%, each interviewee came with a unique story and represented ages 26-60 and ethnic identities including Black, Hispanic, and white.

Table 1. Participant information

<u>Name</u>	<u>Race/Ethnicity</u>²	<u>Birth Place</u>	<u>Age</u>	<u>Occupation</u>	<u>Children</u>	<u>Household Income</u>
Daniella	Hispanic	Dallas	26	Entrepreneur	No	N/A
Belinda	Hispanic	Mexico	47	Dental Assistant	Yes	75k
Elaine	White	Dallas Suburbs	58	Teacher	Yes	110k
Kayla	African-American	Dallas	36	Artist	No	50k
Wendy	White	Deep South	62	Nail Technician	No	160k
Nathan	African-American	Dallas	42	Community Leader/ Judge	Yes	N/A
Kyle	African-American	Dallas	46	Community Center Manager	N/A	200k

A Valuable Place

Throughout each of my conversations with South Dallas area residents, from South Oak Cliff to West Fair Park, I asked about change, about people, and about place. I dug deep into

² All race/ethnicity are based on what participants self-reported.

residents' pasts and asked about their perceptions of the future, each time making sure to return back to the topic at hand: their communities. As each resident spoke to me about who they were and where they position themselves, I couldn't help but ask the question "why South Dallas?," both in why they chose to move there and why they chose to stay. With a community often portrayed in the media as filled with crime and drugs, the emphasis residents put on the positive value of the community was tremendous.

On the whole, residents refused to subscribe to the limited and stereotyped story that Dallas media and North Dallas residents give the area. All of the residents touched on the value of the history of the area or fun facts that made them feel more connected to the place that they lived. Kayla, a native to South Dallas who now works with nonprofits in the area, reminisced on the history of Fair Park talking about a photo exhibition that displayed the KKK on the fairgrounds of the state fair. She said:

I was just kinda like, wow, I like right here. I remember there was a time when Black people had their own day at the fair, you know. Years ago I probably wouldn't actually be here in this space. I love it over here. It's got all that crazy history, but what place in America doesn't, you know? And, I just, I just love it, I really do.

Following her sentiments on the "crazy history" that she attributes to her love as well as the connection fair park has to the nation, Kayla reminded me that while it is filled with that history it also has so much "beauty and nobody ever goes to that park. It's weird and sad to me that the women's museum is shut down [and] the African-American museum has weird hours. I really want to talk about revitalizing the park." The complexity of a place with a tremendous history of racial tension combined with the beauty of a nearly unused public space was echoed in other conversations.

Elaine, a mom of two now-grown children, said "we accessed Fair Park a lot, which I would recommend to anybody. People get really scared of it, but it's one of the best places." She

found that “South Dallas has such a history that people have no idea [about].” Crediting people’s fear of Fair Park to ignorance, Elaine added that “Fair Park was actually the hub of the Jewish community for a long time, which is fascinating. I realized there’s just a lack of understanding, or maybe it’s a lack of interest.” Elaine and Kayla both demonstrated the value they place on the history of space and the way race and negative stereotypes have contributed not only to the underutilization of the gigantic urban space, but also the under valuing of the area itself. Loughran’s (2017) article on race and natural spaces articulates these phenomena as fairly common. After World War II when urban parks no longer symbolized white leisure and nature due to urban disinvestment and suburban growth, they became integrated into cities and thus racialized with “tropes of crime and disorder” (1958). The racialization of the “urban-environmental relationship” continues today to deter visitors based on perceived fears (2017:1962).

Outside of the Fair Park space, residents also valued the history of the area as a whole.

Nathan described:

The history of South Dallas is not purely just African-American, the history of South Dallas [includes] the guy who created Beverly Hills 90210, Aaron Spelling, and Neiman Marcus. You have other people who have South Dallas roots, MLK was in South Dallas at one time just to preach.

