2015

Political Representation and Gentrification

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http://hdl.handle.net/2144/11218
Boston University
Analyzing how Gentrification has affected Politician Responsiveness in Three Boston Neighborhoods

By

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Political Science
2015

Thesis submitted to the Boston University Political Science Department in partial fulfillment for the requirements for honors in the degree of Bachelor of Arts.
2015

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Abstract:

Does gentrification change a politician’s responsiveness to their constituent’s needs?

The research conducted for this study tested how politicians respond their new and established constituents in three neighborhoods in Boston undergoing varying phases of gentrification. The expectation for this research was that wealthy constituents would have their needs addressed by politicians regardless of their status as a new or established resident in the neighborhood. Several in-depth interviews of new and established residents and their politicians were conducted in order to gather data to support the claims found in the existing literature. The methodology used in this research compared the concerns that new and established residents addressed in their in-depth interviews to the policies that were implemented in their community. The key finding of this study was that across the varying phases of gentrification, politicians did tend to listen to the concerns of their wealthier constituents at a higher rate. This research contributes to the existing literature on political representation, political incentives, representation, and voter behavior. The research shows how communities and residents’ sense of political efficacy evolves due to gentrification. The research also highlights the constraints that local politicians face when choosing policy agendas. While the findings for the research were significant, the research is not meant to be representative of general feelings of political representation in each neighborhood.

Introduction:

Gentrification creates contentious politics. In the United States, the issue of gentrification has been studied for its impacts on community relations and businesses in the community. However, the political ramifications of gentrification have not been thoroughly investigated in academic research. Gentrification can potentially affect feelings of political efficacy, political
incentives, community ties and political representation. These are all topics that are important to the study of Political Science. This research investigated the affects that gentrification has on political representation.

This research studied three Boston neighborhoods undergoing various phases of gentrification. The neighborhoods: Jamaica Plain, Roxbury, and South Boston have different histories which have helped to shape the varying racial and economic demographics founds in their communities. While these neighborhoods have undergone different changes due to the levels of gentrification seen in their neighborhoods, substantive conclusions can be reached about how politicians have reacted to these changes. Boston is an ideal city to study the effects of gentrification because many of its neighborhoods began the process of gentrifying over 15 years ago. The city has also been cited by the Federal Reserve Bank of Cleveland as the most gentrified city in America.¹

The definition of gentrification takes on various forms depending on the community being studied and the time period in which the gentrification has taken place. For this research, I will be using Davidson and Lee’s definition of gentrification. Davidson and Lee define gentrification as “a phenomenon that includes four elements: reinvestment of capital, social upgrading of locale by incoming high income groups, landscape change, and direct or indirect displacement of low-income groups.”² It is important to use this particular definition for this research because the predictions and methodology for this research relates primarily to the economic aspect of gentrification.


Economics affects how politicians respond to their political environments according to Political Scientist Paul Peterson. The potential for economic success in a neighborhood can guide a politician’s decision making. The prediction for this study is that regardless of whether or not a constituent is established or new to the community, the wealthier residents will have their political concerns adhered to first.

Words used to discuss gentrification and its effects on political representation will be defined for the reader’s clarity. An established resident of a neighborhood will be defined as someone who has either grown up in the community or has lived in the community for at least ten years. There is no definition found in the existing literature for what constitutes an established resident in a particular neighborhood. The term new resident will address a resident who has recently moved to the community and has resided in the community for less than five years. This research will use Political Scientist Patrick Conge’s definition of political participation: “all voluntary activities by individual citizens intended to influence either directly or indirectly political choices at various levels of the political system.”

**Literature Review:**

The established literature regarding political representation and gentrification is not extensive. However, there is an extensive literature in political science regarding the behavior of political representatives, political incentives, representation, and voter behavior. This particular analysis of gentrification in Boston has contributed to previous literature in two ways. First, the research adds to the existing data concerning the motivations of incumbent politicians by analyzing their motivations within changing neighborhoods. Secondly, the research has analyzed the different constraints that new residents have when integrating into their new communities.

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and attempts to explain how this affects their sense of political efficacy. The analysis of new resident attitudes has been juxtaposed against the attitudes of the established residents and how their sense of political efficacy has evolved since new residents have moved into the community.

The literature on the rational political actor begins with David Mayhew’s claim that politicians are “single minded seekers of reelection.” This claim was tested through this research by observing the incentives that politicians have in advocating for their constituents and attempted to explain any alternative incentives that politicians have in advocating for different demographic groups in their districts. The findings in this research found that politicians have different policy interests and pursuits contingent on whether economic or electoral interests took precedence in their respective communities.

The research conducted by Political Scientist Jessica Trounstine on political monopolies supports Mayhew’s claim regarding the incentives that incumbent politicians have in reassuring that they keep their seats. However, her research on political monopolies states that incumbent politicians must work strategically within communities in order to maintain an electoral advantage. The findings in this research contribute to Trounstine’s findings because the elected officials in Jamaica Plain and South Boston campaign in strategic areas during election season. From the interviewee’s perspectives, the politicians campaign in areas where people are most likely to vote.

Political Scientist Paul Peterson has written extensively on the rational behavior of urban politicians and what incentives they consider when creating policies. He posits that cities constantly seek to improve their economic standing by catering to the wealthiest members of

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their tax base. Some of the findings in this research support Peterson’s hypothesis. However, the nature of gentrification in its relation to politics is highly complicated so it cannot be conclusively said that all politicians in gentrifying neighborhoods respond to their constituents due to their economic standings.

Race also plays a role in rational political behavior. Two of the Boston neighborhoods, Roxbury and Jamaica Plains, are racially diverse and Roxbury has a black city councilor. Research conducted by Brookman and Butler regarding the relationship between the responsiveness of politicians in relation to a constituent’s race found that “minority state legislators responded much more frequently to the black [names] than to the white [names].” 

This finding was important for the research conducted in Roxbury because the neighborhood’s political representative, Councilman Tito Jackson, is black. However, this research did not find anything conclusive that the Councilman had any biases in responding to his constituents based on their race.

Another important study regarding African American political participation was conducted by Griffin and Keane. This study found that “black constituents participate in politics at higher rates when black legislators represent them because they believe that black legislators are more responsive to their concerns.”

