

---

## *Perceptions of Residential Displacement and Grassroots Resistance to Anchor Driven Encroachment in Buffalo, NY.<sup>1</sup>*

Robert Silverman

Henry Taylor

Li Yin

Camden Miller    Pascal Buggs

(University at Buffalo, U.S.A.)

[rms35@buffalo.edu](mailto:rms35@buffalo.edu)

This article examines perceptions of institutional encroachment and community responses to it in Buffalo, NY. Specifically, we focus on residents' perceived effects of anchor institution (e.g. hospital and university) expansion on core city neighbourhoods. Through this analysis we offer insights into the processes driving neighbourhood displacement in the contemporary period. Data were collected through a series of focus groups with residents and other stakeholders in working class, minority neighbourhoods which were identified as being in the early stages of neighbourhood revitalization. A total of nine focus groups were held across three neighbourhoods experiencing encroachment due to institutional investments. The focus groups were held during the fall of 2017. The data were coded and analysed using ATLAS.ti software. The analysis was guided by standpoint theory, which focuses on amplifying the voices of groups traditionally disenfranchised from urban planning and policy processes. The findings from the analysis highlight how the expansion of anchor institutions transforms the built environment, neighbourhood identity, and everyday life in urban communities. Residents perceived change brought on by institutional encroachment as relatively unabated and unresponsive to grassroots concerns. On balance, residents perceived the benefit of neighbourhood revitalization accruing to anchor institutions while low-income, minority residents cope with negative externalities in a disproportionate manner. This led to heightened concerns about residential displacement and concomitant changes in their neighbourhoods' built and social environments.

**Keywords:** Anchor institutions, displacement, gentrification, institutional encroachment, neighbourhood revitalization.

### **Introduction**

This article builds on prior research examining processes of gentrification and institutional encroachment. In particular, it focuses on the role of anchor institutions in the urban revitalization process. Prior research has argued that anchor institutions, like large non-profit hospitals and universities, play a growing role in the revitalization and gentrification of core city neighbourhoods (Adams 2003, Bartik and Erickcek 2008, Sterrett 2009). Although some of the initial discussions of anchor institutions in the urban revitalization process focused on the synergies and benefits of hospital and university expansion in core city neighbourhoods impacted by decades of disinvestment, subsequent scholarship argued that institutional investments in inner-city neighbourhoods could also result in neighbourhood disruption and residential displacement (Silverman et al. 2014, Hyra 2015, Ehlenz 2016). This research offers extensions to this line of inquiry by examining how renters, homeowners and other neighbourhood stakeholders perceive the dynamics of anchor institution expansion in core city neighbourhoods.

### **Methods**

This article is based on data collected through a series of focus groups with renters, homeowners, and other stakeholders in three working class, minority neighbourhoods in

---

<sup>1</sup> Work that provided the basis for this publication was supported by a research grant from the Ralph C. Wilson Jr. Foundation. The authors thank the editors of the special section on gentrification for *Urbanities* and reviewers for their comments

Buffalo that were identified as being in the early stages of neighbourhood revitalization. The focus groups were part of a larger research project studying gentrification and displacement in Buffalo and other cities across the United States. The three neighbourhoods examined in this analysis were identified in collaboration with city-wide stakeholders from local government, the non-profit development community, and higher education using an adaptation of the methodology developed by Lisa Bates (2013) to identify neighbourhoods at risk of gentrification and displacement.

The three neighbourhoods (Lower West Side, Ellicott, and Fruit Belt) are shown in Figure 1. The neighbourhoods are all located adjacent to downtown Buffalo. Table 1 displays the population and housing characteristics of the study neighbourhoods and the city of Buffalo. Across all measures the study neighbourhoods were distinct from the rest of the city. The study neighbourhoods had: experienced more rapid declines in total population and the number of housing units between 2010 and 2016, larger African American and Hispanic populations, higher rates of housing vacancy, lower rates of homeownership, and higher rates of renter occupied property. After selecting the three-study neighbourhood, the research team worked with a community advisory panel composed of representatives from each of the study neighbourhoods to identify renters, homeowners, and other neighbourhood stakeholders to recruit for focus groups.