Nathan connected the famous names from South Dallas to his personal life, noting how he and his family have lived there for decades, and tells me that he valued the “fighters” who pushed through the history of drugs and crime to strive for community unity. Nathan also rejected the stereotype that it is an only Black Space which historically has been used as justification for disinvestment (Mitchell 2018). For Nathan, he highlighted the positives in history not only of famous legacies but also the way that historic adversity has united and strengthened the area.

Born from this complex history, the South Dallas neighborhood is a place many residents value for its sense of community. Elaine contrasted her experience growing up outside of Dallas in a primarily conservative suburb to her life now in South Dallas:

One of my favorite things about living there is that I never, I am never scared about what my neighbors think of me. Nobody cares. Everybody's just trying to eek out a living. [...] And you know how I said I grew up in the suburbs? Nobody cares in [South Dallas] what kind of car you drive. Nobody cares about how much money you make.

Elaine painted a picture of South Dallas as a welcoming environment but perhaps more importantly verbalized what she believed are the values of the Dallas suburbs. For Elaine, she preferred to live in an area where her neighbors are less concerned with her financial standing. Continuing, Elaine said, "it felt like we had more social freedom, you know? [...] When you're in a lower income neighborhood, people really care about who you are. They don't ask where your kids go to school? Where do you work? Where do you buy clothes? Nobody cares." Rather than interpret her neighbors as nosy or critical, Elaine felt more socially at ease in a less affluent area. Belinda, a resident for the past 22 years, also appreciated what she perceived as a judgement-free community. Belinda told me that when she has parties with loud music her neighbors always say "no, no don't worry about it. We're going to be outside just listening to the music, just enjoy it." Elaine stated nearly an identical observation that she "always has huge parties and nobody cares where your car is parked."

What struck me about Elaine and Belinda's responses was the emphasis on "the who" are the people rather than what they have. These two women perceived the judgement-free community as a space for residents to get to know one another and felt supported without being constrained by the prioritization of material wealth. While others may not find the community judgement free, it is interesting how some residents prefer the value of getting to know their neighbor over the value of the amenities a wealthier neighborhood would have. Though this is

only a hypothesis based on my own experiences, I believe that should this same question have been asked to those in my North Dallas neighborhood, the answer would reflect the valuation of material status that defines the Park Cities and Preston Hollow life.

Belinda particularly valued the area when reflecting on her experiences with the pandemic:

Right now, with the pandemic, there's places where you can go get groceries and [the neighbors] are always posting, 'Don't forget, there's going to be groceries in this area from this time to this time. So, if you're in need, stop by.' and so yeah, it's very, very positive.

Belinda praised the way the community came together in times of hardship to support one another and connected that sentiment to the lack of judgement from others for needing help.

Belinda and Elaine's comments demonstrate a belief that not having the resources for necessities or even accessories are something one typically *should* be ashamed of. In either instance, there was an underlying assumption that the kindness felt in the neighborhood was connected to a lower socio-economic status and that they perceived the community as supportive given that unifying factor.

In a broader sense, respondents continually referenced the "culture" of the area and the need to maintain that community culture as a key element of South Dallas. As he looked towards the future, Kyle told me that he hopes "South Dallas is able to maintain its cultural identity as being a primarily African-American community that is rich in the history and rich in the culture." The culture he spoke of connects back to Nathan's sentiments on the culture of "fighters." However, a tension is revealed here in the non-specific usage of "the cultural identity." On the one hand, the cultural identity of the area remains a point of pride for many as well as the way it is connected to history. On the other hand, residents varied understandings of what that identity is. If it was based in history, then Nathan and Kyle diverged on the fact of whether or not it is a

primarily Black community. Though evidently important for some residents, the vague nature of the cultural identity demonstrates a conflict between residents and within themselves.

