

Creating River North:
A Case Study of Demographic Shifts in Denver

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Abstract

The City of Denver has undergone rapid population growth since the year 2000. In light of this growth, my research explores what policies and plans may have affected demographic shifts in the area of River North. Analysis of racial demographics of the area shows extensive absolute population growth of the Non-Hispanic White population and absolute declining populations for every other demographic. My analysis found a moderately strong correlation between new building projects, the decline of Hispanic populations, and the rise of Non-Hispanic White populations. In 2003, Denver released the River North Plan for the redevelopment of an area that was historically industrial. Consequently, local artists formed the River North Art District. With approval from the Denver government, the Art District has grown to include oversight of a Business Improvement District and General Improvement District. In this way, the city has placed great power with the elected board of a local non-profit agency that oversees programming, design, and development of the area, many of whom are interviewed in my research as part of understanding their role and responsibilities. Simultaneously the government created an Inclusionary Housing Ordinance that produced no new housing in River North between 2000-2015. Denver's actions have unintentionally created powers that encourage processes of, without creating measures for avoiding, gentrification-induced displacement.

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I: Introduction

a. Background

Denver is currently one of the fastest growing cities in the country. In 2000, the City of Denver had a population of 556,094, which grew to 663,862 by 2015, a fifteen-year growth of nearly 20% (U.S. Census Bureau 2015^A). The U.S. Census Bureau identified the average annual growth rate for cities between 2000 and 2010 as 0.49% (Frey 2016). In that same time span the City of Denver averaged an annual growth rate of 1.3%. Additionally, between 2010 and 2015 Denver's population grew by 13.8%, representing an average annual growth rate of 2.76% over five years (U.S. Census Bureau 2015^A). This means over a five-year span Denver maintained a population growth rate five times the expected national average for cities. Of that five-year population growth, 65% comes from migration, people moving from other cities, as opposed to natural growth, children born (U.S. Census Bureau 2015^B).

Growth rates of this magnitude, especially with a high percentage coming from migration, raise concerns about Denver's available housing stock. A rising population, coupled with a demand for housing has created an increase in rental and home prices. According to Yardi Matrix, a commercial real estate research and data platform, rents in Denver between March 2015 and March 2016 rose by 10.3%, compared to the national average of 6.3% (Rebchock 2016). This growth is the fourth highest in the nation, on par with cities known for being in rental price crises, San Francisco and Sacramento. Denver's rent prices have seen

double digit increases since the end of 2012, meaning over the past four years Denver rental prices have increased by 40-50%.

Denver has accommodated some of this growth through rezoning and redevelopment of former long-neglected industrial areas, among which is an area north of the central business district of downtown Denver now known as River North. While the majority of, what is commonly referred to as River North, is located in the neighborhood of Five Points, some areas extend into the adjacent neighborhoods of Globeville and Elyria-Swansea. River North contains ample space for new dense housing and commercial spaces, newly constructed public rail access, while the city is also in the planning process for redeveloping a major arterial roadway, Brighton Boulevard, as well as access-based enhancements to the South Platte River. Therefore, River North presents a unique opportunity to examine the convergence of numerous influences and outcomes in one of America's fastest growing cities.

The rapidly rising population, steep rental prices increases, vast infill developments, and the construction of new public transit lines and infrastructure hold dramatic economic implications for people all over the city, especially those people in the traditionally low-income neighborhoods within and around River North. This neighborhood has historically housed heavy industrial use and high percentages of minority, high poverty populations. This location is now the source of cheap decommissioned industrial land and a cheaper real estate market than other areas of Denver. These combinatory factors make this a prime location for resident displacement and dramatic shifts in population.

b. Research Questions

Given this expansive growth of Denver, this case study seeks to explore the various influences and stated opportunities outlined in the *2003 River North Plan*, as well as examine adaptations and outcomes to the area and plan to date, providing an overview for consideration by other growing metropolitan areas. Rapid population growth accompanied by rising rental prices arouses suspicions of gentrification and possible residential and cultural displacement, two concepts to be defined and discussed later but of driving influence on the scope of this case study. Consequently as a way to examine the junction of multiple policy and planning influences, this case study explores one main question:

1. Since the *2003 River North Plan*, what planning policies affecting the Denver neighborhoods in and around River North have influenced demographic shifts and gentrification?

This single question will be informed by addressing four additional sub-questions:

- i. Are demographic shifts and gentrification happening in areas in and around River North?
- ii. Is there a correlation between infill projects and demographic shifts and gentrification?
- iii. What policies led to the creation of the River North Art District and the River North Business Improvement District?
- iv. How have the River North Art District, the River North Business Improvement District, and their placemaking initiatives encouraged or limited demographic shifts and gentrification?

These questions will be addressed through spatial analysis of demographic and housing data, as well as interviews with community members, business owners, and developers within River North. Understanding the full scope and implication of the above questions requires a comprehensive understanding of the various terms, influences, and discrepancies within the language and concepts associated with planning and policy affecting River North.

II: Literature Review

a. Gentrification Defined

Given the aforementioned levels of population growth within Denver, a necessary step the City of Denver took in 2016 was analyzing the potential neighborhood level gentrification happening or with the potential to happen across the city. In light of the city's recognition of this potential problem, and the levels of development and population growth in River North defining the terminology, as well as understanding and analysis of potential gentrification, including possible benefits and downfalls is necessary.

