

[研究ノート]

Millennials Coming to the Neighborhoods Are They Gentrifiers or Improvers?

ミレニアルズ世代と近隣地区の変遷

新たな世代によるジェントリフィケーションへのアプローチ

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Abstract: This research note reports the ongoing research about effects of generational cohort on neighborhood changes. As millennials, the most diverse and educated generation in history, become adults, their unique characteristics may greatly influence the gentrification process. This note first underlines the needs for the study of this generational effect in the neighborhood. The preliminary findings from a case study in Baltimore, Maryland suggest that millennial gentrifiers are more socially concerned and wish to live in a diverse neighborhood. At the same time their participation in neighborhood activities is not consistent, and the need to incorporate their ideas and actions is discussed herein. Lastly, future research possibilities for developing more collaborative and inclusive neighborhoods are presented.

本研究ノートでは、世代によるジェントリフィケーションへのアプローチの違いについて現在進行中の研究を報告する。アメリカで最も多様であり教育レベルの高い世代といわれるミレニアルズたちは、その住居選択および近隣でのコミュニティ形成などに対し、これまでとりあげられてきたジェントリファイヤーとは異なる意識を持っている。本研究ノートではアメリカのインナーシティのひとつ、ボルチモア市のグリークタウン地区の事例をとりあげ、そこに流入するミレニアル世代の新住民が持つ高い社会意識、多様性への支持などを示す。同時にこれらの意識の高さが実際の活動に結びついておらず、今後この世代がより多岐にわたるコミュニティ活動に参加することがインクルーシブな住居環境を形成するために重要になってくることを指摘し、今後の研究の可能性を提示した。

Keywords: gentrification, neighborhood change, millennials, generation, diversity
ジェントリフィケーション、近隣地区変遷、ミレニアルズ、世代、多様性

1 Background

Urban scholars have been vigorously debating the negative and positive aspects of gentrification of urban neighborhoods located primarily in the United State and Europe. Empirical evidence often suggests that the influx of new middle and upper-middle classes into lower-income neighborhoods eventually displaces longtime residents—often renters, non-whites, and the economically disadvantaged. The evidence suggests that it creates racially and socio-economically segregated neighborhoods and deepens inequality (Slater, 2009; Davidson, 2008; Newman & Wyly, 2006). On the other hand, some insist that the influx of new residents improves neighborhood conditions and increases property values (Logan & Molotch, 2007; Grogan & Proscio, 2000). The assumption is that these new residents, especially Millennials, who are highly educated and able to mobilize economic and political power, often actively demand better social services from the city. With neighborhood conditions contributing significantly to people’s well-being, by affecting their finances, health, and access to education (Hunter, 1975; Guest & Wierzbicki, 1999; Fitzpatrick & LaGory, 2003; Ishizawa & Jones, 2016), the debate over whether this gentrification is producing negative or positive consequences has been a major concern for planners, lawmakers, and community organizers.

However, in the current body of literature, it is not clear who the new residents are now, given that several decades have passed since the gentrification discussion started (Glass, 1964). The conventional image of the gentrifiers—wealthy, young whites who prefer urban living, but have little interest in the local context—needs to be revisited, especially regarding “millennials,” also known as Generation -Y, Generation Me and Echo Boomers, who have started to play roles in the neighborhoods. An examination of the processes and consequences in neighborhoods where millennials move in is needed to provide new insights in gentrification studies. Although analysis of the data is still ongoing, this paper will introduce the preliminary findings on the generational effects from millennial gentrification in a neighborhood in

Baltimore, Maryland, in the United States, as well as explore ideas for future studies.

2 Millennials

Although there is no single definition, most seem to agree that millennials are the generation born between the early 1980s and 2000 (Howe & Strauss, 2000; Calson, 2005; Pew Research Center, 2015a). Many of them are now in their 20s and 30s—and directly influencing neighborhoods through their choices on where and how to live.

Millennials have grown up with new technology such as the Internet, cell phones, and social network services, which are not mere electronic gadgets, but have become a fundamental digital infrastructure in their everyday lives. This generation also has encountered economic recession, rising college tuition costs, and scarce job opportunities in the early 21st century. Growing concern for the environment and limited natural resources is a hot topic among them (Furlow & Knott, 2009), and millennials are also often described as “civic-minded” and “team players” (Howe & Strauss, 2000). They also “value community” and “make a positive social impact on their own children and communities, as well as on society as a whole” (The White House, 2014). However, Twenge (2006) counter-argues that they are more individualistic and narcissistic than members of previous generations rather than concerned for others, based on the result of a national survey^[1]. Bonner et al. (2011) also point out that the image of millennials is that of a narrow demographic of affluent whites who grew up in suburbs and only reflects part of the generation.