Finally, straying away a bit from the “who” in South Dallas, many residents valued the proximity the area has to Downtown and the physical accessibility to the rest of Dallas. Wendy, a Deep South transplant to Texas, expressed that “its proximity to the downtown is so valuable.” Wendy focused on the connection between the geographic location and the value added both to her personal life as well as the financial prosperity of her home. Similarly, Daniella noted how other “up and coming neighborhoods,” such as Bishop Arts, are close to her home and as they expand geographic, her property value will increase. Explaining the situation, she told me that the expansion of other areas “means the property that I have is going to be awesome.” However, she separated herself from those in the area who are not as financially secure and noted that the value increase and proximity to other Dallas neighborhoods was sometimes a “bit of a double edge sword.” Lastly, Elaine valued the proximity for recreational reasons: “I really love being so close to downtown, and that I want to use the DART, we actually can and it’s super easy and super safe. [...] There really are a lot of places that are within 10 minutes.” From the Trinity River to the Arts District, South Dallas’ proximity to the rest of the city positions it as a unique area that gives both current residents access to city life as well as hopeful homeowners a stake in the increase in value on their homes. Ultimately, the residents all found a reason or reasons to value the South Dallas neighborhood. However, what they appreciated was highly dependent on who they were particularly in terms of valuing community versus valuing property.

Ways to Improve

Much like any neighborhood, South Dallas residents both new and old wished that a variety of things would change. There were primarily two categories for this desired change. The

first focused more on basic material resources such as improved schools, access to groceries, the environment, and the investment of financial resources for programs like housing and addiction recovery. The second category of desired change tended to reflect non-essential services such as retail and the “look” of the area. An interesting note here before I discuss what residents wanted goes back to the root of my project. While there were two participants who both stated that they wanted to improve “problems” with drugs, the connotation of the desired change was notably different. I attribute this primarily to background and socio-economic status. As I continue, I will demonstrate that though people may want the same things changed, the reasons behind them can be contrasting.

The first change that every single resident referred to was the need to improve the schools, and many highlighted the differences between schools in South and North Dallas. Nathan remarked “education is key” while Daniella stated nearly the same sentiment: “education is the bottom line.” Daniella told me of a stereotype that she hears around saying that “Some people would describe [DISD] as a dumping ground.” Elaine, who decided to homeschool her children, remembered a story when she and her husband went to visit the elementary school across the street from her house: “The principal said ‘we’re just happy if when they leave sixth grade that they’re not pregnant or in a gang.’ [...] The way that they’re treated at the elementary school behind my house, was like prisoners.” The trouble with this principal’s assessments is that they are both accurate and misinformed. While not a single open enrollment high school in DISD is ranked in the top 25 compared to surrounding suburbs, the selective enrollment schools such as those for the gifted and talented or for the performing arts rank extremely highly in terms of graduation rate, standardized tests, and AP classes taken (Ballinger 2020). Nathan touched on

this complexity by telling me how the public schools are not as strong but the options for charter, private, and magnet schools from South Dallas are still quality options for kids in the area.

While many residents are aware of these possibilities, Elaine still lamented the difference she saw between where she teaches in North Dallas versus the school near her house. “The way the kids are treated, say, here (in reference to the school she works at), is a very sweet, sweet wonderful school.” She continued that “kids are poor [in my neighborhood] and just because they come from tough backgrounds, I just don’t believe you have to treat kids like that.”

Even outside of the public-school options that provide better educational opportunities for South Dallas residents, Elaine’s sentiments on the differences between education North to South were again emphasized by Belinda who told me that in her neighborhood “they don’t have the same level of education as the people in North Dallas.” Kyle told me that in South Dallas there are “a few hundred students in those schools as opposed to a couple of thousand in some of the surrounding schools and in other parts of town.” Crediting this to the lack of investment in education as well as the appearance of private schools and charter schools, Kyle highlighted the ways in which South Dallas residents who are not wealthy enough to afford supplemental educational are at a clear disadvantage. Kayla said that if she could change one thing it would be “more access to education, educational services you know, because not everything they’re going to get in the school.” Yet again the shortcomings of South Dallas schools as a part of the greater DISD “dumping ground” were emphasized in what needs to change. Even Wendy, who has no children of her own and has never attended school in Dallas speculated that “the school system, I don’t think, is the greatest down here.” All of these assessments of what is happening with South Dallas demonstrated the most unified opinion between all respondents in terms of a definite need for improvement. Though there was strong variation among all participants on the vast majority

of questions, consistently schools and the stereotypes around South Dallas schools, particularly DISD schools, were a recurring theme.