Defining the phenomenon of gentrification began in the United Kingdom in the 1960's with an eye towards analysis of changes in London neighborhoods. The sociologist Ruth Glass, in the 1964 *London: Aspects of Change*, defined gentrification as the process by which:

One by one, many of the working class quarters of London have been invaded by the middle classes – upper and lower. Shabby, modest mews and cottages – two rooms up and down – have been taken over, when their leases expired, and have become elegant, expensive residences. Larger Victorian houses, downgraded in an earlier or recent period – which were used as lodging houses or were otherwise in multiple occupations – have been upgraded once again. . . . The current social status and value of such dwellings are frequently in inverse relation to their status, and in any case enormously inflated by comparison with previous levels in their neighborhoods. Once this process of 'gentrification' starts in a district it goes on rapidly until all or most of the original working class occupiers are displaced and the social character of the district is changed" (Glass 1964).

Glass' description of the process set the agenda for important aspects typically under analysis in studies of gentrification including social, physical, and economic transformation and associated displacement. While Glass presents a

visual portrayal of the signs of gentrification and a foundational understanding of those repercussions, she neglects exploring potential catalysts for such alterations to the urban fabric.

Following Glass' initial use and definition, scholars, planners, and policy makers have continued to use and adapt the understanding of and forces behind the process. Beginning in the 1970's, in light of the "back to the city" movement that saw middle-income people return to cities from suburbs, scholars such as Neil Smith and David Ley began theorizing about the driving forces behind gentrification. Although both arguments are rooted in economic causes, they proposed vastly different means by which economics propels gentrification.

Smith proposed an explanation rooted in supply-side economic arguments. In Smith's theory, a divergence arises between actual economic gains of a location and the potential economic gains, which he refers to as a "rent gap" (Smith 1979). Through undermaintenance or disinvestment, physical structures decline in value, creating a prime opportunity for cheap investment in property by a wealthier population. Over a long enough period, an area will undergo enough disinvestment and neglect that this gap allows for gentrification as, "the process by which working class neighborhoods are rehabilitated by middle class homebuyers, landlords, and professional developers" (Smith 1982). Smith's argument proposes merely an economic impetus by which future gains in the housing market instigate gentrification.

On the other hand, David Ley proposes a demand-side economic argument for gentrification by focusing on cultural and occupational trends that alter the

urban fabric. Ley suggests that factors such as lower average household size, rising prices of suburban homes, and shifts towards white-collar office jobs encouraged shifting cultural and economic choices towards the city (Ley, 1986). While recognizing the presence of undervalued property allows for the “revitalization process”, Ley emphasizes that changes in the social landscape encouraged the middle and upper classes to move to the city (Ley, 1981), not merely the presence of cheap property. Accordingly, Ley’s argument suggests that changing social demands, perhaps coinciding with supply-side economic factors, are the primary forces behind gentrification.

While both Smith and Ley originally focused their arguments primarily on factors of economics, scholars began to question factors of culture and diversity that coincide with the economic conditions of gentrification. Exploring these historic trends in economics as well as the associated decades of disinvestment in cities due to suburbanization and white flight, Beauregard argues that gentrification could serve as an “antidote for most urban ills”, a necessary step for city governments to take to provide the social needs of an affluent tax base (Beauregard 1985). Over multiple decades, cities across the country began to work with private developers to utilize various tools to gentrify areas abandoned by industry and suburbanization such as River North. Identifying cultural deterrents and interests for middle and upper class citizens, these cities targeted drugs, violence, and other perceived social ills, while simultaneously providing benefits to developers, leading to gentrification (Lees, Slater, Wyly 2008).

Ultimately scholars have questioned the notion of gentrification as a process, transitioning to the observation that gentrification is a consequence of the convergence of cultural and economic factors over a sustained time (Hamnett 1991; Lees 1994, 2000; Ley 1994; Smith 1996). These ideas concerning culture revolve around postindustrial shifts from manufacturing hubs towards service-based economies and the associated cultural repercussions including a desire for diversity and wider social experience (Lees 2000). During the latter quarter of the twentieth century, this shift in economic production led to a transition in lifestyles and patterns of consumption for the middle class.

While not absent of economic factors, theories about gentrification as an outcome of cultural shifts attempt to analyze the effects of changing cultural preferences. Some opinions identify lifestyle predilections associated with the authenticity of urban life as primary drivers for in-movers (Brown-Saracino 2009; Caulfield 1994; Zukin 1982). Within this group of in-movers emerged a subgroup known as the “creative class”, including artists, certain types of business owners, and even those consumers with a partiality for the arts. From this perspective, gentrification is understood more specifically as a process of repurposing old neighborhoods to meet the needs of young, middle-class professionals (Van Criekingen and Derclay 2003). In this line of thinking, cultural affinities primarily drive market forces rather than the other way around.

In the 21st century, the concept of positive gentrification emerges in which scholars observe the regeneration of neighborhoods as bringing positive aesthetic and economic outcomes to previously disinvested areas (Zukin and Kosta 2004).

In this way there develops a transition away from the negative definitions of earlier gentrification research towards focusing on the “healthy economic present and future for cities”, in which typical repercussions of gentrification are absent (Slater 2006). Instead, studies have attempted to demonstrate that the movement of wealth and middle-class values into areas of concentrated poverty produces economic and social benefits to all people (Chaskin and Joseph 2012). This line of thinking attributes concentrations of poverty and urban decline to poor values systems, which can be remedied by the positive presence of more successful and wealthy role modeling (Chaskin 2013; Duany 2001).