Black constituent behavior was important for analyzing Roxbury and Jamaica Plains because African American’s sense of political efficacy affects their rate of political participation, and political participation is a factor in determining the rate of politician responsiveness.

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Political Scientist Claudine Gay conducted research on the differences in political participation based on the races of constituents. Her findings on representation amongst whites were that “in slightly more than half of the Congress districts, white adults of voting age participated at higher rates than did African Americans in the same districts.”9 This was important for the research conducted on neighborhoods such as Roxbury and Jamaica Plain where interviewees commented that the neighborhood was becoming “whiter” and simultaneously more “politically active.” This research contributed to Gay’s findings because community residents did find a positive relationship between a neighborhood becoming whiter and being more politically active than it had before.

Class and income are also important factors in determining rational political behavior and constituent participation. Findings by Rigby and Wright demonstrate that regardless of a candidate’s political party, “neither party aligned with the preferences of their poor constituents.”10 In Roxbury, Jamaica Plain and South Boston, city council members are focused on issues pertaining to business growth and education and not necessarily income inequality, which frustrated one of the Jamaica Plain interviewees. This may be attributed to the fact that the City Council has limited power to create the systemic changes necessary to address income inequality.

Income and economic factors cause differences in political participation according to the research conducted by Political Scientist Steven Rosenstone and Steven Wolfinger. Their findings show that economic problems both increase the opportunity costs of political

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participation and reduce a person’s capacity to attend to politics.\textsuperscript{11} While this finding was important to shaping the conclusions drawn from the case studies, there was nothing in the interviews that provided any conclusive evidence that economics were a barrier to political participation in any of the neighborhoods studied.

In addition to theories regarding rational constituent and political behavior, there are other theories that explain the constraints facing political representatives in gentrifying neighborhoods. The principal agent problem is defined as the dilemma that occurs when one person or entity is able to make decisions on behalf of, or that impact, another person or entity.\textsuperscript{12} This problem is inevitable in a representative democracy. It is assumed that gentrification will complicate the principal agent problem because two different principals, with different political needs, are competing for the attention and resources of one agent. Politicians can find it challenging to pick what issues to address when constituents within their neighborhoods have different, and sometimes opposing, views on certain issues. This research contributed to the analysis of the principal agent problem because in all three neighborhoods where interviews were conducted, it was evident that there was a dichotomy between the issues that some of the new residents faced against those issues that the established residents faced.

A study conducted in Atlanta, Georgia regarding the impact of gentrification on voter turnout helped to shape the predictions for this research. While Atlanta is a Southern city with different demographics and political issues than Boston, the case study had significant findings for the purposes of this research. Knotts and Haspel found that gentrification decreased voter turnout among longstanding residents and that participation amongst new residents lacking


\textsuperscript{12} “Principal-Agent Models of Political Control of Bureaucracy.” \textit{American Political Science Review} (1989): 965-978.
community connections will lag.\textsuperscript{13} Their research found that the negative effects of gentrification were ameliorated by neighborhood-level organizations that help to preserve the sense of community in a neighborhood and integrate new residents into that community. The findings for this research contributed to this existing literature by demonstrating how feelings of community in a neighborhood help to either exacerbate or ameliorate the political cleavages caused by gentrification. An interview with a South Boston resident with no ties to the community exemplified the claim that feelings of alienation within a community can affect one’s sense of political efficacy. Not only was the resident not registered to vote, she had no desire to further antagonize the established residents of South Boston by gaining any political power.

In Jamaica Plain, the new resident that was interviewed felt like she was a part of the community immediately upon moving in because there were so many neighborhood organizations dedicated to community involvement. This resident is registered to vote, votes frequently, and participates in many community activities.

\textbf{Initial Predictions:}

From the literature on political representation and rational political behavior emerged two prediction regarding politician responsiveness in Boston neighborhoods. The first prediction is that politicians will always listen to their wealthy constituents regardless of how gentrified the neighborhood is in order to enhance the neighborhood’s economic standing. This prediction stems from the research of Political Scientist Paul Peterson who states that cities constantly seek to improve their economic standing by catering to the wealthiest members of its tax base.\textsuperscript{14} The prediction assumes that politicians in smaller neighborhoods within large cities will have similar


incentives as the politicians within the large cities that are used as case studies in Peterson’s analysis.

South Boston is not an economically stable neighborhood. While income of the neighborhood is $60,000 per year, housing prices have risen 6.7% over the past year. Based on this prediction, South Boston politicians will not address concerns from constituents regarding stabilizing rising home prices because this is a factor that will attract wealthier constituents to the neighborhood.

Roxbury is a neighborhood with some level of economic stability but many of its residents live close to the poverty line making an average income of approximately $26,000. However, housing prices have risen .01% in the past year. For Roxbury, it is predicted that politicians will listen to all residents of the neighborhood but the residents that demand more business oriented policy will be listened to the most. Creating businesses in a neighborhood like Roxbury will begin to enhance the tax base of the neighborhood.

Jamaica Plain is a neighborhood with residents that have an annual income of $67,000 per year. Last year, housing prices rose 2%. While these statistics paint a picture of a neighborhood that is slowly changing, looking at the census data shows a more insidious picture of Jamaica Plain: the income, racial and educational levels of the neighborhoods are segregated. One area of Jamaica Plain shows that the whites with college degrees earning more than $40,000 per year live clustered in a certain area of Jamaica Plain while another area of Jamaica Plain shows that African Americans and Hispanics with high school diploma earning less than $25,000

15 Ibid.
16 Ibid.
17 Ibid.
18 "Boston Real Estate by the Numbers: Jamaica Plain." Boston 2015.
per year live clustered in another area of Jamaica Plain. While Jamaica Plain is seemingly gentrifying, there are only parts of the neighborhood that are gentrifying. For this neighborhood, it is predicted that politicians will pay more attention to the issues addressed by the area of Jamaica Plains where college educated whites earning more than $40,000 a year are clustered. The higher earners in the community will bring more money to the tax base and have the potential to attract more constituents to the community like themselves.

While each neighborhood is predicted to have politicians listen to the wealthier constituents in their respective neighborhoods, the incentives for politicians to listen to their wealthier constituents are different.

**Research Methodology:**

There were three methods of data collection for this study including gathering census data, collecting newspaper clippings and conducting in-depth interviews. The methods were chosen was because they provide a community based look at an issue than can be misconstrued by just analyzing numbers.