Hand in hand with education as a basic human right was the need to change the food landscape. To put it simply, Kyle told me “South Dallas is the true food desert.” His frank assessment of the accessibility of food in South Dallas could not be more accurate. In South Dallas, there is one Fiesta, a Save-a-Lot, some convenience stores, and a community farm. Though it does depend on whether or not you live in South Dallas proper or a bit outside, the majority of respondents echoed similar observations. Kayla told me:

I don't go grocery shopping really in my neighborhood. I go down the street to Lakewood. [...] South Dallas doesn't have that many options or great grocery stores. I personally just have the Fiesta down the street, which a lot of people are okay with, some are not, but I don't want to just go to Fiesta.

Kayla's response indicated that she was conscientious of the difference in opinion among her neighbors.

One interesting nuance in the views of two residents, Belinda and Wendy, was the distinction between the cleanliness of the grocery stores. Wendy preferred to go shopping at Casa Linda in order to find a non-Fiesta grocery store and noted that “it seems safer, cleaner” outside of the neighborhood. In the same vein, Belinda said that “When you go to a grocery store over there by North Dallas, everything is different. I mean clean, all of them are clean. I can tell you that Tom Thumb is cleaner than Fiesta.” This distinction in the way the stores *are*, not just which stores are available, demonstrates how South Dallas residents don't just desire a change in the diversity of establishments to do their shopping but also an improvement in the quality of the existing stores.

Lastly, residents mentioned a variety of community concerns around drugs, joblessness, homelessness and perceived safety. I chose to use the term perceived safety because residents

primarily spoke of their observations of how safe they were based on the physical environment rather than direct experiences in unsafe situations. The variance in terms of perspectives on the need to change the current drug and homeless situations is reminiscent of the sociological idea of a private trouble vs a public issue (Mills 1959). While some blamed the individuals, who had turned to drugs or crime, others focused more on the chronic disinvestment and systemic issues that got them to that point. One possible reason for this difference in views is length of time in the area. As you will see, a newer resident was inclined to focus on the individuals where as a long-time resident and community leader talked about the bigger picture he saw.

Wendy who is a newer resident of the neighborhood, said that:

“I don't feel safe. There seems to be a lot of drug activity and heavy Hispanic and Black communities and even the fast food and the drug stores I try to not [go]. But I will, and never had any incidents or anything, but it doesn't feel comfortable, especially after dark.”

When I asked further to explain what “drug activity” meant, she said that “I see signs of both (referring to meth and heroin) and some ‘homeless’ are on my exit every day, every single day.”

This assessment of safety signaled to me that her desire for an improvement in safety is motivated by appearances rather than lived experiences, given the fact that she personally has never had any “incidents”. It seemed that she interpreted the drug use as well as the population of those without homes as a reason for the area being unsafe. An alternative approach to the same issue was taken by Nathan. Nathan told me the story about how his father's car was robbed by someone they knew was on drugs. He carefully articulated however that “sadly, the drug houses sometimes are easier shut down than getting people help. Because getting people help is resources.” While Nathan did not hide the fact that the community had struggled with drugs, he emphasized the difficulties in getting tangible resources to change that issue. Ultimately, the

neighborhood does suffer from some of the pitfalls of chronic disinvestment as noted by the area residents. However, the solutions and changes that they want may not yet be on the way.

Changes in Motion

As a neighborhood “on the cusp of changing overnight,” in the words of Kayla, certain changes have already begun to occur. Though the timeline and what the changes are differed substantially among respondents, the resounding agreement was that change is here and opinions were mixed. While I never used the word gentrification in my own questioning, certain residents brought it up on their own.