Despite variations in catalysts and repercussions of gentrification, common understandings of the process of gentrification remain mostly consistent. Little has varied from Glass’ original understanding that gentrification is the process of middle and upper-class people moving into lower income areas. Associated with gentrification are the rises of housing and land prices, as well as potential clashes of social and cultural values.

b. Where Gentrification Occurs

While the definitions of gentrification generally outline a group of wealthier in-movers taking advantage of cultural or market shifts which allow them to occupy residence typically occupied by lower income residents, that does not paint the diversity of pathways scholars have identified within gentrification. The first and most visible association with gentrification occurs in areas with de-valued residential units that, as noted, are attractive for cultural or economic reasons (Atkinson and Bridge 2012; Beauregard 2010; Bluestone et al. 2008). For

similar reasons, gentrification occurs around commercial nodes where in-movers find attractive retail and restaurants (Beauregard 2010). One catalyst of gentrification, seemingly ignored by original scholars, includes socio-cultural amenities such as parks, theaters, waterfronts, or similar attractions (Beauregard 2010; Ley 1996). A final noted source of gentrification is access to transportation infrastructure, with studies noting that proximity to public transit typically increases rents and home values, albeit to varying degrees based on other contextual factors (Beauregard 2010; Chapple 2009; Duncan 2008). These diverse influences on potential gentrification and subsequent repercussions make consistent analysis difficult; yet provide ample justification for the consideration of policy and development outcomes within those contexts if potential negative outcomes such as low-income residential displacement are to be avoided.

c. Gentrification and Displacement

Within the literature, displacement of low-income residents, meaning the unavoidable movement out of a neighborhood or region, presents a highly investigated problem. Some scholars argue that gentrification-induced displacement occurs because more economically advantaged individuals and families move into these areas of lower income and subsequently raise rents and the cost of goods and services, effectively forcing out low-income residents (Atkinson 2000; Jerzky 2009; Schill, Nathan and Persaud 1983). These same studies generally highlighted raised rental prices, evictions, or change of property owners as reasons, all of which are documented effects of gentrification, for

displacement. Many studies attempted to use census data and personal interviews to determine rates of displacement over multiple years. However, interview-based studies show non-economic social and cultural effects of gentrification also lead to displacement, but the efficacy of those studies prove difficult to use in showing causal linkages between gentrification and displacement (Atkinson 2000; Newman and Wyly 2006). Thus, a duality of emerging arguments over the reality of displacement has produced significant scholarly debate.

Opponents to gentrification-induced displacement argue that studies have shown limited or no causal link between gentrification and displacement, but that positive economic development can be accurately attributed to gentrification (Betancourt 2011; Davidson 2009; Freeman 2009; Vigdor 2002). Other scholars have attempted to promote the notion that displacement is not occurring but rather the normal transformation of class structures as people move (Hamnett 2003). Further studies even went on to demonstrate that there is no evidence of elevated levels of original residents moving out of neighborhoods (Ellen and O'Reagan 2011), but rather the patterns were consistent with normal migration. In the case of River North it is important to note that "normal migration" may not be an applicable term for the transition of populations given the inordinate growth compared to similar sized cities.

Proponents of gentrification-induced displacement propose alternative analyses which posit that long-term studies show low-income residents do as much as possible to remain in place. Thus, the year-by-year levels of displacement are perhaps not startling, but over the course of long-term study, the

displacement becomes more obvious. Through practices of exclusionary displacement in which, while low-income people may initially remain, when they chose to leave, their residence will not be filled with a similarly economically situated person, but occupied by a wealthier individual, thus changing the overall character of a space (Marcuse 2005; Van Criekingen 2006; Wyly et al. 2010). This change in character of space has also been shown to be a further catalyst for residential mobility. The buying power of wealthier in-movers dictates the retail atmosphere of a neighborhood to the point where diversity is replaced by cultural homogeneity, which in turn has potential to limit community networks essential to a sense of place (Newman and Wyly 2006; Walks and Maaranean 2008). Even in the case of original residents remaining, if they transition to being the minority populace, they lose a sense of place by virtue of becoming a minority in their neighborhood.

Ultimately the dichotomy of information and analysis results from similar difficulties in most areas of study concerning definitions and units of measurement. Scholars struggle to agree on definitions of the terms gentrification and displacement. These differences lead to disagreements over acquisition, analysis, and presentation of data in terms of source, scale, and length of time. Furthermore, the potential subjectivity of objective data makes analysis of cultural or social factors of displacement difficult to operationalize.

d. Environmental Gentrification

One important, and perhaps often overlooked, aspect of gentrification-induced displacement comes from the well-intentioned actions of environmental

improvement. In the case of River North, this concept requires examination given the areas former industrial atmosphere, and proximity to freight rail lines and interstate highways. Those attributes which would have defined the area as undesirable are now being reversed through the conversion of industrial space, planned construction of a new park, and the revamping of access to the South Platte River, all efforts at environmental improvement.

Many metropolitan areas have focused on redeveloping brownfield sites and creating greater access to urban green space over the latter half of the twentieth century onward with an eye towards addressing concerns with public health and environmental justice (Barnett 2001). However, many urban areas known for lack of green space are low-income and by introducing urban greening development, areas threaten to alter the lived experience and visual landscape in a process known varyingly as ecological gentrification (Dooling 2009), green gentrification (Gould and Lewis 2012), or environmental gentrification (Checker 2011). Analyses have shown direct links between greening and real estate development as a mechanism for altering economic access to housing, linking park construction with gentrification (Checker 2011). While at times efforts to green an area result in indirect displacement through economic repercussions, but at other times can result in the direct displacement of homeless people in riparian areas such as what occurred in Seattle through similar river access redevelopment as is proposed in River North (Dooling 2009). Later analysis of River North's available green space, tree canopy, and proximity to homeless shelters will

illuminate the pressing need for considering environmental gentrification as a repercussion of current development.