The first method of data collection for this research was to analyze census data for the neighborhoods being studied for this research in order to gather information on the current and past demographic information along race, income and educational lines. Census data helped analyze the predictions for the research in two ways. The first way the census data helped analyze the demographics of the neighborhoods is that it will show changes over time in income levels that cannot be explained by rising wages. The second way census data helped draw conclusions about the demographics in the neighborhood was that the data showed obvious

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19 Graphs 1 & 2
segregation along education, racial or income levels that existed in Jamaica Plain and South Boston.

Six in-depth interviews were used as the second method of data collection. These interviews functioned as case studies for each neighborhood and provided the most evidence for testing the prediction regarding politician responsiveness to constituent concerns. New residents, established residents, and a politician were interviewed for each neighborhood.

Using in-depth case studies as opposed to surveying residents or collecting polling information was found to be more useful for this research because of the state of the literature on political representation and gentrification. The previous literature regarding the relationship between political representation and gentrification is sparse. Case studies are an important for new research areas or research areas in which the existing theory seems inadequate. This qualitative method of data collection allowed community residents to speak about the issues they have in their community, whether or not they sense a community in their neighborhood and their feelings about their own political efficacy. The case studies also allow a direct comparison to be drawn between the issues of the established residents and the new residents. While this method provided a deep insight into the interviewees’ feelings of political efficacy, sense of community and feelings of politician responsiveness, the findings from this study cannot be generalized because so few interviews were conducted per neighborhood.

Newspaper clippings from the neighborhood’s local papers, the Boston Globe and the Boston Gazette were the third method of data collection for this research. The newspaper clippings in the Boston Globe and the Boston Gazette highlighted shifts in politics that have occurred over the past 5 years. The choice to use these particular publications for research was

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due to their reputation for covering political stories. These publications often focus on specific policy decisions of City Councilors. Big policy decisions of representatives that have captivated the attention of journalists can provide insight to what it is perceived to be an important issue for the particular neighborhood.

Using newspaper clippings from local neighborhood papers in Jamaica Plain and South Boston helped to test the predictions for this research because these papers highlighted issues the community is invested in. The clippings highlighted the most contentious issues in the community that were not necessarily highlighted in the *Boston Globe* or the *Boston Magazine*.

Ethnographic data was collected for the study as well. However, this data was not used to test the prediction. It functioned as a visual component to the stark inequalities found in the census data. The forms of ethnographic research that was collected were photographic documentation and accounts of community life by interviewees.

Since the majority of the data collected for this research study is qualitative, the prediction was tested by analyzing the issues addressed by the new and established residents during their interviews against the issues that politicians have received attention for in the *Boston Globe*, the *Boston Magazine*, or the neighborhood’s local papers. While this method of testing the prediction can provide insight into the dichotomies that exist between the politicians’ policy agendas and resident concerns, it cannot provide conclusive evidence that these policy agendas were pursued because a politician prefers his new constituents over his old ones. However, this method of testing did provide insight into the dichotomy between the issues that wealthier and more educated residents wanted to pursue and the issues that were addressed by residents with less education and less resources.
South Boston: Shedding Stigmas through Gentrification:

South Boston is a densely populated homogenous community located approximately 10 minutes from downtown Boston. This neighborhood of working class Irish immigrants gained national attention during the 1970s due to an uproar in this neighborhood over desegregation efforts. Over the past 30 years, this neighborhood has transformed from “Southie,” long known as Boston’s tough, working class to a thriving economically diverse neighborhood.22 The U.S. News and World Report stated that South Boston was the home of the “white underclass,” or the neighborhood with the highest concentration of white poverty in the nation in the 1990s.23 Through its gentrification efforts, this neighborhood has changed and is slowly removing the stigma that it had in the 1990s. In 2015, the median housing price for this neighborhood jumped 6.3 percent from the previous year to $501,300 and is forecasted to increase 3.6% by 2016. The median income for this neighborhood is $60,260.24

Although the economic demographics have changed in the neighborhood, the politics of the neighborhood have not changed, according to the residents. I interviewed with two residents of South Boston for this case study: one resident who has lived in South Boston for 54 years and can trace her roots in this neighborhood back five generations and the other resident is a self-described yuppie who has recently moved to the neighborhood for its amenities and proximity to the downtown area. According to the predictions for this study, the content of the interviews and the legislative research on South Boston’s Councilman Bill Linehan should show that Linehan’s legislation is balanced in its catering to both the old and new residents in the neighborhood.

Barbara MacDonald is a 65 year old white woman with two years of college. She is currently the executive director of the South Boston Neighborhood House, a settlement house

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22 Boston, City of. City of Boston. 2014. 20 February 2015.
dedicated to supporting family and neighborhood life in Boston. She has lived in South Boston for 54 years but the MacDonald family came to South Boston from Ireland in the 1800s. Her father established a community program for the young, predominately white youth living in the housing projects to go sailing in Charlestown. She said that this inspired her own community activism.

MacDonald’s take on the changes that have occurred in South Boston are that the neighborhood has become more “chic” as opposed to “populated by middle class or [working class people]” who she defines as “firefighters, police officers, people who worked for gas and electric companies, and stay-at-home moms.” She blames the changes that have occurred in the neighborhood on the rise in real estate prices. MacDonald believes that new residents of South Boston are “empty nesters who’ve moved in from Wellesley and very shoo-shoo [wealthy] suburbs, and young urban professions, who like the proximity to downtown and the beaches.” This has created, in her opinion, a sharp dichotomy between the old and new residents of the community. There is an obvious distinction between those who have moved into South Boston and pay “one million dollars for a condo” and those who belong to homes where “one third of the children live below the poverty line.” This distinction has created two different communities in South Boston where the “new young people come in and they decide not to stay because they don’t want their children going to Boston Public Schools or being in daycare with the poor children.” MacDonald believes that the new residents represent a transient community of professionals who have no true connection to the spirit and character of South Boston.

Her take on the divisions between these two different communities affect the political scene is that “none of the [nationally known] politicians talk about poverty in this country…they only talk about the middle class. They don’t talk about poverty because it makes everyone really
uncomfortable” However, she feels that the politicians in her area have to take note of these differences between the residents and she attributes this to the assumption that “politicians don’t really know any of the new residents…and the new people don’t have any needs or consider themselves residents.” In addition to the lack of awareness of new resident issues, South Boston’s established residents constantly make demands of their politicians.