These contradictory images of millennials show the complex nature of generalizing such a large cohort group. I acknowledge that throwing such a large and racially diverse group into one category can be challenging. Nevertheless, just as it is possible to discuss how the baby boomers as a generation made a deep impact on American cities—fleeing to the suburbs

and embracing car-dependent lifestyles (Myers and Ryu, 2008)—Millennials are the largest cohort group in history (Pew Research Center, 2016), and their influence at the neighborhood level should not be underestimated and deserves more attention.

Although a “back to the city” movement by those in younger demographics, possibly including millennials, has been well-documented in the existing literature (Sturtevant and Jung, 2011; Hyra, 2012), such studies fail to discuss the unique characteristics of millennials. Moos (2015) points out the importance of generational effects on a neighborhood’s condition, and how millennials’ ideas and behaviors need to be incorporated into neighborhood-change studies. Brown-Saracino’s work (2004) about “social preservationists” is one of the few studies that discuss the behavior of millennials in neighborhoods. She argues that their desire to live in an “authentic social space” motivates them to try and preserve these urban neighborhoods’ “original” conditions, including existing small businesses and indigenous residents. This paper further investigates these behaviors by the new generations, but focuses on social relationships built between them and the other groups, which can propel the neighborhood into any one of several directions—displacement, conflict, or collaboration.

3 Greentown: Baltimore, Maryland

Using qualitative research conducted from 2013 to 2015 in Baltimore, Maryland, in the United States, this paper illustrates the early stages of the gentrification in this city. Like many post-industrial cities, Baltimore has suffered a declining economy and a loss of population since the 1960s. In the meantime, the city’s amenities, such as affordable housing near professional jobs in hospitals and universities, had the potential to attract younger and highly educated populations. The city also had a number of former industrial sites along the harbor area that were available for redevelopment. As a result, Baltimore started to see signs of gentrification in some neighborhoods:

influx of higher-income population. The research was conducted in one of those neighborhoods, Greektown, which had been a working-class neighborhood of Greek immigrants who arrived at the Port of Baltimore starting in the late 19th century and is now seeing an influx of new residents—many of them are millennials. In addition, Latino immigrants have been renting existing houses owned by Greeks who left the neighborhood for the suburbs. Consequently, Greektown has become an ethnically, socioeconomically, and generationally diverse neighborhood ^[2]. The neighborhood has been transformed in many ways and provides good insights into how millennial gentrifiers are influencing the future of the area.

Forty-five residents, community organizers, and developers were interviewed: of which nineteen fit the Millennials' category. Ninety-four survey responses were also collected: of which 42 are considered as Millennials residents while the rest are the existing residents. In addition to those, participant observation in the community meetings and local events – such as street fairs – was conducted over the past two years.

4 Preliminary Findings

4.1 Diversity

The study found that the new millennial new residents in Greektown have an idea that “diversity is good” and tend not to identify with stereotypical images of gentrifiers. They often said they do not want to displace lower-income residents. These statements often came from their own life experiences. In general, as millennials are also a very racially diverse generation due to the declining white population and increasing non-white and immigrant populations, they have more opportunities to encounter a more racially diverse cross-section of people in their daily lives. This is especially true if they are college students or work in large institutions/organizations, which usually make efforts to have diverse populations through measures such as affirmative action (Bowen & Bok, 1998). These personal experiences tend

to make millennials more comfortable than previous generations in diverse settings. The survey supports their statements, as 92% of new millennials residents said they do not want to live in racially/ethnically homogenous neighborhoods and prefer more diverse neighborhoods.

In addition to this positive attitude toward diversity based on their personal experiences, it should be noted that racial and ethnic diversity within the millennial new residents in Greektown also appears to have influenced their attitudes toward their Latino (ethnically and socioeconomically different) and Greek (ethnically and generationally different) neighbors. Amanda, an African-American female in her early 30s, is a professor at a nearby college and just moved into a new house in Greektown. She expressed her concern about gentrification despite possessing many of the qualifications of a gentrifier, such as having a professional job and higher income than much of the existing population in Greektown.

“I’m a little concerned that the Latino population might be pushed out that’s in the neighborhood, and I don’t think that that’s OK. So (I like) some cities work to try to be more inclusive and try to, like, create mixed neighborhoods.”

As a former public housing resident,^[3] Amanda, as a millennial new resident, criticized the process of gentrification and supports inclusive and diverse neighborhoods. Amanda firmly pointed out that she does not want to live in either an all-white or all-black neighborhood. She explained that in a white neighborhood, she would probably feel isolated, while an all-black neighborhood would make her feel disconnected from other groups. In addition to racial and ethnic diversity in Greektown, some of the millennial new residents are openly gay and live with their same-sex partners. The interviews with them found that the diversity in sexual orientation among the millennial new residents also makes them support other types of diversity,

especially racial, in the neighborhood.