In response to studies showing this connection, scholars have appealed for the adoption of strategies known as “just green enough” (Curran and Hamilton 2012), by which green spaces seek to alleviate health issues related to environmental justice, but are not so appealing as to drive land and home values beyond the reach of lower income citizens. In this model, environmental hazards are addressed, but industrial use and jobs are preserved, allowing the area to maintain lower income residents (Curran and Hamilton 2012). This concept could be appropriately addressed within River North if some of the industrial spaces are maintained as such while eliminating industries with hazardous by-products. However, much of the area in River North is not being maintained as industrial space, and much of the previous empty industrial space is being converted by means of infill into residential, business, and entertainment spaces.

e. The Role of Infill

Given the previous zoning and uses of River North as primarily industrial, the development of this area does not fall into typical gentrification models of in-movers directly displacing low-income residents, at least not directly within the River North boundary. River North reflects the transformation of former industrial spaces into a livable neighborhood through conversion of industrial spaces, but more widely through the creation of commercial and cultural nodes, transit oriented development (TOD), and dense housing, mostly by means of

infill. Scholars have broadly defined infill as development on vacant or underutilized parcels within a metropolitan area (Landis et al. 2006; McConnell and Wiley 2010). Therefore, an understanding and analysis of infill and its associated positive or negative links to gentrification requires attention.

By occurring on vacant or underutilized parcels, infill does not directly impress displacement upon low-income residents by bulldozing homes. Infill will bring new residents and commercial investments, which many believe stabilizes a neighborhood through increased taxes and activity (McConnell and Wiley 2010). This has the potential for addressing issues associated with concentrated poverty, such as unemployment and crime, through increasing density and economic activity (Farris 2001). Infill projects utilize the built infrastructure of existing neighborhoods and tie together the prevailing urban fabric where previous dead zones may have existed, often seen as a stimulus for crime. This converts underutilized spaces into areas of public, social, and economic benefit (Burchell et al. 2000; Cooper 2004). Those benefits are derived from potential new access to commercial space, open space, or transit infrastructure.

Alternately, some argue that infill raises prices and rents, and generates cultural shifts that encourage gentrification-induced displacement (Farris 2001; Steinacker 2003). Those shifts occur because of the newness factor and any efforts towards establishing a new cultural identity in the form of placemaking. Additional arguments against infill include loss of open space, traffic congestion, noise pollution, and increased crime (Evans 2004; Flint 2005). However, this

assumption rests on the idea that infill will not include changes to infrastructure, public transit, or security.

In the case of River North, the creation of commercial spaces, TOD, park creation, and new housing reflect the broad spectrum of benefits and concerns expressed through the various literatures. Therefore, all theory behind these methods of investment and development necessitate consideration in analyzing River North.

f. The Role of Placemaking

The extent to which infill and industrial transformation constitute the development of River North resulted in the creation of a new identity and lived experience on the ground, resulting in an emerging sense of place in the form of nominal and visual identifiers associated with the practice of placemaking. Ideally, placemaking represents an attempt at creating livable spaces and resources conducive to the cultural desires of the populace (Flemming 2007). Additionally, placemaking seeks to give memorable visual meaning to the experience of space (Yencken 1995). In the case of River North this is accomplished through the aforementioned acronym and logo, but also in its designation as an Art District, to be discussed in more detail later.

Scholars have noted that often the identity of a space is sustained through the structure and symbols of money, goods, labor, and culture (Appadurai 1996; Lefebvre 1991). Thus the construction of place identity in the form of placemaking, results from local leadership using methods for easily recognizable

visuals to broaden residential and commercial appeal. However, some argue that placemaking methods can illuminate uneven power structures that allow power to dictate cultural identity, even in the face of competing cultural claims (Appadurai 1996; Massey and Jess 1995; Saitta 2013). The question to be asked in light of that concern being: who decides the cultural identity of a place? If identity is dictated by powers unrepresentative of the majority, or implemented in efforts to promote one cultural identity over another, scholars would question the purpose of placemaking. The main concern in short is that placemaking masks or inaccurately reflects the lived experience of low-income residents, long-term residents, or less powerful residents.

Nevertheless, arguments in favor of placemaking highlight the potential social and economic benefits associated with improving the physical environment through a sense of place in underdeveloped areas (Burton et al. 2010). By creating new associations based on placemaking identity, the assumption is that people will supplant negative associations of crime or poverty with the alternative and newly established cultural identifiers (Burton et al. 2010). In the case of River North, the placemaking, in terms of name branding and district designations, has generated a uniquely different cultural identity than the original industrial space, and a symbolic cleaving from Five Points.

g. Art District, Placemaking, and Gentrification

As part of its placemaking, the City of Denver has designated River North as an Art District. According to the “Initiatives” page of the RiNo Art District website, the art district exists to “direct resources to programs that creatively,

sustainably grow the neighborhood and direct its future”. RiNo’s initiatives target five priority areas: neighborhood character, affordability, infrastructure, mobility, and sustainability” (“Initiatives” RiNo Art District). The RiNo Art District initiatives are established, monitored, and implemented by a board representing various interests within the geographic boundaries of the district.

At times these types of art districts emerge spontaneously from artists seeking cheap studio and gallery space which merges into a social space for working, meeting, and exchanging ideas (Zukin 2011). Alongside the benefits an emerging art district holds for the artists, come important economic benefits generated through cultural activities associated with the district such as community revitalization and job creation (Grodach and Loukaitou-Sideris 2007). In this view, and as outlined by the RiNo Art District, art districts can provide socio-economic benefits to a variety of interested partners within a neighborhood in the form of shops, restaurants, bars, and cultural destinations.