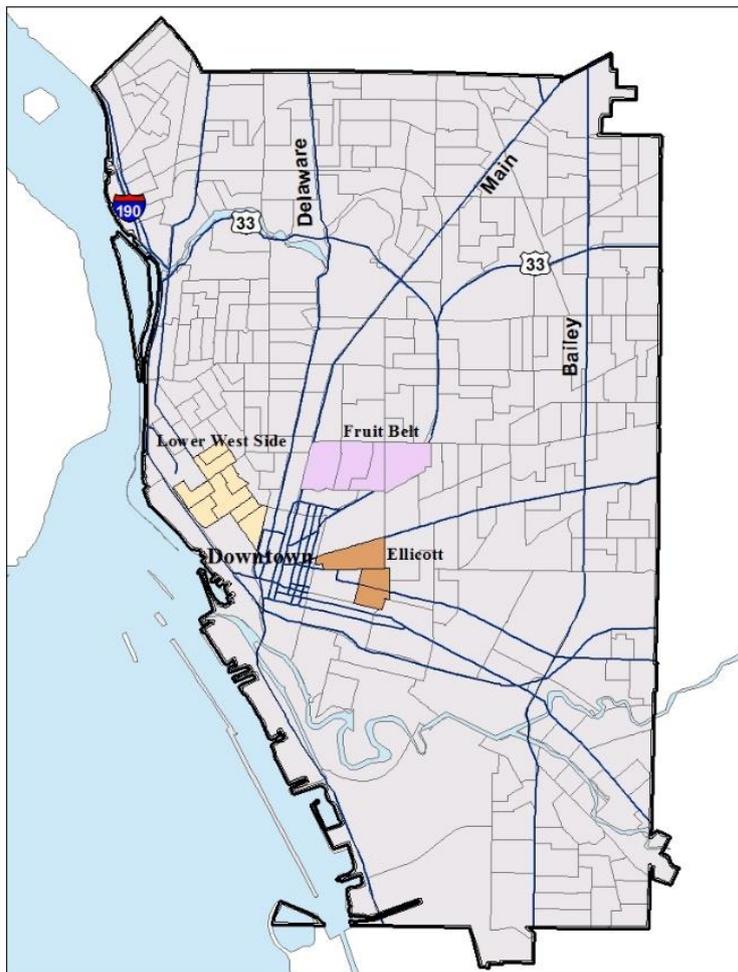


Figure 1: Three Study Neighbourhoods where Focus Groups Were Held.

	<b>Study Neighbourhoods</b>	<b>Buffalo, NY</b>
<b>Population 2016</b>		
Total	10,528	258,989
Percent Change 2010-2016	-15.7	-2.6
<b>Race 2016</b>		
Percent White	34.7	48.1
Percent African American	41.1	37.3
<b>Ethnicity 2016</b>		
Percent Hispanic	33.1	10.9
<b>Housing Units 2016</b>		
Percent Change 2010-2016	-11.1	-5.9
<b>Housing Occupancy 2016</b>		
Percent Vacant	20.6	16.3
Percent Occupied	79.4	83.7
<b>Tenure of Occupied Housing Units 2016</b>		
Percent Owner Occupied	27.3	41.4
Percent Renter Occupied	72.7	58.6

Table 1: 2016 Population and Housing Characteristics of the Study Neighbourhoods and the City of Buffalo, NY. Source: U.S. Census Bureau, American Community Survey 2010 and 2016 five-year estimates.

A total of nine focus groups were held across the three neighbourhoods experiencing encroachment due to institutional investments. Separate focus groups were held in each neighbourhood with renters, homeowners, and other stakeholders. Table 2 displays the characteristics of the focus group participants. The focus groups were held during the fall of 2017, each had an average of 6.4 participants, and each lasted approximately two hours. The data collected from the focus groups were transcribed verbatim and analysed using ATLAS.ti software. The analysis was guided by standpoint theory, which focuses on amplifying the voices of groups traditionally disenfranchised from the planning and policy processes (Adler and Jermier 2005, Anderson 2017).