Throughout my interview with Daniella, she primarily focused on herself and her life and repeatedly tried to distance herself from others in her neighborhood. She said to me “you know, I could speak like an uneducated person. Or some people say ratchet. [...] Even when I look at the area I grew up in and the people around me, they do not speak the way I speak.” The distinguishing between herself and her neighbors continued as I asked what changes she was seeing. She began by using the term “facelift” repeatedly in terms of new establishments such as an LA Fitness Center. She also referenced Bishop Arts and said that it “is providing culture and some people in [South Dallas] say that we are getting gentrified.” Going on to tell me “I will never be a victim of any kind because my mind is strong,” the connection she made between aesthetics, distancing herself from her neighbors, and the fact that change would not make her a victim was a unique position among all my participants. Generally, Daniella referred to the positives of what she called gentrification and framed it as “extra classy.” She used the term “facelift” six total times in our interview together. This word choice and distinction she gave herself from her neighbors signaled to me that while she was from Oak Cliff, she framed the change as for her but not necessarily for her neighborhood. In repeatedly accrediting her “not

being a victim” to her mind and education, I believe that she framed this change as a reflection of herself. In Wacquant’s (2007) work on territorial stigma, he discusses how areas deemed as “penalized spaces,” which are “traditionally associated with poverty and ethnic origin or postcolonial immigrant status,” such as the South Dallas neighborhood, become areas that mark dishonor or stigmatized as urban outcasts (67). Wacquant notes that thus residents of those areas “commonly hide their address [...] and feel compelled to make excuses for residing in an infamous locale” (2007:68). While Daniella was open about where she is from, she made a point to distinguish herself from the rest of the “territory” based on education and her use of language.

Other residents tended to be more specific on the type of change that they were seeing and how they felt about it. Specifically, housing was a subject that came up time and time again. Belinda told me about how her neighborhood used to be:

There were a lot of apartment complexes that were demolished and they built brand new solar houses. In those apartments, only Hispanic people used to live. Now that they’ve built all the solar houses, there’s suddenly white people living there with young little kids. So it’s been even more peaceful. [...] Mexican people you know are loud. We like to party. It was loud and a lot of traffic because apartment complexes are a lot of people. Now they’re just one floor solar houses and it’s more peaceful than it used to be.

When asked how she felt about the new development she said, “I like it now.” As we continued the interview she recounted that the city notified her that she needed to paint her house because “it didn’t look presentable” in the context of new neighborhood homes. Living paycheck to paycheck, she worried about how she would afford it. However, as we continued again she mentioned how peaceful the area was and the benefits of new housing, including that the influx of white residents attracted the police. Belinda represents what Kyle referred to as the “mix-bag” of opinions on change. While single family homes created a quieter area and increased police responsiveness, it also created a financial burden when something non-essential like painting a house became necessary to remain a part of the neighborhood. Additionally, Belinda, similar to

Daniella, separated herself from those who lived in the apartments. While commenting that Mexican people were loud and thus more disruptive than the white home owners, she also identified as Mexican. In this way, it seems like she was distancing herself as a member of that group given the criticism of the loud noise and traffic as not to implicate herself within the negative remarks. Both Belinda and Daniella revealed a tension in their comments between who they believe they are and what they believe their neighborhood is.

In terms of who is living in the neighborhood, Elaine told me that “it really has changed from being a white neighborhood in the 70s and then to a mixed neighborhood of white and Black and then changing with the new immigrant community.” As a long-time resident, Elaine told me that she knew it changed to a primarily Central American community “when we got a Fiesta, and you can just tell when you go down [road] that everything is in Spanish.” Though her community has changed over the years in terms of who is living there, she laughed about how poor her Spanish is but how it makes her happy to be in a mixed community. Elaine also talked at length about how the city infrastructure has changed:

When we first moved to the house we live in now, it’s like everything had shut down and then there was this resurgence and they put money into bringing more stores. Now there’s a neighborhood Walmart [...] and we got a DART station³, three dart stations, which was wonderful.

