

Crime in economically diverse neighborhoods

A comparative study of six communities in Chicago

Prepared by Anis Parsa

For Philip Nyden

SOCL 370 – Equitable Sustainable Community Development

Center for Urban Research and Learning – University of Loyola Chicago

December 14, 2004

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Introduction

Sustaining economic diversity in Chicago's communities represents several challenges. Diversity and change are often taken as synonyms for danger and insecurity, and these unfounded perceptions often end up being obstacles in the process of creation, development and encouragement of mixed-income neighborhoods.

Several studies have examined the correlations between poverty, particularly concentrated poverty with crime rates and patterns. Violence is considered a manifestation of feelings of diffused anger, resentment, and frustration, all of which are closely associated with economic disadvantage (Phillips, 1997). Mixing residents with higher and lower incomes within a community is often therefore seen dubiously, as there is the presence of a bracket of the population with a low-income, often associated with affordable and subsidized housing. In as much as Economic Deprivation is an important Crime factor, other factors such as Social Cohesion (Sampson, 1997), Community Control and Density (Hawkins, 2003) are major contributors to crime variations in communities.

Many questions therefore arise as to the nature of mixed-income neighborhoods, but often the most crucial is "Are they safe?" This study compares six communities each with predominant income groups: low-income, high-income and mixed-income, and observes crime variations over time as well as crime rates according to the statistics provided by the Chicago Police Department.

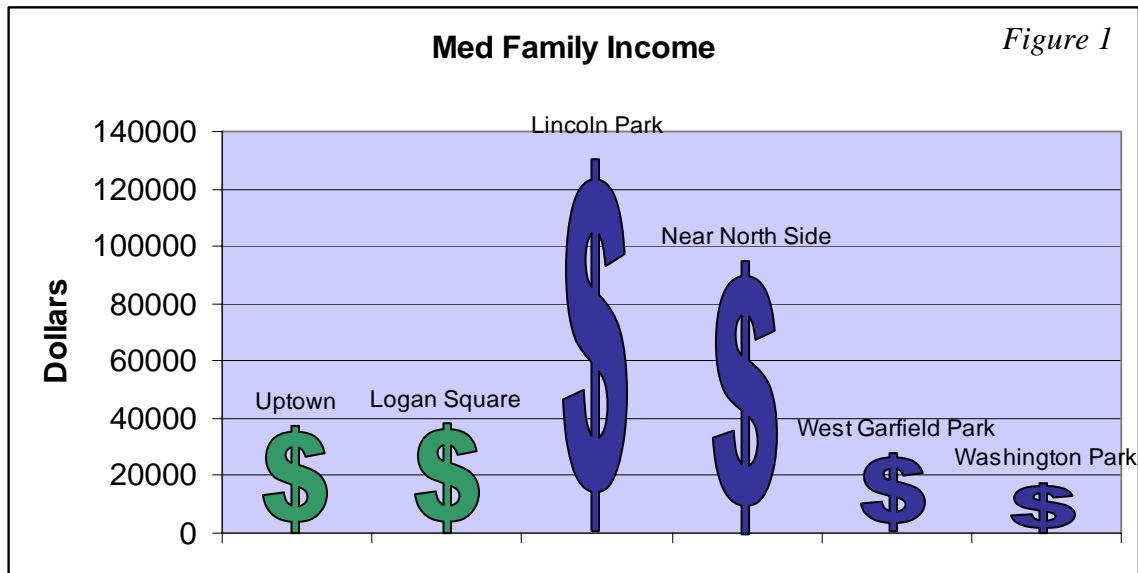
The first section consists of crime comparisons over 5 years from 1998 to 2002, to examine the changes in crime due to gentrification in these communities. The second one looks at crime rates (occurrence per inhabitant) and analyses trends and patterns related to the economic status of these communities.

The findings clearly indicate that the impression given by economically diverse neighborhoods as being unsafe is obviously a wrong assumption. Not only is the level of safety in these neighborhoods comparable to high-income neighborhoods in several crime patterns, but sometimes even better, like in the case of Theft, where high-income areas are known to have a high theft rate.

Uptown and Logan Square, two examples of diverse neighborhoods.

Taken as a whole, Chicago is a very diverse city, with a variety of incomes, races, ethnicities and social compositions. It is rare however to find neighborhoods that reflect the economic distribution within their population, as neighborhoods are often characterized by one predominant economic composition. The following is a short description of Uptown and Logan square that are good examples of “economically diverse neighborhoods”, containing within them this variety of incomes.

Figure 1 shows the Median Family Income (2000 census) for the six neighborhoods chosen for this study. It is clear that Uptown and Logan square do not have a high income, making therefore a distinction between high-income and mixed-income.

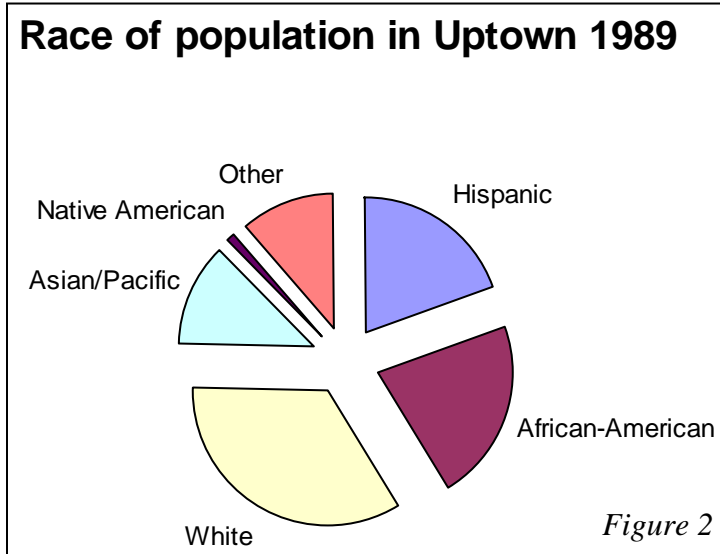


Uptown

Uptown is a diverse community area in Chicago, not only economically but also in terms of its racial, ethnic and social composition. A clear indicator of the fact that it’s a mixed-income community is the existence of a variety of different dwellings: several affordable and subsidized houses cater to the needs of low-income families and individuals, but there is also a great amount of luxurious rental and home-ownership units.