South Boston is a politically active community boasting over a 70 percent turnout during 2013’s mayoral election.  

MacDonald describes South Boston as “ground zero for politics in [Boston]” and that South Boston’s residents represent some of the “most organized most vocal people.” She states that this sense of political power amongst the general South Boston community has shifted in recent years. When asked about her local political representatives, she said seemed that she trusted them to act in her interest. She also trusts them to help with the South Boston Neighborhood house. She plans to request that her representatives “help [the South Boston Neighborhood House] financially because no one funds our senior program.” She is confident that her representatives will find a way to fund the program once she makes them aware of this issue. Other issues that seem to attract politicians’ attention are “parking, housing and cost of living for seniors.” MacDonald states that “politicians love the elderly because they vote” in South Boston. However, she has noticed that senior concerns are only paid attention to by the politicians during election season.

MacDonald believes that while the new residents are helping to change the image of the neighborhood, the stigmas of a tough, racist, working class neighborhood still remain. The new population of residents moving into the neighborhood is “all white people” according to MacDonald. She believes that South Boston has remained politically relevant because “everyone

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here votes” but believes this may change because of the large influx of new residents who “are not community people” MacDonald cannot imagine the new residents “being fired up about a local election.”

The second interviewee is Meaghan Bolduc, a 26 year old white woman from New York City who recently received a job at Boston University. Her highest level of education is a Bachelor’s Degree in Business and she has lived in South Boston for one year.

Bolduc is a self-described member of the “yuppie movement” in South Boston. Even in her short time living in the neighborhood, she has noticed “more businesses and restaurants open that are driven toward a younger, professional clientele.” She commented that the presence of a paint bar and a bagel shop in her area that would have been “taboo” in South Boston in previous years.

Her experience with South Boston’s political scene is minimal. She is not registered to vote nor does she interact with her city council representatives. Bolduc attributes this lack of interest in South Boston politics to the hostile environment that the “locals” create over issues such as parking. While she is not politically active, she does see a lot of changes occurring in South Boston and the neighborhood’s attempt to attract more people of her demographic. She also senses the hostility that the locals have directed towards her. Like MacDonald, she senses two worlds in South Boston where the new residents “eat in different restaurants, go to different bars and even attend different social affairs in the neighborhood than the locals.” However, unlike MacDonald, who senses that the new residents do not want to be affiliated with the established residents of South Boston, Bolduc states that “there is very little socialization between both parties, and the locals would like to keep it that way.”
Bolduc seems confused by the lack of welcome in the community and believes that “Southie is not my neighborhood...when it comes to change or having a voice I am not heard and not encouraged to speak up.” She believes that all of South Boston’s problems are blamed on the new resident but positive changes such as “the decrease in crime and drugs and the dramatic increase in property values” are not taken into account when discussing the new resident population.

This profile on two residents in South Boston shows how tensions within a community can affect political efficacy. While MacDonald states that her interactions with State Senator Linda Forry and State Representative Nick Collins are positive, she does not mention her City Councilor who is the most instrumental person in creating policy for her area. Her preference for her State Representative and State Senator may be due to the weakness of the Boston City Council. The issues that have been addressed by both MacDonald and Bolduc have not necessarily been addressed by their City Councilor Bill Linehan.

Councilor Bill Linehan is the city councilor for South Boston and has been reelected four times. He currently serves as president of the council. While the concerns of the residents have been regarding parking, funding for seniors and increases in rent, the issues that he has gained notoriety for in recent months are asking to raise City Councilor wages and increasing the excise tax on alcohol in order to raise funds for alcohol abuse and treatment prevention programs. South Boston’s neighborhood magazine, Caught in Southie discusses how Councilor Linehan attempted to resolve the parking crisis. Councilman Linehan responded to these issues after social media hashtag #ParkingInSouthie was created. He then filed legislation that created a 90 Day Resident Parking Pilot Program. Although he attempted to solve the issue, the established

resident of South Boston residents remain skeptical of this policy solution and believe that he could have done more to address the issue.\(^{28}\) Although parking remains a divisive issue in Southie, there have been other ways that the Councilman has displeased some of his residents.

According to the *Boston Globe*, Linehan has infuriated his residents by allowing businesses to redevelop an abandoned townhouse in South Boston. When the project was originally addressed with the Councilman, he stood by his established residents who petitioned against the building and did not allow the redevelopment to occur. However, in early March, it was reported that the Councilman changed his opinion about the project and stated that it was “inevitable.”\(^{29}\)

The case of South Boston has been characterized best by the *Boston Globe* as an accident of geography.\(^{30}\) The proximity of the neighborhood to downtown and to the beaches has caused the influx of new residents that has drastically altered the community. The problems that South Boston faces in regard to parking, inequality and seniors being priced out of their homes is a product of the influx of yuppies.\(^{31}\) However, the divide within the community is evident in the interviews and it seems to already have political ramifications.

The articles that cover the policy initiatives undertaken by Council Linehan shows that he is focused on catering to the needs of his wealthier constituents by further developing South Boston regardless of the opinions of the established residents.

**Jamaica Plain: Two Communities, One Representative [Revised]**

Boston’s neighborhood, Jamaica Plain or “JP,” is referred to as a quintessential streetcar suburb. The neighborhood was once a part of Roxbury and touts that diversity is one of its


\(^{31}\) Ibid.
When addressing gentrification in Boston, Jamaica Plain always comes up in conversation because its constantly changing businesses to cater to a more “hipster” or yuppie crowd and the stark economic inequality that exists in the neighborhood. The neighborhood has seen a sharp change in its businesses in recent years and more young professionals, especially those who identify as LBGTQ, has flocked to the neighborhood in search of a community hospitable to all. This gentrifying neighborhood has seen its housing prices rise 5.7% since 2014 to a new average of $473,000 with an expected further rise of 3.1% in the next year. The median income for Jamaica Plain is $60,623.