Elaine said to me that in terms of the changes, “I see them as wonderful.” The changes of resources were welcome contributions to the area she lives in and improved transportation with the DART making her commute to Downtown that much easier. However, she also discursively distanced herself from the community. I specifically inquired if she felt that the DART station

³ DART is the Dallas Area Rapid Transit that is Dallas’ public transport system that runs commuter rails, city buses, and most famously the light rail. Elaine references the light rail system that has four active lines connecting the Dallas metroplex. DART stations increase residents’ ability to travel without a car throughout Dallas in a fast and economical way (DART, 2021).

was benefiting the community that lives there right now and she quickly came back with “Absolutely not, because what happens with gentrification?” Elaine told me that her husband was totally different than she was and that he hated the talk on home values concluding that “I know what happens with gentrification.” This distinction she made between herself and the neighborhood as well as even herself and her husband yet again emphasizes the tendency to distance oneself from change that could be seen as hurting one’s community but benefitting oneself. Elaine also demonstrated the moral conflict that many feel. As Freeman (2006) wrote, “if gentrification were a movie character, he would be both a villain and knight in shining armor [...] dreaded and welcomed at the same time by the same people” (60). While there wasn’t anything inherently wrong with her new Walmart or better transportation, the sign that possibly displacing change was coming puts her and other residents in a tough spot to reconcile differences between community improvement and community destruction.

Take Nathan’s assessment of another transportation development:

The SM Wright won’t be there anymore, the SM Wright Freeway. So it is not going to cut through South Dallas. It’s just going to be 45 which they already made that connection where I can bypass South Dallas. And, you know, you just have those items that are hurtful.

The SM Wright Freeway was built after World War II and cut the predominantly minority neighborhood of Southern Dallas in half. The freeway will be transformed into a six-lane boulevard and the freeway-to-freeway connection from I-45 to I-75 will be moved (TDOT, 2020). While the project website says that it will “reknit an African-American neighborhood that was divided when constructed in the 1950s,” Nathan feared that the project would make it possible for people to travel throughout Dallas without ever having to enter South Dallas (Moore 2018). He said that “the neighborhood is changing and nothing’s wrong with change, what’s wrong is displacement of people and for no good reason.” Nathan’s statement embodies the fears

of many acknowledging that change is not inherently bad. He continued to focus our conversation on the positives. While he said that there was some improvement in the schools and some investment from the city, he predominantly focused on the future and the possibility. Nathan told me “I just know that South Dallas can be that beacon for excellence. And it does not have to be a Black community. I want to say that it needs to be a community of color and of color means the rainbow, every color, not just Black and Latino, but every color.” Even as I press for his opinions on the change, Nathan remained firm in his belief that the change was inevitable and thus the need was for the community to unite and advocate for themselves. Unlike the previous conversations, Nathan framed change outside of himself. He framed changes as an inevitable that could create prosperity but only as long as the focus was on the community.

While Nathan discussed the physical aspects of change, Kayla said, “I feel like sometimes you start to see the residents change first and then you start seeing other things pop up.” Elaine referred to this in terms of her neighborhood incorporating more Spanish elements; however, Kayla highlighted what she sees as the other telling sign of change: a Starbucks. She laughed while saying “There’s a Starbucks now, you know? [...] I’m like Starbucks... I’m not saying that this Starbucks isn’t for everybody, but it’s definitely not like, you know, you can just tell, it’s not for the people that already live here.” As I asked who was moving in and how she knew they’re new, she asserts “they’re not Black or brown.” The racialized nature of this revelation is a reality that much of Dallas faces. There are Black neighborhoods, brown neighborhoods, and white neighborhoods, and as one of the most segregated cities in the United States they do not mix often unless change is on the way (Urban Institute 2020). Kayla equated the Starbucks and the new residents with whiteness which accords with the demographic changes

underway. Kayla framed this change as racialized. For her, this change does not reflect the existing Black and Brown community and is happening because white residents are moving in.