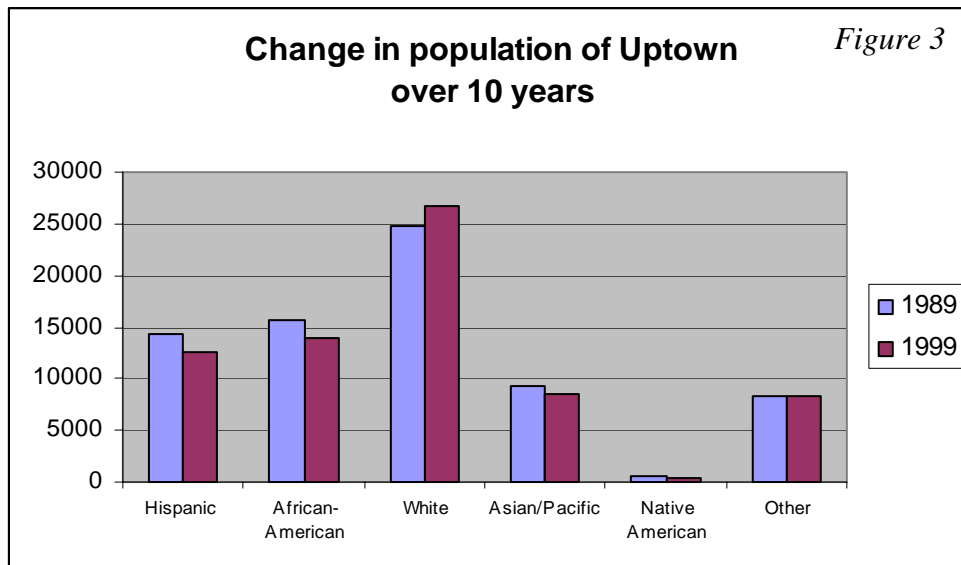
This variety in its inhabitants is linked to Uptown’s history. Since the beginning of the 20th century, Uptown has been a port of entry for immigrants to the United States and populations migrating from Chicago’s near north and south side neighborhoods. Throughout the years, the population became increasingly diversified, first by the coming of many Russian Jews, followed by Greek Americans and African Americans, and finally

by large numbers of Latinos and some refugees from Southeast Asia (Figure 2 shows this diversity). In 1990, almost a third of all residents were foreign-born.



Since 1990, and particularly in this new millennium, Uptown has been targeted by the housing market for an increase in luxury condominium apartments. This resulted in the conversion of some affordable housing into higher level units, therefore introducing a segment of the population predominantly White and middle to high-income. This is shown in Figure 3 where there can be seen a decrease of the Hispanic and African-American

populations, with an increase of the White population. It is also reflected in the increase of the Median Family income from \$29,044 in 1989 to \$36,306 in 1999, meaning an increase of 25% in 10 years. Although there has been a decrease of 20% from 1989 to 1999 in persons living below the poverty line, they yet represent 24% of the population in 1999.

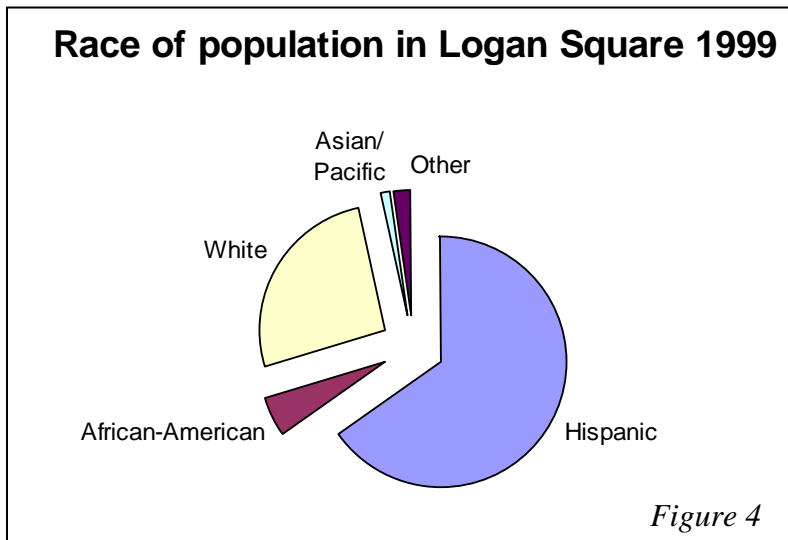


This diversity in race, ethnicity and economy has been promoted by constant efforts of many community organizations, civic leaders and public officials, in a way as to ensure a balance in growth and development on the commercial and housing fronts.

Logan Square

Logan Square has less of a racial mix than Uptown, as its community is predominantly Hispanic, however it has a diverse mix of incomes and a variety of businesses. Initially a major commercial center, its population grew larger and larger through the influx of immigrants from Germany, Norway and Poland, reaching a peak of 114,000 people in the 1930s. Since then, due to a decline in manufacturing, commercial activities and population decreased progressively. In the 1960s, there was a boost given to the community, by the construction and renovation of many residential and commercial structures, and since that time, Logan Square has known a great increase in its Hispanic population that amounts today to about 65% of its population, as shown in Figure 4.

Once again, the presence of a wide range of household types, from affordable housing to trendy condos is an indicator of its economic diversity. In recent years particularly, some of its areas have experienced some little gentrification, thereby introducing higher income residents, and partly accounting for the impressive increase of the Median Household Income from \$22,584 in 1989 to \$36,245 in 1999 therefore 60% increase in 10 years.



It is important to note that there has been a decrease of the percentage of people living in poverty. However according to the 2000 census, they represent still 19.8% of the population. Logan Square also knows a strong history of community organizations that have supported and labored for the promotion of diversity and balanced development of housing as well as commercial activities.