Alongside the potential benefits, however, some scholars highlight socio-economic negatives. Other historic areas of emergent art districts, such as SoHo, New York, saw culture clashes in the commodification of space (Zukin 1982). The general premise is that the placemaking schemes attempt to draw crowds of consumers, increasing the desirability of the space as a means for generating economic benefits. Such desirability, while initially beginning with a cultural focus at bringing attention to the arts, shifts towards capital accumulation and real estate value as part of the space’s identification with the place as art district (Grodach and Loukaitou-Sideris 2007; Wang and Li 2009; Zukin 1982). In

economic terms, the increase in desirability simultaneously increases prices, which directly negate the original interest of the art district as a cheap space for artists. Therefore, governments, communities, and businesses engage in a delicate balancing act between authenticity and commodification of space and place within an art district, with potential for preservation or displacement.

h. Business Improvement District

Alongside the RiNo Art District, the City of Denver has declared River North a business improvement district (BID), a further designation about which scholars present differing opinions. Despite nominal variations by region or city, the concept of a BID is a private-public partnership in which private interests supplement public services for a designated geographic area (Hoyt and Gopal-Agge 2007). Scholars attribute the rise of BIDs to socioeconomic and political factors effecting cities in the latter half of the twentieth century which saw the decline of city-centers, declining tax bases, and the accompanying inability for local governments to effectively manage entire cities (Burayidi 2001; Gopal-Agge and Hoyt 2007; Hoyt and Gopal-Agge 2007). In light of those challenges, local governments agree to offer decision-making powers beyond their normal impact to private interests, usually in the form of a board, to determine infrastructure and development of the designated area with public approval. The RiNo BID is overseen by a board of business owners and residents, funded by tax revenue granted by the city government.

Typical economic value from BIDs comes from their ability, with municipal approval, to collect varying amounts of the tax revenues from within the district, and implement services whereby they ensure that the revenue collected is used within the BID (Briffault 1999; Hoyt and Gopal-Agge 2007). The designation further allows the BID leaders to act with high levels of autonomy in addressing local issues (Hoyt and Gopal-Agge 2007). Given their loose designation, a BID can provide a wide array of services including sanitation, business development, but also security (Hochleutner 2003; Hoyt and Gopal-Agge 2007; Reeve 2007). The literature suggests that BIDs in the United States have been successful at promoting retail and residential development in areas of central cities associated with underdevelopment and concentrated poverty (Birch 2002; Gopal-Agge and Hoyt 2007; Hoyt and Gopal-Agge 2007; Wood and Ward 2007). Advocates suggest that BID's are able to do this because they operate unlike governments, without significant rules and bureaucratic policies (MacDonald 2000). Due to the transformative success of BIDs, they have become widely used throughout Denver.

Despite noted successes of BIDs, scholars have noted areas of concern over their role, implementation, and effectiveness. Primary concerns highlight the privatization of services, signaling the ineffectiveness of the public sector and the questioning of its further utility (Briffault 1999; Hoyt and Gopal-Agge 2007). Additionally, concerns about representation insinuate that BID boards afford more power to private business and property owners at the expense of non-property owning residents (Briffault 1999; Hoyt and Gopal-Agge 2007). This is true of

River North in which the board does not consist of renters. Concerning the security powers of BIDs, some have argued that this authority allows private interests to dictate the use and acceptable behaviors of public space resulting in over-regulation based on the desires of powerful businesses (Hoyt and Gopal-Agge 2007; Reeve 2007). This line of thinking echoes concerns of gentrification-induced displacement that propose that cultural suppression or imbalance leads to displacement through a loss of a sense of place.

In the consideration of the River North BID, the convergence of influences and outcomes attains further analytic difficulty considering its designation as an Art District, the level of infill and TOD, and the potential for gentrification-induced displacement as development continues.

III: Methodology

The choice to analyze River North through the lens of a case study emerged from Robert Yin's assertion that a case study, when done well, allows for the investigation into a contemporary phenomenon with real-life context utilizing multiple sources of evidence (Yin 2014). Yin broadly outlined the necessary parts of a case study as study questions, multiple sources of evidence, and a chain of evidence, creating a linear logic from questions informing data collection, which further inform conclusions. Utilizing this outline of a case study, I selected specific types of change I wanted to analyze, ethnic and economic shifts, as well as their association with modern development. From my main research question, I generated sub-questions that would lead to a thorough answer of my primary question.

In line with Yin's definition, this case study, in examining plans and policies that affected demographic shifts, relies on a two-fold methodology for analyzing both quantitative and qualitative data. Therefore, I used data from the U.S. Census Bureau and the American Community Survey as a source of quantitative data for understanding population shifts. I coupled that quantitative data with qualitative data gained from personal interviews with members of the River North Art District board, BID board, General Improvement District (GID) board, residents and business owners, and City Councilman Albus Brooks, who represents the district in question. As such, this study will find consistencies and discrepancies between the raw data of numbers and the lived experience within River North.

Section IV is a historic overview with a broad explanation of the larger Denver filtering down to the smaller Five Points area, which includes River North. This historical overview includes an explanation of the differing boundaries and justification for my choices concerning boundaries for analysis. This historic overview also provides context for understanding population shifts in this part of Denver.

Section V focuses on outlining the important information from the *2003 River North Plan*. This includes an overview of the relevant stated opportunities and goals of the plan, as well as a quick view of the existing conditions of the planning boundary. This provides a necessary foundation picture of the area before moving into examining change.