Variable	Percent
Average focus group size	6.4
Percent homeowners	34.5
Percent renters	29.3
Percent other stakeholders	36.2
Percent male	38
Percent female	62
Percent age 18-35	8
Percent age 36-64	32
Percent age 65 and over	60
Percent white	22.5
Percent black	63.3
Percent Latino	10.2
Percent other	4

Table 2: Characteristics of the Focus Group Participants (N=58).

## Institutional Encroachment

### *Changing Land Uses and Renaming Neighbourhoods*

Buffalo is a shrinking city that has experienced decades of population decline, employment losses, housing abandonment, and property demolition (Silverman et al 2013; Silverman et al 2016; Weaver et al 2017). However, there has been growing boosterism among city officials and local development interests fed by, ‘nascent revitalization in select urban neighbourhoods [that] has prompted a flurry of articles depicting the city as a paradise for young, hip millennials’ (Renn 2015). City boosters point to investments by local hospitals, universities and other anchor institutions as evidence of revitalization in the city. Despite the presence of some new investment in and near downtown Buffalo, the long-term trajectory of the city and the region remains unchanged. Buffalo is projected to continue to lose population and housing stock into the future, raising questions about the spill over effects of anchor institutions’ investments on low-income, minority neighbourhoods that buttress against their campuses and physical plants.

The three neighbourhoods examined in this study have been at the epicentre of anchor driven revitalization efforts in the city. Each has been impacted by the recent expansion of the Buffalo Niagara Medical Campus (BNMC), the University at Buffalo (UB), D’Youville College, and other healthcare and higher education institutions in the city. Although these changes affect all of the neighbourhoods, the intensity of institutional factors driving neighbourhood change varies due to the proximity of specific anchor institutions to each of them. For example, the Lower West Side is most effected by institutional pressures from

D'Youville College and other anchor institutions in downtown Buffalo. The Ellicott neighbourhood's is most influenced due to its proximity to downtown Buffalo and endangered by spill overs from residential and commercial development in that area. While the Fruit Belt is confronted by institutional expansion of hospitals, the medical research centre, and UB's medical school. During focus groups residents and other stakeholders discussed the magnitude, scope, and impact of this expansion. One renter from the Fruit Belt neighbourhood made this comment about the BNMC's expansion:

The campus sits on a 120-acre site adjacent to downtown Buffalo and directly in the Fruit Belt neighbourhood. Presently there are estimated 17,000 employees working at the Buffalo Niagara Medical Campus with a projected 12,000 more employees and students in the region in 2018. The University at Buffalo is in the process of completing a \$375 million medical school, currently constructed of \$40 million parking ramp on East North. The Conventus Medical Family Center just opened up in 2015. That was another \$100 million. Kalida Health announced the grand opening of the Oishei Children's Hospital. Another \$250 million and \$7 million just got allocated for Allentown [an adjacent neighbourhood] so it can be connected as a hub to the medical campus. Not one dollar has poured this way towards the Fruit Belt neighbourhood and not one dollar of those millions of dollars has been allocated for any minority businesses. So the effect that they have on us here is? You can answer that. No progress with them or a relationship with them. We need to be included in what's going on as they sort of gentrify and push the residents here in the Fruit Belt out without a word.

Like this resident, other stakeholders verbalized concerns about the 'encroachment' of the medical campus and the neighbourhood displacement they perceived it produced. The general sentiment was that anchor institutions did not serve the interests of residents living in surrounding neighbourhoods. As one renter from the Ellicott neighbourhood put it, 'It's sad that over there in the Fruit Belt, not only UB, but also the cancer centre takes so much out of the Fruit Belt and then they want to build things just for the cancer centre or UB.'