Crime comparisons

This report uses the categorization of crimes according to the Police Index Crime. The following definitions (Chicago Police Department – Annual Report 2002) are useful for a proper understanding of the data and analysis provided below.

Violent Crime

- Murder. The willful killing of a person, or death through the criminal act of another.
- Criminal Sexual Assault. Broader than the traditional definition of “rape” (the carnal knowledge of a female, forcibly and against her will), this category includes any sexual assault—completed or attempted, aggravated or non-aggravated—committed against any victim, female or male.
- Robbery. The taking of or attempting to take anything of value from the care or custody of a person, by force or threat of force.
- Aggravated Assault/Battery. The intentional causing of serious bodily harm or attempt to cause serious bodily harm, or threat of serious bodily injury or death. This category includes aggravated assault, aggravated battery, and attempted murder.

Property Crime

- Burglary. The unlawful entry of a structure to commit a felony or theft, or an attempt to do so.
- Theft. The unlawful taking or attempted taking of property or articles without the use of force, violence, or fraud.
- Motor Vehicle Theft. The unlawful taking of or attempt to take a motor vehicle.
- Arson. The willful or malicious burning or attempt to burn a house or other building, motor vehicle, aircraft, or personal property of another.

As Murder and Arson statistics do not represent a high number, rate increases over the years were not included in this study, as for example an increase in Murder from 0 to 3 (increase from 1998 to 2002 in Lincoln Park) would show disproportionately on a chart and only obfuscate the analysis.

Time analysis

In the following pages, this report analyses the change in different criminal offenses over 5 years, from 1998 to 2002. Six communities are compared in this study, two low-income neighborhoods – Washington Park and West Garfield Park, two high-income neighborhoods – Near North Side and Lincoln Park, and two mixed-income communities – Uptown and Logan Square.

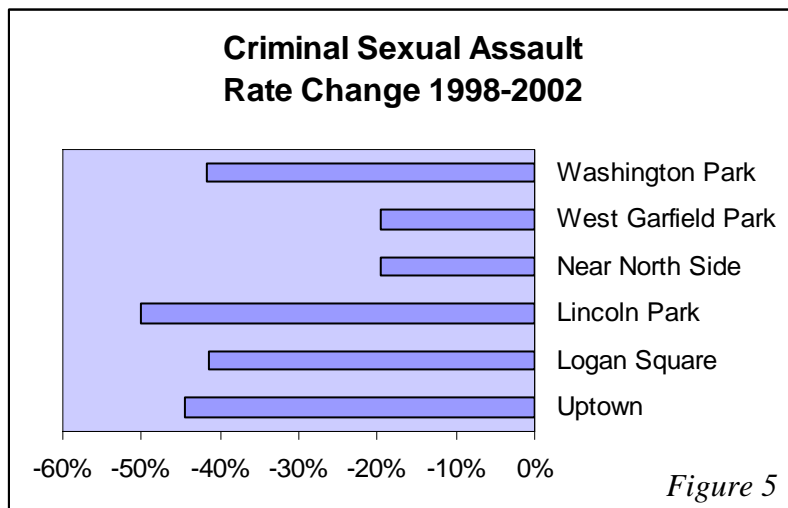
The purpose of this analysis over time is to examine the positive and negative impacts of gentrification and of the increase in the population of higher-income residents. It is to be noted that Chicago as a whole has known a decrease in its criminal incidents in the last 10 years, therefore it is expected that this should translate itself across neighborhoods.

Violent Crime

One would expect that due to the increase of higher-income residents in the community, there would be a reduction of violent crimes, as these are normally associated with concentrated poverty. At the same time however, gentrification, with its implications of displacement and of bringing together residents with diverse incomes and racial and ethnic backgrounds could signify an increase in violence.

Criminal Sexual Assault

From Figure 5, we can see that there has been considerable decrease in Criminal Sexual Assault in both economically diverse neighborhoods, while the changes in the other communities are not consistent with their income.



We can conclude in this case that variation in Uptown's and Logan Square's populations over the 5 years yielded positive results while not really setting them aside other neighborhoods in this respect.

Robbery

The redevelopment and gentrification of areas, often brings with itself a more

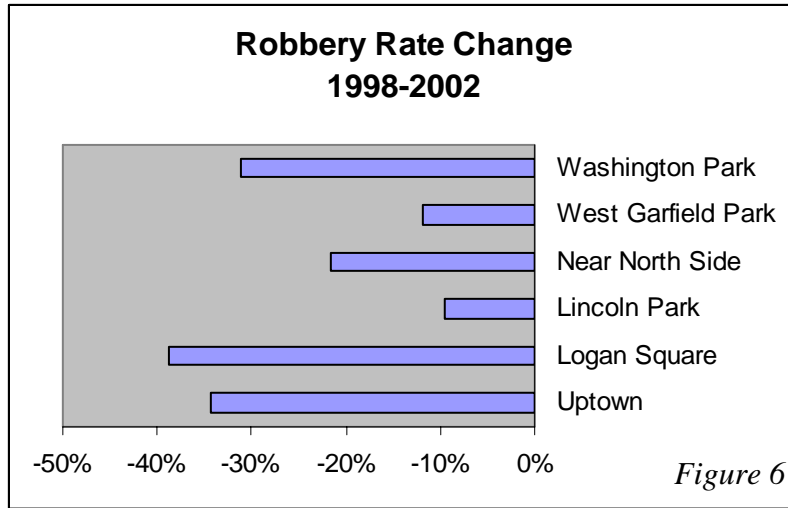


Figure 6

solid police surveillance and patrol, generally controlling to some extent robbery. Perhaps this is a factor that explains the more clear decrease in robbery in the mixed-income communities as compared to the low and high-income neighborhoods (See Figure 6). There is however little doubt that the increased

diversification of Uptown and Logan Square has had a positive impact on the reduction of Robbery.