Section VI, the River North Case Study, aims to answer my thesis questions about the existence of demographic shifts and the policies affecting those changes in demographics. I begin with looking at Census and American Community Survey data to understand racial demographic change between 2000-2015. Using Census data from 2000 and 2010, as well as ACS data from 2015 I was able to create graphs demonstrating the change in actual residents within each self-identified racial group. Comparing those numbers to the total number of residents in each of the three designated time periods, I was able to understand the change in relative percentage of each self-identified racial group over 15 years.

Additionally, I used those same sources of data to understand economic change related to racial demographics between 2000-2015. The only measure I looked at was median income of the three census tracts, as well as the median

income of each self-identified racial group. This single measure of economic well-being does not consider variability because of migration, or deeper understanding of general wealth, but does offer a singular simple view of economic standing and change between 2000 and 2015.

The final step in understanding demographic shifts involved the process of mapping infill projects between 2000-2014 and running a Pearson correlation between the presence of demographic shifts and infill development. I did this by taking an online database of infill projects provided by Ken Schroepel at the University of Colorado, Denver, and geocoding the information for each infill site. Using those locations in conjunction with mapped information in GIS about demographic changes, I was able to determine which census tracts had the greatest shifts in racial demographics as well as how many infill projects each of those tracts contained. This allowed me to run a Pearson coefficient calculation to determine any level of association between infill projects and racial displacement. This entire section presents data relevant to understanding the levels of demographic shifts occurring in River North.

The case study continues with an examination of how the River North Art District, BID, and General Improvement District (GID) came into existence, their influence on development, and their vision for the future. This consists of stated histories and goals from their respective websites, but also one-on-one interviews conducted by phone. To conduct these interviews I filed an IRB exemption request with Tufts University. I included information pertaining to the secure saving of documents in an online box system operated by Tufts University. I also

included sample questions and a scripted introduction for the project and options for the interviewees to disclose their names, occupations, and statements. Tufts University gave me exemption from the IRB process, the files were saved in the online box system, and each interviewee granted me permission to use their name, occupation, and statements in this thesis. Each of the interviews was conducted by phone between thirty and sixty minutes, and was not recorded as I typed notes. I conducted nine interviews between March and April of 2017 with board members from the Art District, BID, GID as well as residents and business owners, developers working within the boundary, and politicians representing the area within and around River North. Questions were related to the role of various organizations, the stated goals of the River North Plan, the results of my demographic shift analysis, as well as perspectives on future development.

It continues with an overview of government policies concerning housing and development and their relationship to demographic shifts. This involved reading various planning documents related to the area created between 2000 and 2016, primarily focusing on the *2003 River North Plan*. Interview questions related to direct stated goals and opportunities within this plan.

The final section of consists of analysis and discussion of the findings from the case study. Relying on Yin's outline of analysis, I use the case description to build an explanation of what happened over the past fifteen years to create the apparent demographic shifts (Yin 2014). I match accepted academic ideas referenced in the literature review with the mixture of quantitative and qualitative data presented in the case study to create a picture of demographic

change and the associated policies in River North. This is finalized with policy recommendations for the City of Denver and possibly other cities dealing with potential gentrification-induced displacement.

IV: History of the Area

a. Colorado, Denver, and Five Points

The City of Denver was founded as a gold mining town in 1858 on the banks of the South Platte River at its confluence with Cherry Creek along the edge of the Front Range of the Rocky Mountains. Within the next few years more than 100,000 miners flocked to the Front Range in search of gold in what is known as the Pike's Peak Gold Rush (Brown 1985).



Figure 1: Location of Denver in Colorado
Source: freeworldmaps.net

Denver was officially settled by General William Larimer, who laid out the designs for the city with the dream that it would grow into a major mining city (Larimer 1918). Unfortunately for Larimer, the gold dried up quickly and miners moved deeper into the Front Range to work the mines. At this point Denver adapted into a supply hub for difficult to manufacture materials in the small mining towns throughout the Front Range (Brown 1985). By 1870 Denver had

connected railway lines between Kansas and Wyoming, ensuring its place as an important depot for goods and people moving west (Baker 2004). The Territory of Colorado was formed in 1871 followed by statehood in 1876. Denver grew to 106,713 people by 1890, making it the 26th largest city in the United States (U.S. Census Bureau 1998).

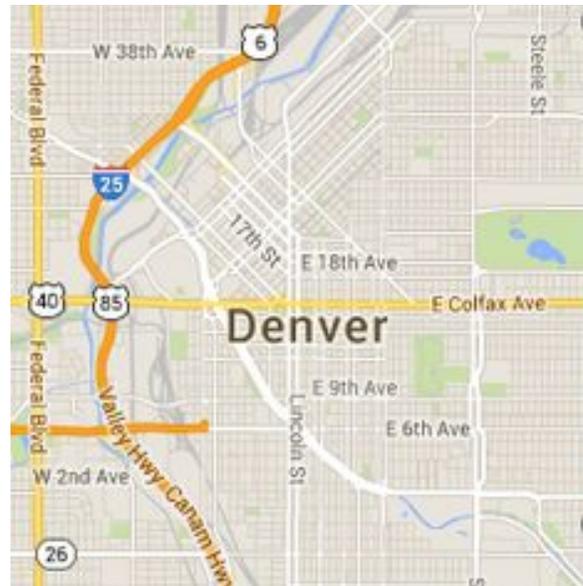


Figure 2: Downtown Denver showing street alignments
Source: Google Maps

At the time of its founding, Denver's streets formed a grid aligned to the South Platte River and Cherry Creek; however, by the 1860's the city began aligning new streets on a grid system along cardinal directions.