Residents and other stakeholders concerns about institutional encroachment were most pronounced when they discussed the issue of neighbourhood identity. In a number of instances residents and other stakeholders discussed how encroachment transformed the identity of their neighbourhoods. One way this occurred was with the renaming of neighbourhoods by institutional actors. One stakeholder described his experience in a planning meeting hosted by the City when he realized that the name of his neighbourhood had been surreptitiously changed:

People in the meeting, residents, they were saying, 'we're concerned with the Fruit Belt being taken over by the medical campus. Speculation, and things like that'. They were told, 'Oh no, no, no that's not going to happen'. Then on the map it shows, rather than saying 'Fruit Belt' it says 'Medical Park'.

Other residents raised similar concerns about seeing their neighbourhood's name changed in plans when they attended public meetings hosted by the City and developers. One

homeowner commented that, ‘when you look on maps you don't see it anymore, it's considered the Medical Park, or whatever, they have erased us with a big eraser off of the city map’. Another homeowner pointed out that the change of the neighbourhood's name had also been adopted by commercial websites and on social media, commenting that, ‘it's up on Snapchat, if you know what that is, it will say “Medical Park”, and I'm like, “no I don't live in the Medical Park!”’

The renaming of neighbourhoods by institutional actors was one way that the identity of communities was transformed. Another way this occurred was when boundaries of neighbourhoods were redrawn. A homeowner in the Ellicott neighbourhood made this comment about how redrawing boundaries impacted neighbourhood identity:

We could have lived anywhere in the city. And we chose to live down in this neighbourhood because they were part of downtown. It's been interesting because I feel we were sold on being part of downtown and then they tried to disenfranchise us from downtown. So little things like the zip code. Zip codes are really important because zip codes tell banks about the people, everything. So if you look at us, we're in 14204. But guess what, you go one block up there in 14203. Guess what, 14203 is downtown. 14204 is not. That has a huge impact on our home values, on the bank. I'm still pissed about that. So you want to talk about a change, one of the changes is we were told we were downtown and then they changed the zip code. Not only did they change the zip code, but then they changed where we get our mail. Again, we used to get our mail right there on Washington. So we were downtown. Then all of a sudden I get something in the mail and now our mail is on William Street, past Fillmore. I'm going 20 blocks in the other direction when I used to go two blocks to get my mail. So I think that there's been a smoke and mirrors trying to disenfranchise us.

On one level, changing the name or boundaries of a neighbourhood has symbolic effects on its identity. On a more substantive level it has implications for everyday experiences and residents' quality of life.

#### *New Faces and the Disruption of Everyday Life*

On a more micro level, institutional encroachment was evidenced by changing residential demographics. One renter in the Fruit Belt described how the BNMC expansion had changed the neighbourhood's residential composition:

What I see is white people not being afraid to come into a black neighbourhood. A lot of things I've heard over time about white people is they don't like to come to the inner-city of Buffalo because they're scared, or they don't like to come to the bars because they think something is going to happen. It's negative. But I see white women, young white women, they'll walk 5 or 6 blocks to their cars they park here in the Fruit Belt. Another thing I've seen is, 3 o'clock in the morning, I see a white woman in spandex pants jogging down Jefferson, down Masten, walking their dogs.

The changing composition of a neighbourhood has implications on who occupies public and private spaces. For instance, a homeowner in the Lower West Side neighbourhood commented on the relationship between increased rents and encroachment due to the expansion of D'Youville College, saying that 'you can end up with like a dorm next door, because they can split up the rent and it becomes reasonable if you've got four people'.

Changes in occupancy patterns inevitably spill over into public spaces and impact social interactions. A renter on the Lower West Side described how the growing number of college students living in the neighbourhood increased nuisances, such as parties on the weekends. She described this encounter with a college student leaving a party next door to her, 'I came from a Halloween party myself, but I'm like, "Oh my God", I pulled in front and he's like "are you my Uber?" I'm like "no, I live here! Have a good night"'. Nuisances caused by institutional encroachment were not limited to late night interactions with college students. A number of concerns identified by residents and stakeholders related to parking congestion on neighbourhood streets. One renter in the Ellicott neighbourhood described how parking congestion was a direct result of anchor institution expansion:

What's happening is the workers don't feel like they should have to pay for parking. They got enough parking lots, but they don't want to pay for parking. I don't agree with them because it's a state job first of all, and I feel like you make enough money to pay for parking.