Aggravated Assault and Battery

Once again, as shown in Figure 7, there has been a solid decrease in Aggravated Assault and Battery in the mixed-income neighborhoods over the 5 year period, and overall this is a higher decrease than the other

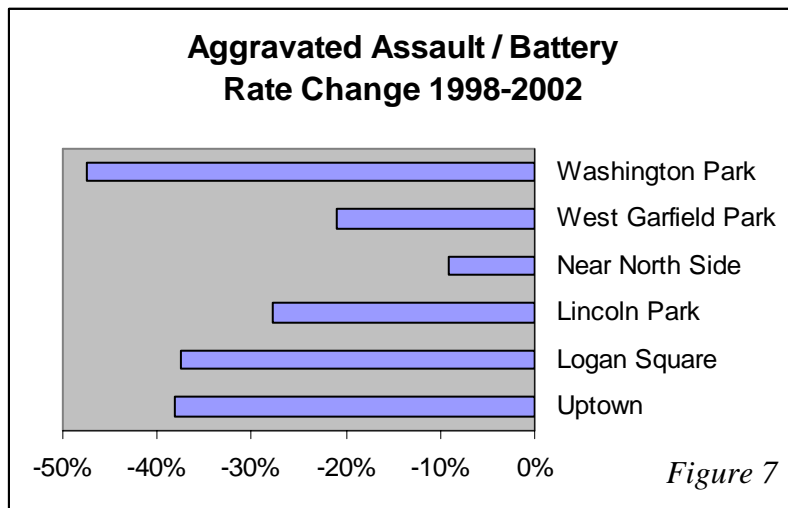


Figure 7

neighborhoods, although Washington Park shows an impressive change as well. Therefore, although positive results can be seen, we cannot directly associate this progress to the diversification in the mixed-income communities.

Property Crime or Non-violent Crime

Contrary to violent crime, property crime is linked to the value of the property available in an area, whether this is a house or wealth of a person. Hence it is often assumed that the increased income of the residents of an area could lead to an increase in property crimes, particularly when this difference in income is not evenly distributed in

the population, but represents the wealth brought in by some new residents who have moved into new units in the neighborhood.

Burglary

A comparison of these different neighborhoods (Figure 8) shows that there has been nearly a 40% decrease in burglary in the two mixed-income neighborhoods, but that

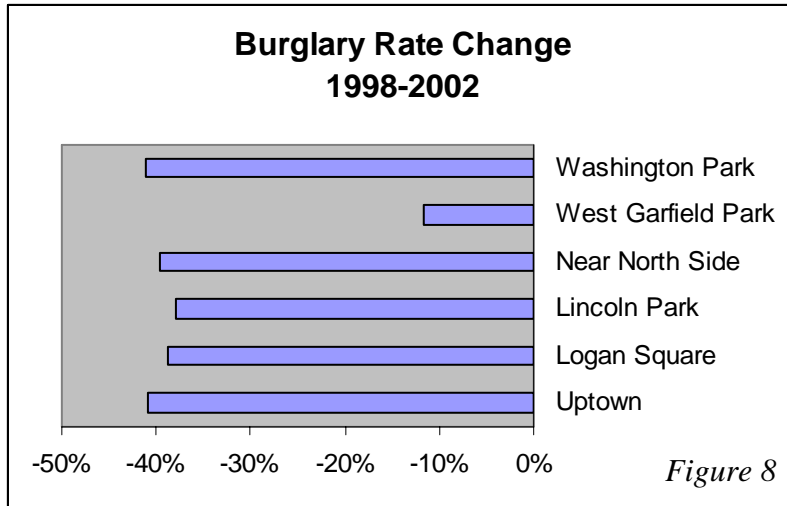


Figure 8

these are not in a better position than any other neighborhood, since both high and low-income communities experience a similar decrease. This goes against the assumption that gentrification and the introduction of wealth in mixed-income communities must be followed by an increase in burglary.

Theft

In this case, as seen in Figure 9, the data is not consistent with the neighborhood type. Whereas Uptown has experienced a decrease comparable to other communities, Logan Square has experienced nearly no decrease. Overall, both mixed-income neighborhoods have seen a relatively smaller change in theft. Theft, as defined above being the stealing of property without the use of violence, has a very wide range. Statistics indicating theft rates in an area are strongly related to patterns of reporting. Whereas Police departments have a higher probability of being informed when incidents involving violence and more substantial crimes, reporting of smaller incidents of theft are

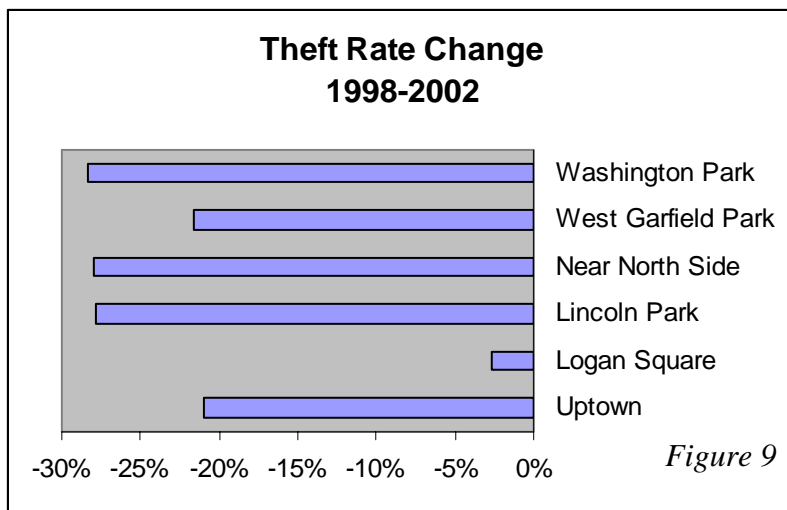
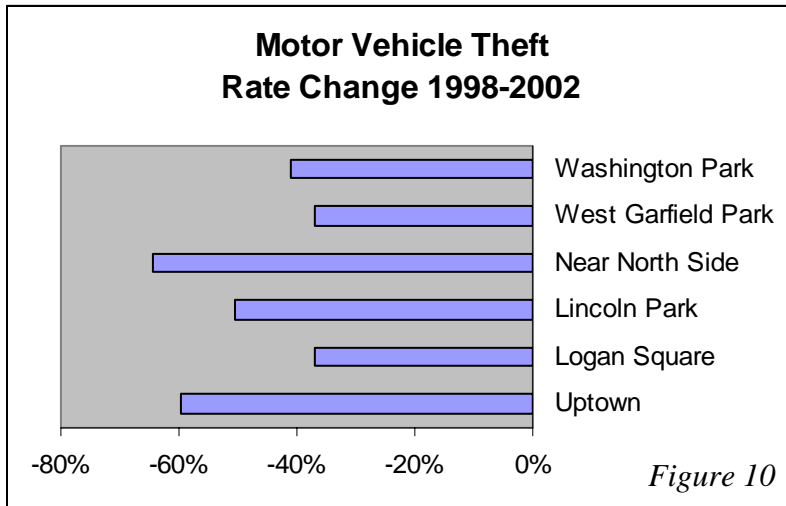