Much like Kayla, Kyle also mentioned the distinctions between new and old residents.

Introducing the change that has already happened around South Dallas, Kyle said:

What I see potentially happening is that there will be parts of the community that will go the way of North Oak Cliff, the Bishop Arts Neighborhood, or the Trinity Grove area over in West Dallas. There will be pocks of tremendous change that doesn't take into consideration or look anything like the neighborhood that exists where the developers will be allowed to come in and do what they do: build, find tenants, and you know, bring in different kinds of amenities for that neighborhood that speaks to their new tenants and new residents, and not necessarily keep in mind the greater neighborhood.

This quote from Kyle reveals the layers of change that come to a neighborhood and how he believed they would happen. Looking at gentrified areas like Bishop Arts or Trinity Groves that are a stone's throw away from South Dallas, Kyle focused on the precedent that was set and credited developers primarily for bringing in residents to new buildings that come with amenities geared towards the new. As he predicted how it would happen, Kyle posited that "Deep Ellum will ultimately expand into South Dallas there'll be connective tissue there, because of the opportunity to do that is already looking right." Kyle's analysis of change was valuable in that he noticed the way Dallas and the agenda of the whole city is deeply interconnected. Not only will new residents start to encroach on the area, but existing neighborhoods will continue to expand and cross the South Dallas neighborhood lines.

While it may be impossible to forecast exactly how change will manifest, both Kyle and Nathan discussed the importance of perception. Simply put, Kyle recalled that "the perceptions of the neighborhood will change" in a similar way to North Oak Cliff and Bishop Arts. Both areas were previously seen as "undesirable," and when perceptions shifted, new development and new residents came. Kyle was not as positive on this change in perception as Nathan. While

Kyle linked a change in perception to outsider invasion, Nathan believed the change in perception could provide investment for the existing community. “There’s an image problem that needs to be corrected [...] if the image would be improved [then] you’ll see people will be flocking to South Dallas because all of those things happened first.” “Those things” that Nathan mentioned are a change in the way the city invests in the area that would lead to an improvement in businesses, the recognition of the “warm, welcoming place,” and a decrease in crime.

Both of these longtime residents knew that perception is a fundamental part of how the neighborhood is treated as a whole yet diverged at how a new perception in the future would impact the change that is occurring. Nathan and Kyle alluded to the impact of an intangible reputation that could simultaneously perpetuate disinvestment for current residents while encouraging change to make the neighborhood more desirable for new residents. It seems to me like the change in perception that is underway is a real “catch-22.” If the current perception promotes a narrative that the area is not valuable enough to maintain as is for the city while also encouraging developers to bring new amenities, regardless of who they are for, how can South Dallas, the city, and developers create change without disruption and invest while being conscientious?

Visions for the Future

The idea of change and how residents perceived it left many linger questions for both myself and my participants. A few participants offered what they thought possible solutions could be. Kyle proposed a unique solution that included the private sector:

There’s an opportunity for the private sector to get engaged. [...] There are a number of Fortune 500 companies headquartered here, or at least have a second headquarter, and I don’t think our leadership in the city is doing enough to get those organizations connected.

Kyle noted how even though many large companies moved to Dallas due to the pro-business environment, there was a disconnect between the community workforce feeling the benefits of growth and jobs and the businesses. There are people outside of Dallas willing to commute for jobs in Downtown and he offered a solution where those companies that move into the area choose to recruit from within Dallas in order to integrate those jobs into the fabric of economic growth.