The United States Congress granted the area today known as Five Points, and containing most of the area now known as River North, to the City of Denver in 1864, thirteen years before Colorado became a state. The area quickly became one of the most desirable neighborhoods for Denver's wealthy by virtue of its location near water, the newly created Curtis Park, and its location along the streetcar line (Ugochukwu 2006). The tramway popularized the name Five Points

as a reference to the five-pointed intersection at the end of the route (City and County of Denver 1995).

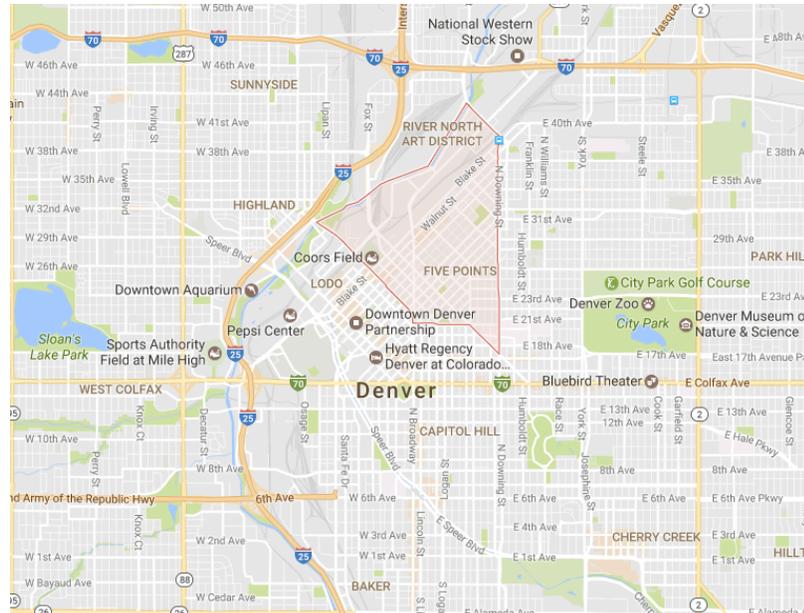


Figure 3: Five Points Neighborhood
Source: Google Maps

The prestige of Five Points, however, was short lived as wealthy families re-located to Capitol Hill, a neighborhood far from the emerging industries along the South Platte River running through the Five Points area (Ugochukwu 2006). This wealth migration coincided with an influx of African American and Latino migrants who would dominate Five Points' population for the next 100 years mostly as a repercussion of segregation and real-estate covenants restricting those ethnicities from other areas of the city (Ugochukwu 2006). As such, Five Points became the center of African American and Latino community life in Denver, garnering the moniker, Denver's "Harlem" (Mauck 2001).

Throughout the early twentieth century, the area developed into a largely industrial space along the river and railroad tracks. In the 1930's the Longero

Boiler and Sheet Iron Works, and the Banner Iron & Wire Works Company located in the area (C.C.D. 2003). By 1940, the Denargo Market, housing various businesses, was conducting thriving business as a manufacturing and distribution center for much of the areas food products (C.C.D. 2003). Other industrial uses throughout the first half of the twentieth century included the Pepsi-Cola Bottling Company, Dryfoot Rubber Company, S.H. Supply Company, National Fuse Powder Company, Railway Steel Spring Company, and the Gardner Denver Company (rock drill manufacturers) had all located along the train lines through Five Points (C.C.D. 2003). The city designated some of the industrial spaces like the Omaha-Grant Smelter as superfund sites after ceasing operations, leaving some of the industrial or vacant parcels unusable for years (C.C.D. 2003).

At its height in the 1950's Five Points population reached 32,000, but with the 1954 Colorado Fair Housing Law, many people began abandoning the area that had seen limited investment in over a century, and the population declined to 8,700 by the 1970's, a twenty-year decline of 23,000, or 71% (Aguilar 2003; Ugochukwu 2006). In the subsequent thirty years, the population of Five Points changed little. In 2000, the population was 9,989 people, reflecting national trends in urban population stagnation throughout the latter half of the twentieth century (Ugochukwu 2006).

b. The Emergence of River North

The name River North appeared in newspaper articles and business and real estate advertisements starting around 2003 despite lacking status as an official neighborhood in Denver. While the name was used to describe the area in

the *2003 River North Plan*, the official first plan for the area, the name is often now attributed to Jill Hadley-Hooper and Tracy Weil who established the River North Art District (RiNo Art District) in 2005 (Calhoun 2015). The art district grew out of a recognition that many residents of the neighborhood lived there because of the cheap rents and abundant former industrial space available for use as studios and galleries. Now the nickname has been applied widely to businesses such as the River North Brewery, RiNo Physical Therapy, RiNoVELO, River North Residences, The Lot @ RiNo, River North Workshop, River North Investment Co., and general language to describe homes, apartments, and businesses near the RiNo Art District.

The original River North boundary used for the 2003 plan included an area predominantly in the neighborhood of Five Points, but including small areas of Globeville and Elyria & Swansea. This original planning boundary differs greatly from the boundaries established for the RiNo Art District and BID.