Figure 9

subject to the habits of the population. Therefore in order to interpret in further detail the reasons behind a small decrease in these two neighborhoods, one would have to examine factors such as reporting habits as well as police presence and focus in one determinate area.

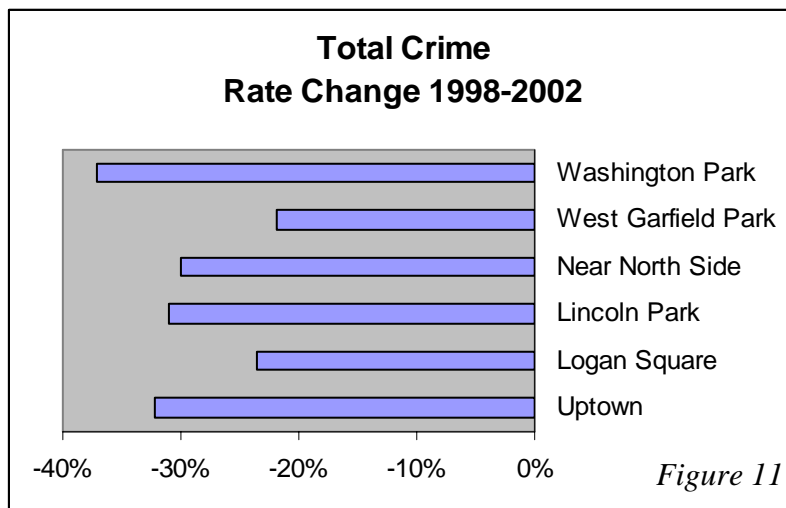
Motor Vehicle Theft

The comparison in decrease of Motor Vehicle Theft shown in Figure 10 does not reveal anything in particular about correlations between the change of rate of this particular crime type with income patterns of neighborhoods.



Conclusion

Rate changes in crime categorized according to neighborhoods proved to be for the greatest part inconclusive. In some cases, such as Robbery, there was a predominant decrease in the mixed-income communities when compared to other ones, and in some other cases, such as Theft, it was the opposite. The results of the variation in Total Crime over these 5 years (see Figure 11) are a proof of the fact that gentrification and changes that have taken place in these areas have not had adverse nor positive impact on the crime rate, if compared to areas with neighborhood with other economic predominance.



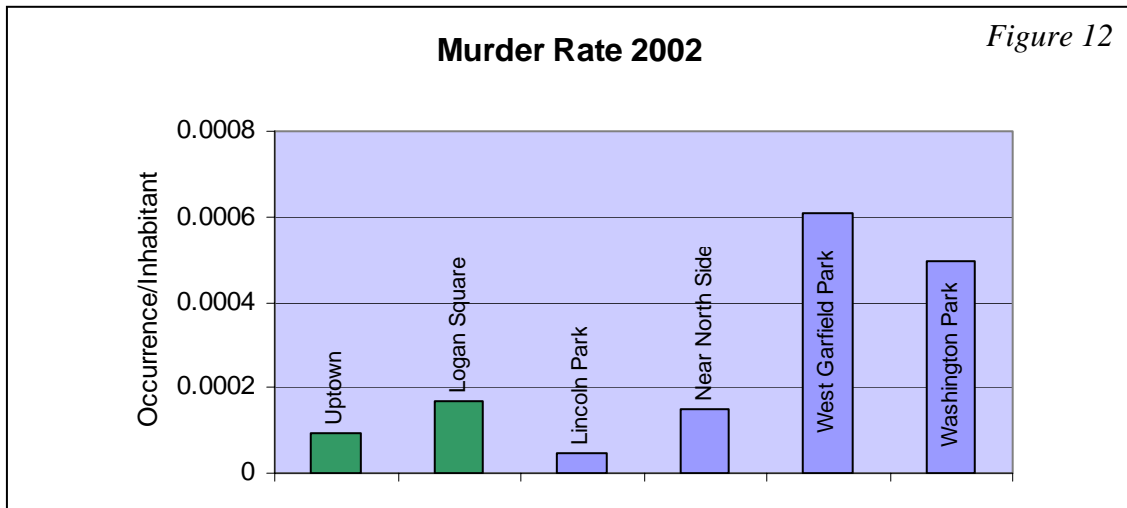
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Cross-neighborhoods comparisons