For this case study, two residents of Jamaica Plain were interviewed. While both interviewees fit the definition of “new resident,” one resident wishes to leave the Jamaica Plain upon her graduation from college and the other resident plans to remain in the community long term. The first interviewee is a politically active student that sees the problems that are occurring in Jamaica Plain as representative of the entire Boston population and wants her representative to pay more attention to the issues at hand. The second interviewee for this case study is manager for a community health organization who is interested in becoming a part of the community but is unsure how to become fully integrated into the community.

Lindsay Englavini is a 21 year old bi-racial woman who is a student at the University of Massachusetts Boston and works as an administrative assistant at Emerson College. She has lived in Jamaica Plain for three years and chose to live in the area because of its community spirit and its relatively affordable housing. She is a member of the International Socialist

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33 Ibid.
34 “Boston Real Estate by the Numbers: Jamacia Plain.” *Boston* 2015.
35 U.S. Census Bureau; American Community Survey, 2010 Boston Profile of General Population and Housing Characteristics, Table; generated by Gabrielle Sims; using American FactFinder; (5 March 2015).
Organization, or the ISO, a leftist political organization focused on the grassroots mobilization of low income people.

While Englavini is politically active with the issues of the ISO is active, her involvement with the political issues in Jamaica Plain is not as active. In her opinion, the problems that need the most attention in her community, such as “police brutality, cost of living and segregation in public schools” will not be addressed promptly by politicians because they are more focused on issues that could be perceived as “good public relations, or something that could be a potential public relations issue.” Englavini believes that her politicians are not willing to tackle the harder issues that are more systemic and therefore she is disengaged from the Jamaica Plain political scene.

As for her sense of neighborhood change in Jamaica Plain, she has seen a change in the make-up of the business community in recent months, especially on Centre Street, which runs directly through Jamaica Plain. Her observations within the last two years about the changes on Centre Street are that the restaurants have become more “fancy…with fancy wine, menu items, everything.” Englavini has also noticed that the neighborhood has become “whiter, wealthier, and more family oriented.”

The second interviewee, Katie Kosner is a 32 year old white woman works as a program manager for Health Leads in Boston, a community health advocacy program. She holds a Master’s in Public Health and Social Work and she has lived in the neighborhood for less than two years. Many of the changes she sees in the neighborhood are in her opinion “outlandish” and she recognizes that the inequality within her neighborhood cannot be easily solved. However, she claims that the two worlds that exist in Jamaica Plain have no obvious political ramifications; it’s mainly aesthetics or even a feeling.
Kosner has witnessed changes in the businesses in her neighborhood that include the introduction of higher end boutiques and a new Whole Foods that replaced the grocery store. The introduction of these types of businesses into the community has increased the property values of the homes around them. She claims that the increase of property values and the increase in the cost of living are pushing people out. Kosner believes that the changes in the businesses are pushing people out of Jamaica Plain because they cannot afford simple items at a grocery store such as Whole Foods, let alone the increasing rents.

She identified the feeling of two distinct communities or two “worlds” as the most troubling aspect of her neighborhood. The area along Centre Street is “bringing in higher end businesses and is populated by more white folks.” While the other part of Jamaica Plains is “more diverse, predominately lower income, the projects…it’s literally two parallel spaces.” She also describes a feel to the two Jamaica Plains. Kosner says that while the aesthetic aspect to the difference is crucial, there is also a psychological one that no one talks about. She states that she “can feel it…going from one area that feels like it’s more well-kept, or the streets are—[that they] have been plowed, or people are friendly and chatting with one another, and then you move to another space…and there’s trash, things are boarded up after hours.”

When asked about if these two Jamaica Plains affect the politics of the area, she believes that it certainly does. For instance, during the political elections last year, one of the candidates had their main office on Centre Street and would “plan rallies, their flyer campaigns, and speak to constituents.” During Marty Walsh’s campaign as mayor, he made sure that he participated in many of Jamaica Plain’s events including attending the annual Lantern Festival in October. Kosner expressed doubt that Walsh had campaigned in areas of Mattapan or Dorchester.
As for her interactions with other representatives, Kosner said that her political involvement has been due to her interactions with her landlord, who is an established resident. Her landlord is very active in the “green living, recycling and clean energy” movement. Kosner’s landlord hosted ex-mayoral candidate John Connolly at their home for a rally where he spoke about these issues. Kosner said that meeting with him and speaking with him in that context allowed her to see his stance on politics which “jibed with a lot of what I would want to see.” Kosner would have preferred a candidate who took a strong stance on “inequality, specifically around race and affordable housing.” Her landlord has also hosted other local politicians at her home and has had them speak about the green energy movement. Although some of the politicians are not perfectly aligned with her views, Kosner always votes because voting is made easy in Jamaica Plain.

Although Kosner says that Jamaica Plain has rampant inequality, she still believes that she made the right decision in moving to the neighborhood and plans to remain. The feel of Jamaica Plain overall is a “town feel.” Its removal from the large college aged population in Boston also provides an attractive feature to the neighborhood in her opinion. She has noticed that the average description of a resident in Jamaica Plain is a “young professional lesbian with a family.” Kosner commented that the neighborhood has a large population that identifies as LGBQT.

While she is involved in the political and general community in JP, she knows that her identity as a young professional is complex. Kosner states that “I don’t have the total buy in [when it comes to policy] the same way that somebody who was born and raised here would.” Although she does not feel fully integrated into the community, she does trust that her elected officials are listening to her voice and the voices of those like her.
Both Kosner and Englavini wish that their representatives would pay attention to the more issues relating to inequality in their neighborhoods. While Englavini believes that politicians do not pay attention to these issues because they want to attract good public relations, Kosner does not identify a possible cause of why politicians in the neighborhood are campaigning on issues environmental efforts and ignoring problems such as inequality in Jamaica Plain. Their representative, Councilman Matt O’Malley, has addressed some of the concerns in the community but has not taken an active stance against the inequality in Jamaica Plain.