Increased competition for street parking has direct effect on residents' quality of life. A renter in the Fruit Belt made this point about the ways parking congestion that resulted from institutional encroachment affected residents:

Older people couldn't get rides or couldn't park in their own driveways because people blocked their driveways. They're needing medical care and things like that, and they couldn't get it. Another thing was, when relatives or somebody came over they had to park blocks over to get to the property.

For residents, institutional encroachment resulted in a change in the fabric of neighbourhood life. In some cases, new, unfamiliar people were encountered on the streets. In others, overflow parking and commuter traffic led to disruptions in everyday life.

## Conclusions

This article focuses on how institutional encroachment transforms neighbourhoods' built and social environments. Data from focus groups in Buffalo highlight how the expansion of anchor institutions transforms the built environment, neighbourhood identity, and everyday life in urban communities. Often the benefit of this transformation accrue to anchor institutions while low-income, minority residents cope with negative externalities in a disproportionate manner.

---

## References

- Adams, C. 2003. The Meds and Eds in Urban Economic Development. *Journal of Urban Affairs*, 25 (5): 571-588.
- Adler, P. and Jermier, J. 2005. Developing a Field with More Soul: Standpoint Theory and Public Policy Research for Management Scholars. *The Academy of Management Journal*, 48 (6): 941-944.
- Anderson, E. Spring 2017 Edition. Feminist Epistemology and Philosophy of Science. In E N. Zalta (ed.), *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, <https://plato.stanford.edu/archives/spr2017/entries/feminism-epistemology/> (accessed June 25, 2018).
- Bartik T.J. and Erickcek, G. 2008. *The Local Economic Impact of "Eds & Meds": How Policies to Expand Universities and Hospitals Affect Metropolitan Economies*. Washington, DC: Brookings Institution.
- Ehlenz, M. M. 2016. Neighborhood Revitalization and the Anchor Institutions: Assessing the Impact of the University of Pennsylvania's West Philadelphia Initiatives on University City. *Urban Affairs Review*, 52 (5): 714-750.
- Hyra, D. 2015. The Back-to-the-City Movement: Neighbourhood Redevelopment and Processes of Political and Cultural Displacement. *Urban Studies*, 52 (10): 1753-1773.
- Renn, A. M. 2015. Reinventing Buffalo: The Western New York City Should Focus on Getting Better – Not Bigger. *City Journal*, Autumn  
<https://www.city-journal.org/html/reinventing-buffalo-14115.html> (accessed June 25, 2018).
- Silverman, R. M., Lewis, J. and Patterson, K.L. 2014. William Worthy's Concept of 'Institutional Rape' Revisited: Anchor Institutions and Residential Displacement in Buffalo, NY. *Humanity & Society*, 38 (2): 158-181.
- Silverman, R. M., Patterson, K. L., Yin, L., Ranahan, M. and Wu, L. 2016. *Affordable housing in US shrinking cities: From Neighborhoods of Despair to Neighborhoods of Opportunity?* Bristol: Policy Press.
- Silverman, R. M., Yin, L. and Patterson, K. L. 2013. Dawn of the Dead City: An Exploratory Analysis of Vacant Addresses in Buffalo, NY 2008-2010. *Journal of Urban Affairs*, 35 (2): 131-152.
- Sterrett, S.A. 2009. Planning and Partnerships for the Renewal of Urban Neighborhoods. *Journal of Higher Education Outreach and Engagement*, 13 (3): 113-130.
- Weaver, R., Bagchi-Sen, S., Knight, J. and Frazier, A.E. 2017. *Shrinking Cities: Understanding Urban Decline in the United States*. New York: Routledge.