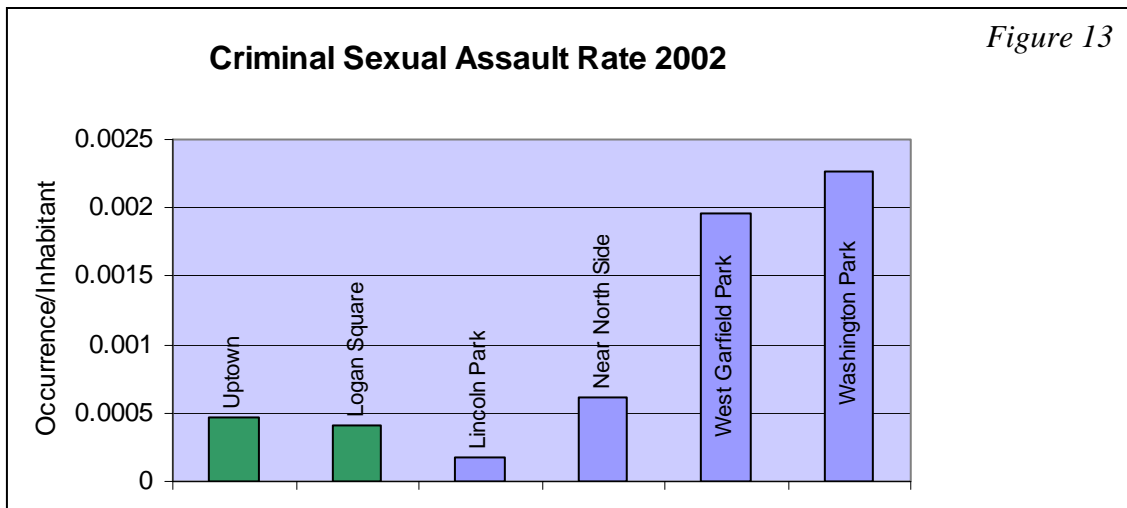
According to the latest data available at the time of this report, a comparison among the 6 neighborhoods in terms of the different criminal activities according was undertaken. The purpose of this comparison is to examine the crime patterns in mixed-income areas and compare them to high and low-income neighborhoods. Are they characteristic of an area that has concentrated poverty like the low-income neighborhoods, or are they closer to those of a healthy community? The Crime Index used above is applied again here in the same order, and in this case Murder and Arson rates are also used.

Murder



As Figure 12 shows above, murder rates for Uptown and Logan Square are comparable to those in Lincoln Park and Near North Side, and distinct from the low-income neighborhoods.

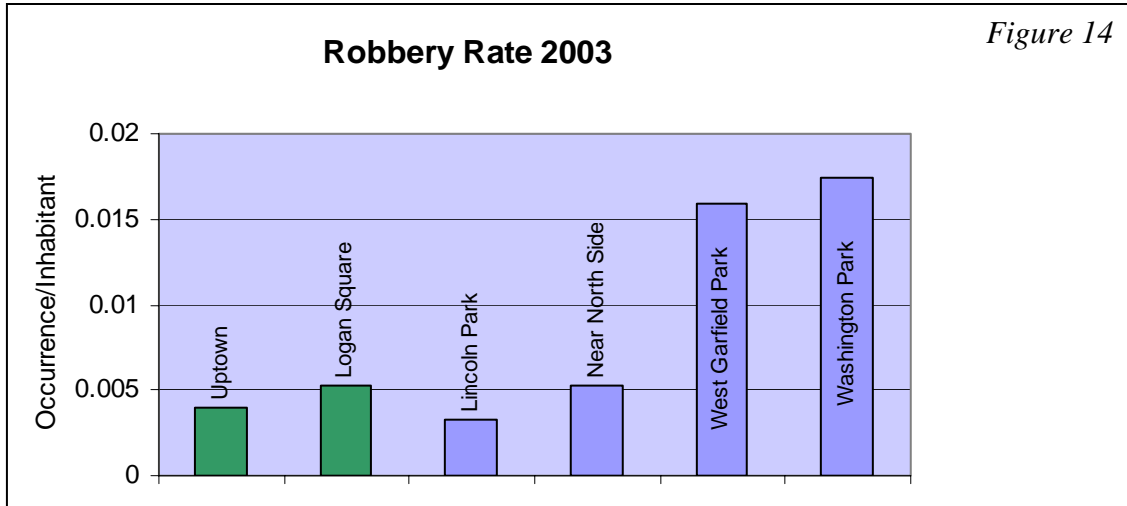
Criminal Sexual Assault



Once again, Figure 13 puts the mixed-income neighborhoods on a close level with the high-income neighborhoods. Criminal Sexual Assault Rates in low-income areas are about 4 times higher than high and mixed-income ones.

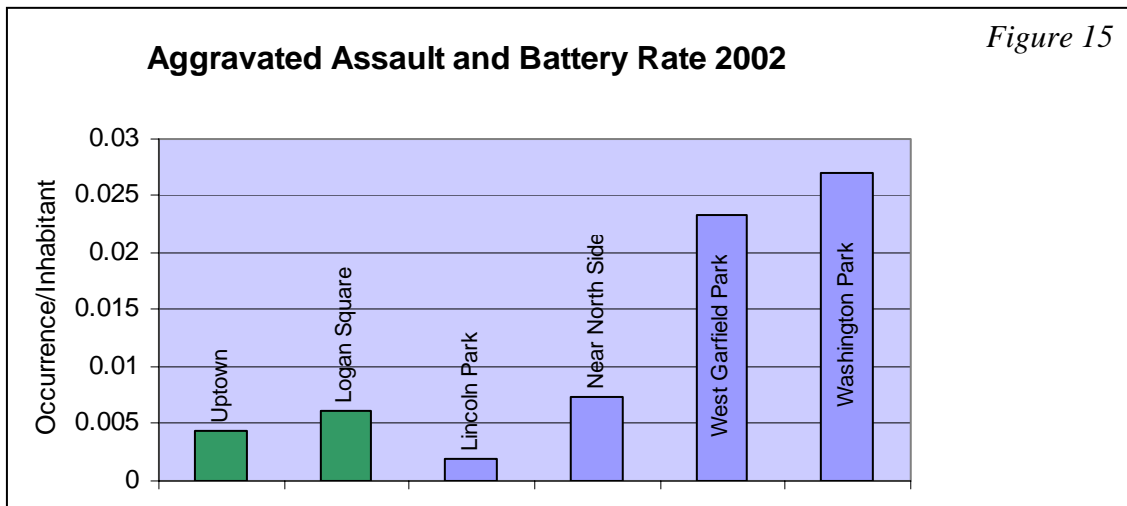
Robbery

Figure 14 speaks for itself, where Robbery rates for the high and mixed-income communities are considerably lower than West Garfield Park and Washington Park.