The policy pursuits of Matt O’Malley in recent years have included banning cigarette smoking in public parks.³⁶ In an interview with the *Jamaica Plain Gazette*, he stated that he supported the ban because smoking “has [an affect] on public health, the littering of cigarette butts in parks; and it encourages people to smoke less.”³⁷ He also included that smoking should not be allowed near playgrounds. His stance could be attributed to the large population of families that reside in Jamaica Plain.³⁸

There are no findings of Councilman O’Malley’s stance on the inequality that exists in Jamaica Plain as identified in the interview with Kosner. While his stance on inequality is not present, he supports the proliferation of small businesses in the community. He addressed this point in an interview with the Boston Magazine: “I’ve really tried to focus on as a district councilor, is support for our small businesses—working with our Main Streets programs to try to

³⁷ Ibid.
³⁸ U.S. Census Bureau; American Community Survey, 2010 Boston Profile of General Population and Housing Characteristics, Table; generated by Gabrielle Sims; using American FactFinder; (5 March 2015).
bring more small businesses, more locally-owned and -operated stores, into our neighborhoods. It’s development outside of downtown.”39

In addition to passing these legislative initiatives, Councilman O’Malley has appeared in articles in the Boston Globe taking a stance on issues occurring in his own community and on the Boston City Council. In early February, there was an incident regarding an officer being shot and O’Malley commented on the incident standing with the police for protecting Jamaica Plain from “violence…that was beyond shocking.”40 A resident such as Lindie would see O’Malley’s statement as an example of a politician addressing an issue for publicity and not commenting on the systemic issues that led to the violence in Jamaica Plain.

Councilman O’Malley has also taken a stance against the bill put forth by Councilman Linehan involving the pay raise for City Councilors.41 Last year, he voted against raising the pay of the council citing that it is “corrupt to have City Councilors vote on their pay raises.”42 Those in the Jamaica Plain community took note of his stance against the City Council bill and published about it extensively in the Jamaica Plain Gazette.

Councilman O’Malley makes an effort to remain visible in his community by participating in events such as “Jog Through JP,” which is a story in the Jamaica Plain Gazette that allows a politician or local community resident to highlight the important sites in Jamaica Plain while taking a jog with the editor of the paper.43 Politician visibility in the community is

42 Ibid.
very important to new residents in Jamaica Plain, such as Kosner, who believe that seeing politicians in their community means that they care about their issues.

O’Malley ensures that he remains visible in his community by conducting numerous interviews with Jamaica Plain’s local newspaper and being featured in news stories that would catch the attention of his residents. However, he has not taken a stance of the inequality in Jamaica Plain and has encouraged the proliferation of high end businesses in Jamaica Plain. His lack of attention to inequality in his neighborhood and attention to family oriented and business issues shows that he is focused on catering to the interests of his wealthier demographic.

Roxbury: Rebranding a Community through Gentrification

Roxbury is a neighborhood located 10 minutes south of downtown Boston that was originally inhabited by Irish and Jewish immigrants. Following the second wave of the Great Migration of African Americans from the South during the 1940s to 1950s, the demographics of the neighborhood changed drastically. Many of these changes are still evident today and the neighborhood is described as the “the heart of Black culture in Boston.” Although many neighborhoods in Boston have undergone some level of gentrification, Roxbury residents have not seen changes in the demographic make-up of their community; however, there have been changes in housing prices. In 2015, the median housing price for this neighborhood jumped 1.1% percent from the previous year to $266,500 and is forecasted to increase .1% for 2016. While the housing prices have increased steadily over the years, the median income for Roxbury has remained around $30, 778.

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44 Boston, City of. City of Boston. 2014. 20 February 2015.
45 Ibid.
46 "Boston Real Estate by the Numbers: Roxbury." Boston 2015.
47 U.S. Census Bureau; American Community Survey, 2010 Boston Profile of General Population and Housing Characteristics, Table; generated by Gabrielle Sims; using American FactFinder; (5 March 2015).
The residents and the politicians alike have noticed the changes in housing prices have undergone over the years. I spoke with one resident and one political representative for this case study. The resident of Roxbury has lived there for 15 years and has seen the redevelopment projects fail in her neighborhood. The local political representative, Councilman Tito Jackson, described the following years represent a “window of opportunity” for the Roxbury community that could close if strategic measures are not taken to revitalize the community are not undertaken. He has a detailed five year plan that he hopes will help his residents live in a safer community. According to the predictions of this research, the interviews should show that Councilman Jackson, will address the concerns of the wealthy, or business developers since his constituents are low income.

The first resident of Roxbury I interviewed was Robin Tillman, a 52 year black woman with an Associate’s degree who works as a Coco-Cola representative in Needham. Tillman says that she has seen a slight demographic change in her neighborhood but in her opinion the changes are not widespread throughout Roxbury. She believes that the demographic changes in her area are due to her proximity to Jamaica Plain.

When Tillman moved to the neighborhood 15 years ago, she described the community as predominately black and politically thriving. However, when developers came into the community believed that Roxbury would be a profitable area to redevelop, they set their eyes on Tillman’s neighborhood. She said that the area was so “hot” that there was a point when “real estate agents were going door to door, asking you if you wanted to sell.”

Before the housing market crash of 2008, there was a genuine effort to revitalize Roxbury and make it a more upscale community by building luxury homes and condos. Tillman said that she used to “live across from a big field until the contractors wanted to put 50 condos on the
However, the activism in her community was instrumental in making the contractors build seven townhouses instead. However, when the market crashed and housing prices deflated, the developers believed that Roxbury would not become a budding upscale community. Therefore, the townhouse project was abandoned. The town homes were turned into halfway homes that housed ex-felons. Tillman believed that turning the town homes into halfway houses was not good for the neighborhood in attracting wealthier residents in the future.

The politics of the neighborhood have shifted slightly in Tillman’s neighborhood as she has seen more white families move into the community. She believes that the uptick of politically active gay white men has contributed to politician’s responsiveness in her area. Tillman commented that she sees more politicians campaign in her neighborhood than before even though her neighborhoods have always been politically active. Issues Tillman believes should be addressed are jobs for ex-offenders, affordable housing and redevelopment are still the most prominent issues brought up within her community but she is worried that if more politically active whites move into the community, these issues may lose their importance amongst local politicians.

Councilman Tito Jackson has been a resident of Roxbury his entire life. Four years ago, he was elected to serve the community of Roxbury. During his time in office and living in the community, he has seen the community undergo tremendous growth and he hopes that these efforts continue under his watch. He hopes to use Boston’s growth to help his neighborhood thrive. However, he still wants to ensure that his residents achieve a level of economic stability. This is something that he views as impossible under the current rent pressures.