4.2 Global Citizens

Because millennials grew up in the Information Age, with the ubiquitous Internet, they are more familiar with what is happening in other parts of the world than any other generation. Some attended schools that had international students, while others spent a year or two in foreign countries as part of their educational curricula. Traveling abroad is not an once-in-a-lifetime opportunity for them, but instead happens more regularly.

Therefore, it is not surprising that in the interview, many millennial new residents of Greektown expressed an interest in and understanding of foreign cultures and people. Jimmy, a white male in his 20s, said he had a lot of international friends when he was in college. The experiences left him believing that learning from other cultures is a good thing. In Greektown, he often eats at local Latino restaurants that usually only cater to Latinos and do not have English menus.

“It’s really interesting, so I have gone in to them (Latino restaurants in Greektown) too. I speak a little bit of Spanish, so I try. To me, it’s a cool way to experience the culture.”

Critics may argue that such behaviors are merely superficial expressions of curiosity toward exotic cultures. However, even if they are, the positive attitudes that these millennial new residents have toward foreign cultures, with many considering themselves “global citizens,” likely influence their social relationships with Latinos and others in Greektown.

4.3 Socially Minded Gentrifiers

As Howe & Strauss (2000) suggest, many of the millennial new residents in Greektown expressed an interest in community activities and in

creating “good” neighborhoods. They often attend community meetings and events, but their participation is sporadic: some come to three consecutive community meetings, and are very vocal about protecting the environment, and then they stop attending. They often avoid leadership roles in the group, such as becoming a board member of a community organization, with the excuse that they are busy at work. This contradiction between their views and actions is typical. As many of them know how to demand social services through local politicians and how to use the latest technology, such as cell phone apps, how their “civic-minded” ideas can be converted into action in the neighborhood is a topic that planners can discuss.

In regard to the social factors that affects their behaviors, it also has been speculated that local contexts have attracted those millennials who are more idealistic and civic-minded to Baltimore. The largest employers in Baltimore are medical institutions and universities such as Johns Hopkins University. According to the 2010 Census, almost one third of the city’s population over 16 years old is employed in the education and health care sectors, compared with only one-fifth in Washington, D.C., and in the Manhattan borough of New York City^[4]. Although further investigation is needed, those people in more “socially-minded” industries and organizations may have different attitudes toward their neighbors, who are often racial minorities and/or of a lower socioeconomic status, compared with other more corporate-oriented cities.

The findings suggest that these millennial new residents have the potential to improve the neighborhood and help keep it diverse, especially in cities like Baltimore, a post-industrial city that has lost many profitable businesses, with many of its current principal employers being nonprofits and public organizations. However, more consistent participation in community activities is essential in order to foster engagement in the social issues in the neighborhood.

5 Discussion and Future Study

To determine whether the effects on this neighborhood by millennial gentrifiers can be generalized, the study needs to be expanded to other neighborhood cases. Qualitative research in neighborhoods located in more “corporate-oriented” cities such as New York is needed to determine whether industrial differences in other cities attract different types of millennials. In addition, the research needs to take it consider the other powerful actors in the neighborhoods—local governments and business owners including developers. Finally, comparing the millennials new residents’ statements and actions to other generations, such as baby boomers, is essential.

For urban planners and community organizers who advocate for creating diverse neighborhoods, this study offers promising implications and guidance on how to approach such millennials. The generation’s potential, as socially-minded supporters of diversity and foreign cultures, stands to starkly contrast previous gentrification phenomena, which brought about inequities. We need to encourage this new generation to participate in community activities consistently and to turn their ideas into actions as improvers, rather than gentrifiers, if we want to create collaborative and inclusive neighborhoods.

Endnotes

- [1] The “Monitoring the Future” survey of high school students and the “American Freshman” survey of entering college students.
- [2] Based on the 2010 Census, more than 1/3 of the neighborhood’s total population (2,810) is Hispanic. Approximately 15% recently moved to the area and are under 35 years old, and approximately 30% of the total population is of Greek ancestry.
- [3] In the United States, public housing has been occupied mostly by poor minority populations and has been criticized as “ghettos” that perpetuate poverty (Wilson, 1987).
- [4] American Community Survey, five-year estimate 2010: The civilian-employed population, 16 years and up, in three cities indicates 29.62% of workers are in “educational services and social and healthcare assistance” in Baltimore, compared with 19.68% in Washington, D.C., and 21.99% in New York City (Manhattan).

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