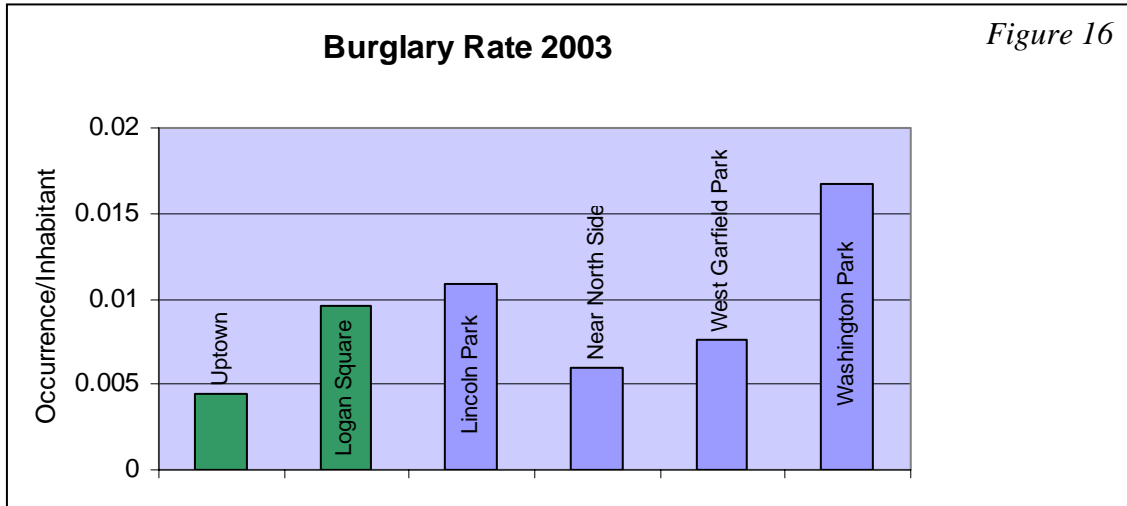
Aggravated Assault and Battery

The last on the list of Violent Crimes shows that Aggravated Assault rates are as low in the two economically diverse communities, as they are in high-income areas.



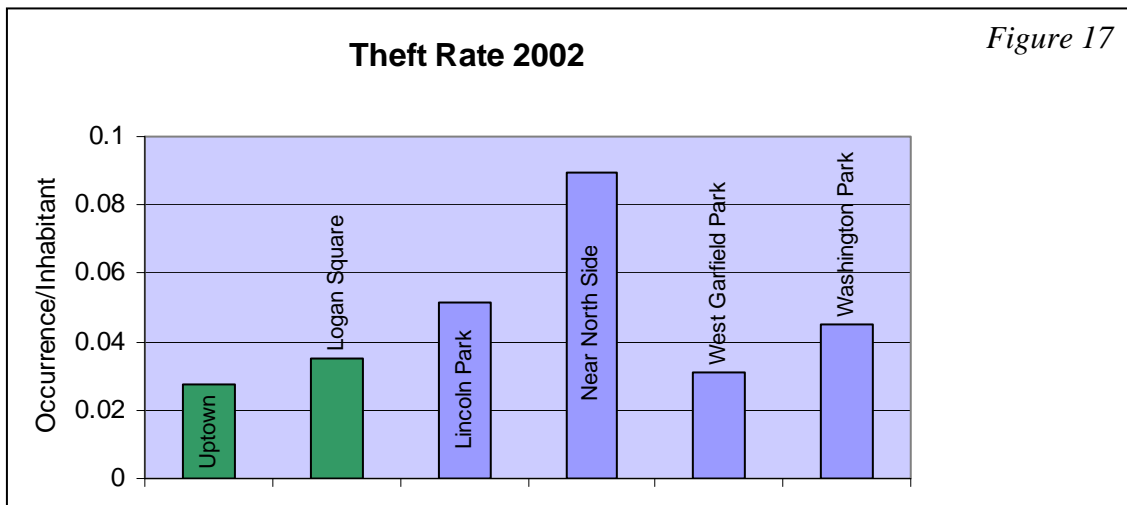
Burglary

Burglary Rates shown below do not put in evidence any particular community type. The variations are more between single communities, and not linked to the type of income in each of these areas. It is interesting to note however that the overall rate in mixed-income neighborhoods is lower than the high-income communities.



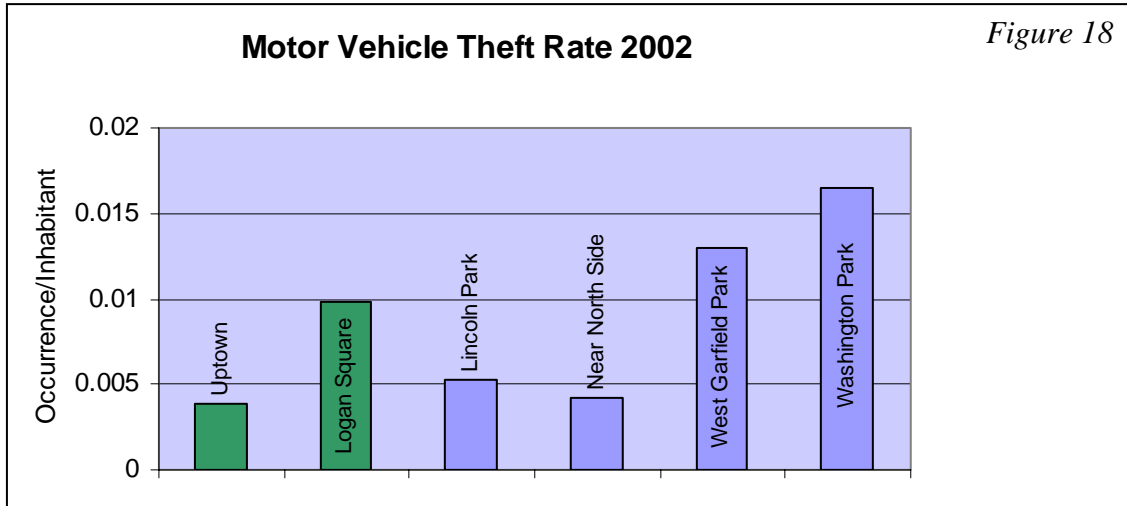
Theft

Probably the most interesting comparison of all is the Theft rate (Figure 17). So far, the two economically diverse areas have shown similar patterns as high-income neighborhoods. It is perhaps surprising to note that theft rates, which are higher for high-income areas compared to low-income areas, are even lower in mixed-income areas. This makes Uptown and Logan Square appear as taking the best of both in terms of lower crime rates observed until now.