One issue regarding housing policy that Councilman Jackson is very passionate about is the displacement of his residents. He says that the upward trend in rents is literally displacing
people from where they have lived their entire lives. In parts of Roxbury, the median income is $24,000, which is below the poverty line in income for Massachusetts.\textsuperscript{48} Despite the large proportion of Roxbury residents that live below the poverty line, who according to the research by Rosentone should not have time to participate in politics, the residents still find time to participate in civic activities and continue to make the community their own.

Councilman Jackson has taken notice of the “hard work of neighborhood organizations, elders, crime watch organization, and neighborhood watch organizations that have all come together and increased the quality of life.” He says that efforts of these various organizations show that he has a very politically engaged community and he interacts with many constituents that are a part of these groups daily. Although his schedule is hectic, he makes an effort to create opportunities for his constituents to interact with him. He hosts “office hours in the community where people come and deal with everything from registering their young person for school, potholes, street lights, trash, and the parts of [the] job that I refer to as the real parts of the job.” Other mediums he uses to connect with his constituents include “Facebook, Twitter, Google Hangout…which allow [the Councilman] to interface with large groups of people in a really efficient fashion and platform.” He is able to connect with various demographics in his constituency simultaneously through using these platforms. This has allowed his to orchestrate a wide range of policy initiatives in his community.

Councilman Jackson has been paying attention to the myriad issues that his constituents have addressed with him. Two of his policy initiatives demonstrate this. The first policy initiative involved making Northeastern University an integral part of the community by requiring the

university take part in a community benefit package. One aspect of this contract is that it requires fifty percent of the construction workforce to be residents of Roxbury. Another aspect of this contract is that 30 percent of their contracting has to be with minority businesses and involve 10 percent women. In addition to including Roxbury residents in the construction and business plans of the university, the political leaders of Roxbury were able to negotiate “60 scholarships a year for Roxbury residents attending the university.”

Another policy initiatives involving stopping petty crime demonstrates that he has listened to his residents who have had experiences with theft and have expressed their concerns to him. At the time of the interview, the Councilman was involved in filing legislation regarding the illegal trading of stolen cell phones. Before the legislation was filed, there was a “207 percent spike in iPhone theft between 2010 and 2013 because anyone could steal a cell phone and sell it to a store without any form of identification.” The Councilman stated how dangerous this was for those who lived in neighborhoods with drug offenders who do not see the “phone [as someone’s property, but as an easy]…$200.”

Other issues that he is concerned about are inequality between Roxbury and other neighborhoods within Boston. The research conducted by his staff found that from “the wealthy neighborhood Back Bay and Roxbury, there is a 33 year difference in life expectancy for males.” The distance between Back Bay and Roxbury is three stops on a train, or 15 minutes. He has not filed any legislation related to this issue.

Despite some of the more disheartening statistics that highlight the inequality in Roxbury when compared to Boston neighborhoods, the Councilman is hopeful that Roxbury will become a thriving and vibrant community and compete with other neighborhoods in Boston. His five policy initiatives for achieving this goal are related to economic development, education,
affordable housing, partnerships that include the people, and public safety. By implementing these policy initiatives, he hopes to change the brand of Roxbury and Dudley so it is not a “place that people begrudgingly come to.” He firmly believes that his vision is shared with the greater Roxbury community and he believes that it is important “not to serve the people who are going to be here for two weeks, but serve people who have been here for [generations] and put their needs first.”

The interviews show that Councilman Jackson and Robin Tillman are both aware of the various issues affecting their community. Roxbury is at a different stage of gentrification than other neighborhoods in Boston, such as South Boston and Jamaica Plain. Therefore, the Councilman is focused on other issues that are crucial to improving the community and catering to business interests. While Tillman is concerned about the spike in her housing prices, issues such as crime and employment for ex-offenders take precedence in what should be addressed by local politicians.

In addition to the policy initiatives addressed in the interview with Councilman Jackson, he has been making headlines for other headlines for his innovative thinking and desire to implement programs such as an “entrepreneur-in-residence.” This program would create additional technological savvy solutions that “would allow city councilors and representatives to interact with their constituents in a revolutionary way.”

Jackson has put forth policy initiatives that will help the majority of his constituents who are economically disadvantaged find opportunities while simultaneously attracting more business interests. Jackson’s attention to building businesses in the community is directly correlated to his desire to rebrand Roxbury.


50 Ibid.
Results:

The initial prediction for this research was that politicians will respond to their wealthier constituents in each neighborhood, regardless of whether or not these residents are new residents or established in the community. For South Boston, this was the prediction because rising home prices and an influx of wealthier residents helps to increase the tax base of South Boston. For Roxbury, it was predicted that politicians will respond to business oriented constituents in the community because there is not a lot of wealth in the community. This was the prediction for Jamaica Plain because the segregation along economic, racial and educational lines in the neighborhood has the potential to attract more high income constituents to the neighborhood.

In South Boston, City Councilors paid more attention to the issues addressed by his wealthier constituents. This conclusion was reached by comparing the issues that Bolduc and MacDonald addressed against the policies that Councilman Bill Linehan was addressing in his community. Bolduc felt that parking was a huge issue in the community as did MacDonald. MacDonald also felt that issues regarding inequality in South Boston caused by raising housing prices and care for seniors should be addressed. While Councilman Linehan addressed the issue of parking in the community, he did so in a way that the established residents of the communities were not satisfied with the outcome of his policy. His actions in the community regarding his reneging on promises made to established residents in the community while pursuing policies that would raise the excise tax on alcohol shows that he is focused on other policy options than addressing inequality in the community caused by rising housing prices. According to Paul Peterson’s analysis of behavior of urban politicians, Councilman Linehan has made a rational decision not to address the rising costs of homes in South Boston.
In Jamaica Plain, City Councilors paid more attention to the issues addressed by his wealthier constituents over the problems that faced his residents living in the public housing projects. This conclusion was reached by comparing the issues that Councilman O’Malley addressed in the local Jamaica Plain paper and the interview with Katrina Kosner. Councilman O’Malley has drafted legislation to pass policies that are primarily family oriented, such as the cigarette smoking ban. In an interview with Boston Magazine, Councilman O’Malley stated that he wanted to expand small businesses in the Jamaica Plain community. Throughout the interview with Kosner, she addressed the changes in the types of businesses along Jamaica Plain’s Main Street, Centre Street. Kosner stated that in the short time period that she’s resided in Jamaica Plain, she has seen the businesses on that street cater to a wealthier demographic. There was no evidence found in the Boston Globe or the Boston Gazette of policies that Councilman O’Malley has pursued to alleviate the inequality that exists in Jamaica Plain. According to Jessica Trounstine’s analysis on incumbent politician behavior, Councilman O’Malley is working strategically within the wealthier community in order to keep the support of those living in that community.