Alternatively, Kayla told me that there needs to be “more organizations and more activists that are communicating with people from the neighborhood to say ‘do speak up.’” Kayla referred to a belief from residents that they wouldn’t be listened to and that encouraging residents to use their voices would create a power in numbers to influence how change happens. With a similarly community focused approach, Nathan suggested that there were “a lot of good people and they haven’t had the chance to build relationships with one another and that’s what we have to do.” Nathan indicated that there is a lack of relationships between those within South Dallas and those outside of it. Clouded by the narrative of danger and crime, Nathan believed that, if relationships could be formed between South Dallas and the greater Dallas area, change would come in a positive way that could provide more resources without being disconnected from area need.

Finally, Wendy wished that growth would happen faster. Her take was unique from others potentially due to her roots not being in South Dallas. She said “it’s not going as fast as I was hoping” but that a possible solution would be the inclusion of more retail to entice both investors and new residents. “I feel like when they build the houses and you get more people that are either working class or higher class then that retail (newer, cleaner retail in her words) then growth will come.” Wendy represented a portion of new residents who believe the improvement

in the community and the change they want to see is based on more “non-essential” solutions such as dining and retail. Her solution for change and the way she wanted to see it comes from the outside. Wendy, Kyle, Nathan, and Kayla, though in different ways, proposed options that lend themselves to diminishing the disconnect between South Dallas and greater Dallas. From the private sector to personal relationships, from amenities to activism, these participants demonstrated how regardless of what the change was, there is a clear point that both the respondents and the rest of Dallas conceptualize South Dallas as “other.” The tension that was felt between what residents see, what they want, and how they understand it was emblematic between the tension of the entire neighborhood and the city of Dallas.

CONCLUSION

What this thesis set out to do was to understand how residents frame change and create meaning out of the environment that they live in. Using Freeman’s (2006) approach of speaking with residents directly, I attempted to create a space for each participant to reflect on themselves and the ways in which they interacted with their community. While the small number of respondents doesn’t lend itself to policy recommendations, I believe it lends itself to the understanding of how people make meaning in this particular context. Though the finds are not generalizable, a central finding is that all participants revealed a sort of tension in terms of the type of change they saw, the way it was happening, and how they believed themselves and the community fit into it. There were distinctions between themselves and others as well as how they felt about South Dallas. After expressing what they appreciated in the neighborhood, residents often later seemed to contradict these sentiments by asserting that these same things needed to be improved. While some residents would say they loved the neighborhood wholeheartedly, they would also tell me lists upon lists of what need to be fixed or changed. I also noticed that what

residents said they valued was a fairly good indicator of the rest of the interviews. If they valued their neighbors or the community, it was more likely that the change they wanted to see would be for the community. If they valued their property or their position in the neighborhood, usually the change they wanted or interpreted was for them.

Goffman's frame analysis (1979) tells us that individuals create meaning based on different frames of reference. In conversation with his assessment, this study demonstrates that the meaning that is made is highly conflicted and that one person may engage with a multitude of frames of reference. These frames of life experience can create an internal tension between how residents view themselves and the area. In terms of urban change specifically, the frame that is most present in all interviews is that tension. The tension is a consistent theme in how urban residents understand development, that should be central to how we discuss gentrification, both in academic literature and in public discourse. As I demonstrated in the literature review, our understandings and our definitions of urban development are limited by a binary understanding of gentrification as either "bad" or "good." Rather than use this limiting frame, I encourage sociology and society at large to shift the focus from understanding the benefits or the consequences of urban development to understanding the tension among residents in their own interpretations of what is happening. Tension should be foregrounded in the conversation on urban change, not elided.

For future research, I suggest that we shift how we think about neighborhood change and urban development. Community members' perceptions matter and should be included within our conversations on how urban space changes. Rather than having conversations based in academia or even based in popular cultural definitions of gentrification, I suggest that we have conversations based in the people. Instead of talking about an area, I suggest we talk *with* the

area. There is a shortage of “ground-up” urban research that limits both social and academic understandings of urban change. It is fundamental moving forward to engage with the people as it reveals how they think about themselves and their neighborhoods and how what they want to see happen fits into the urban landscape.

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