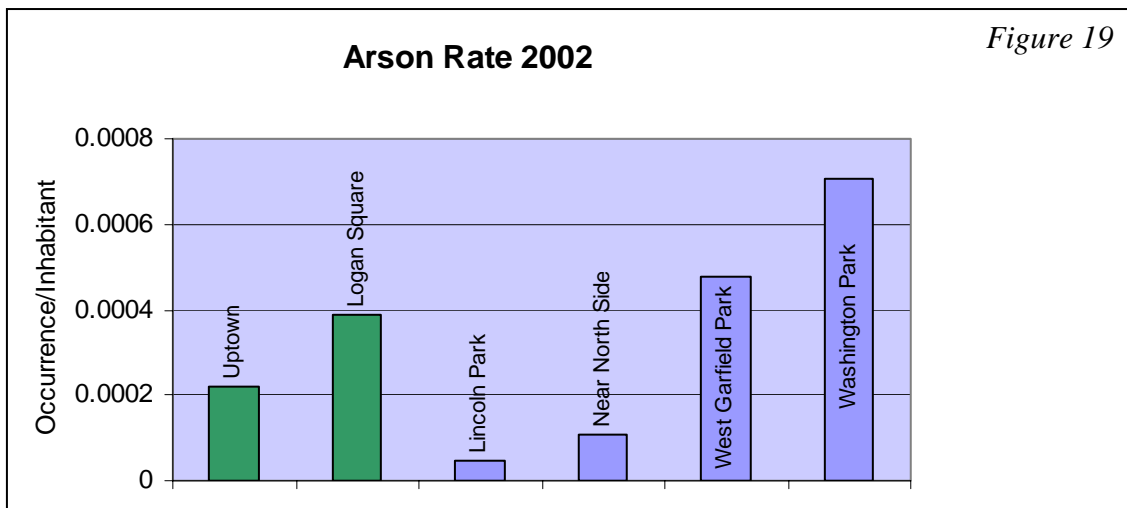
Motor Vehicle Theft

Overall, rates are higher for low-income communities, and lower for the other two income type communities. Logan Square has higher rates, but Uptown has the lowest rates, showing that the rate of these communities is low but not directly contrasting the high-income neighborhood rates.



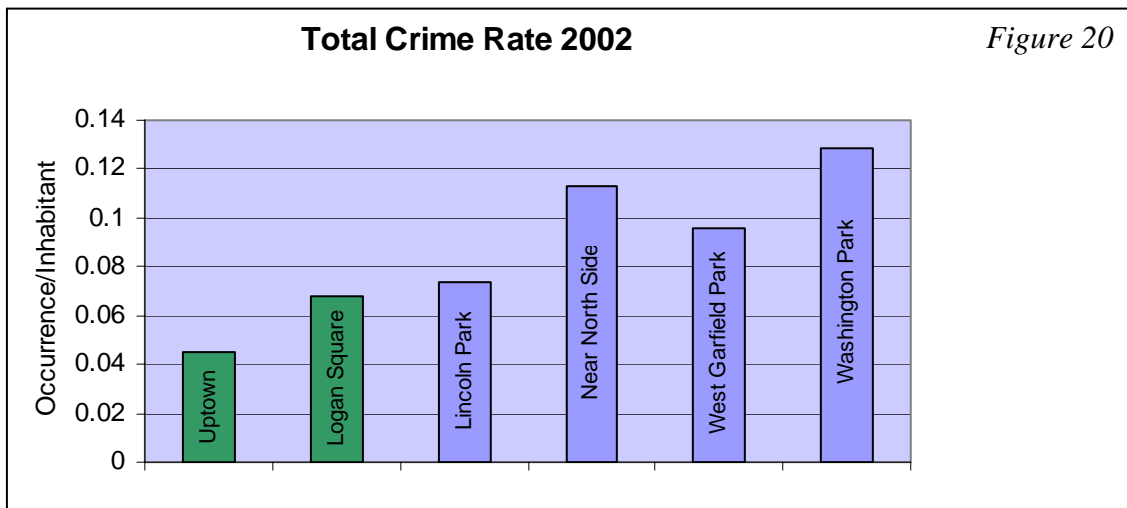
Arson

The last of the Property Crime shows a notable difference between mixed-income areas and high-income areas. Although the rate is lower than low-income areas, it is still quite higher than the “wealthier” communities. As mentioned earlier, Arson and Murder occurrences are very low and often are difficult to use in crime analysis. In order to represent a complete picture, these were also included in this comparative study.



Conclusion

The analysis of the statistics in the latter part of this document, particularly the comparison in theft, robbery, aggravated assault and criminal sexual assault rates prove that the level of crime in economically diverse neighborhoods is as low, if not lower in one instance, than high-income neighborhoods. This is reinforced by the data in Figure 20 where the total crime rate is compared. In this case we can see that the level of total crime per inhabitant in Uptown and Logan Square is below the rate of all the other four communities. It is therefore unfounded to say that mixed-income neighborhoods are unsafe.



Similarly, the assumption that the increase in high and middle-income residents in these neighborhoods would either benefit or be of negative impact to the crime rate is disproved through the time analysis of change in crime in the six neighborhoods.

To our question whether mixed-income neighborhoods are safe, we can safely reply that there are less occurrences of crime there than in other neighborhoods, including those that are predominantly inhabited by high-income residents.

Hence, solely based on a description and examination of crime in these areas, we are encouraged to take mixed-income communities such as Logan Square and Uptown as examples for building and promoting development in other areas.

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