While Roxbury City Councilor Tito Jackson paid more attention to the issues of the wealthier demographic in his neighborhood, this case study complicated the picture somewhat. Established resident Robin Tillman wanted the community to be revitalized after seeing the community’s attempt at gentrification fail but she did not specify in what way. In the interview with Tillman and Councilman Jackson, the rise of housing prices was addressed. While both Tillman and Jackson say that this is a critical issue that needs to be addressed and solved soon. However, the Councilman’s plans to bring new businesses into the community and to rebrand Roxbury while simultaneously ensuring that established residents can afford to stay in their
homes may not be feasible because there is a direct relationship between the rise in housing prices and the introduction of new, thriving businesses into a community.

Each neighborhood is undergoing different levels of gentrification and politicians are responding to the changes in the community in strategic ways. The Boston City Council is weaker than the State Representatives and State Senators in their ability to create policy changes that could tackle the larger, more deeply rooted issues such as racial and economic inequality.

The methodology used to reach these conclusions complicates the results. The in-depth interviews used to gather evidence regarding new and established resident issues within their respective communities cannot be used to generalize the issues that all of the residents of the respective neighborhoods may have.

**Limitations to this Research:**

There were many limitations to making generalizable conclusions about political representation in gentrified neighborhoods due to the methodology used in the research, the time constraints of the research and the selection of the interviewees.

While conducting in-depth interviews was a useful way to capture the culture of the neighborhoods and was the most appropriate way of gathering data for a research, these interviews are not intended to represent the interests and concerns of the entire new and established resident population. In an ideal world, I would have interviewed an established resident, a new resident and a political representative for each neighborhood. Due to the time constraints that politicians face, only Councilman Jackson was available to be interviewed.

The use of articles from community newspapers and news sources such as the *Boston Globe* and *Boston Gazette* were intended to represent the popular or unpopular policies that City Councilors were implementing. Due to the wide circulation of these publications, many
constituents would be aware of City Councilor policies from the stories published in these papers. However, the writers of these *Boston Globe* articles may have had their own biases in choosing which policies they wanted to highlight in their stories.

In addition to the methodology, time posed a constraint to gathering data for this analysis of political representation as well. Gathering interviews from six members of three different neighborhoods cannot serve as a representation of the myriad views and concerns of those who live in the South Boston, Jamaica Plain or Roxbury. It would have been preferable to collect interviews for these case studies over a period of at least one year with at least 10 different candidates for each neighborhood. However, since this research was only to be conducted over the course of two semesters, six interviews had to suffice.

Given the constraints of the research methodology, the generalizability of this research is limited. This study of one northeastern city cannot be applied to cities across the United States. Not only Boston unique in its status as the most gentrified city in the United States but the characteristics of Boston as an urban city are very unique. Another limitation on this Boston case study is that Boston has a large college aged population that makes it a hospitable environment for gentrification.

Although there were limitations to this study, the research conducted provides an interesting contextualization of how old and new constituents in these Boston neighborhoods are responding to the political changes caused by gentrification. The research also provides insight into how theories such as the principal agent problem and the rational political actor are reshaped in the context of gentrification.
How this Study Could be Expanded:

While this study was an interesting way to study how politicians respond to their constituents in gentrifying neighborhoods, in order to make this research more relevant to the political scientists researching gentrification, there should be a quantitative aspect to the study. Taking surveys and conducting polls of a large, random sample of the population of these neighborhoods would provide a better idea of the issues that are important to community residents. The use of different quantitative methodologies would provide more support for the findings.

Gentrification is a complex topic and studying the threat of higher income residents does not provide a complete picture of how politics in the neighborhood has changed because the literature is so sparse. Researching politician responsiveness in gentrifying communities and how this could create a sense of racial threat amongst established residents would be provide a fresh insight on how gentrification changes politics. The literature on racial threat is extensive.

Conclusion:

Gentrification creates contentious politics. While it is obvious that an influx of new residents into a constituency will change the politics of the area, the research by Political Scientists Paul Peterson and Jessica Trounstine provide some insight into why this occurs. Incumbent politicians want to get reelected and gathering more resources for their communities by building up their tax bases will help them be perceived in a more positive light by their constituents.

While politicians are focused on catering to those who will help bring economic resources to their neighborhoods, the needs of residents who do not have the same economic clout are not addressed. This was found to be the case in Jamaica Plain and South Boston. Even
in Roxbury, where the average resident earns only $7,000 more than the poverty level, the Councilman is trying to attract more businesses to the neighborhood in order to increase its tax base.

All of the interviews conducted in this research have alluded to the “two worlds” that have been created by gentrification. From the changes in restaurant items and stores found on Main Street in Jamaica Plain to the introduction of paint bars and bagel shops in South Boston, the residents of these communities have noticed the changes in aesthetics in their neighborhoods. While the aesthetic changes were obvious to all who were interviewed for this research, the political changes were not immediately identifiable to some.

Having a sense of otherness was felt amongst residents in South Boston and Jamaica Plain. Whether this sense of otherness is real or perceived, each resident who felt alienated said that it affected them feeling connected to their community, something that has real political implications as highlighted in the research by Knotts and Haspel.

While it is true that incumbent politicians seek reelection, all of them want to see their communities thrive and grow under their leadership. From this research, it can be concluded that gentrification changes the community perspective on what constitutes growth in a community and politicians must respond accordingly through their policy initiatives.
Graph 1: Jamaica Plain

**Distribution of racial and ethnic groups**

Graph 2:

**Median household income**
Special Thanks To:
Dr. Katherine Einstein
Dr. Katherine Kimmel
Dr. Japonica Brown-Saracino
Megan Winderbaum
Wes Soper

Interviewees:
Katrina Kosner
Lindie
Eliza Reddick
Barbara McDonald
Councilman Tito Jackson
Robin Tillman
Meaghan Bolduc
Sage Systems
B.K. Carter

Landmark Associates: Transcription Services