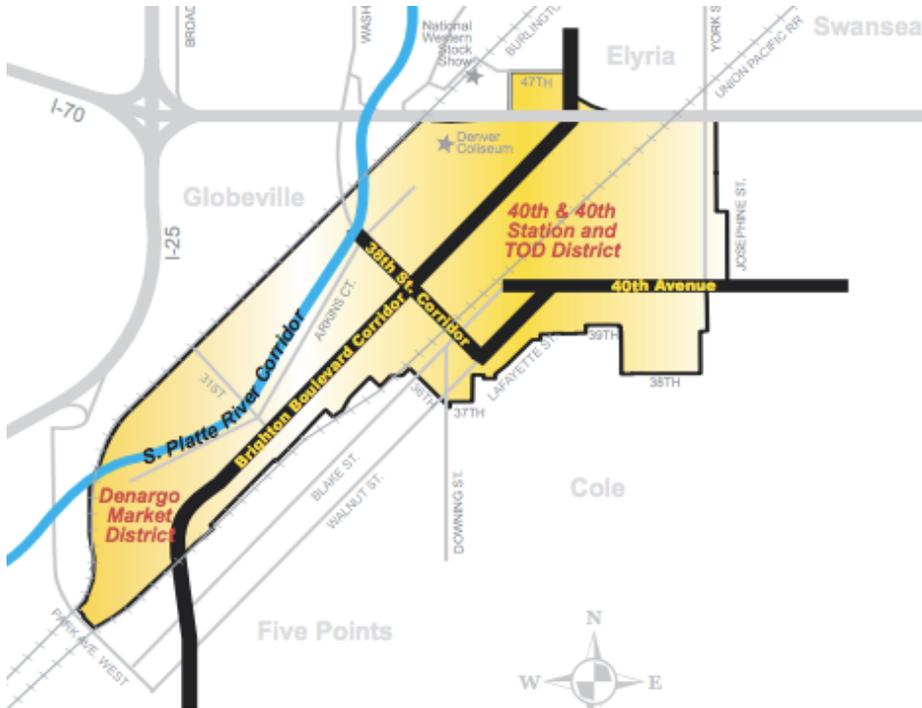


Figure 4: 2003 River North Plan boundary
Source: 2003 River North Plan

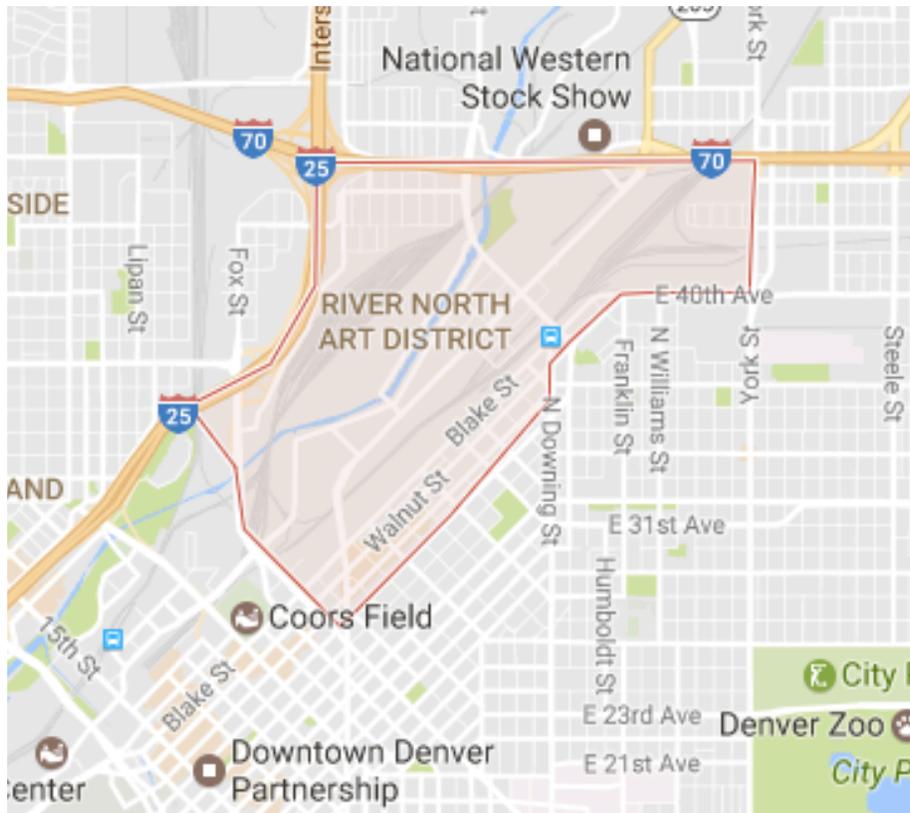


Figure 5: River North Art District boundary
Source: Google Maps

This discrepancy in boundaries has enabled a rise in marketing and placemaking schemes that utilize the name RiNo without designating any of the plan goals to those areas. This distinction is important because it limits potential for identifying location based strategies, addressing conflict between overlapping areas and their associated plans, and assigning accountability to individuals or groups for implementing desired goals.

Compiling and understanding the goals and implementation efforts in this area is also difficult because of the inconsistency of locational naming across a decade of different plans. While the *2003 River North Plan* established a comprehensive set of goals and implementation methods for the designated area, the River North Art District and BID boundaries overlap with a multitude of plan boundaries including the *2007 Downtown Area Plan*, *2009 38th & Blake Station Area Plan* (Amended 2016), *2011 NE Downtown Neighborhood Plan*, *2014 Globeville Neighborhood Plan* (Amended 2016), *2015 Elyria & Swansea Neighborhoods Plan*, and the *2016 Building Heights Plan Amendment*. This plan-based inconsistency in identifying location boundaries coupled with marketing-based strategies for associating with RiNo, despite pre-existing neighborhood designations that match census tract boundaries, make analysis and discussion of River North a complex and difficult task.

Therefore, for purposes of this analysis I use the largest designated boundary for River North, which is the Art District boundary. For purposes of discussing and analyzing demographics I chose to use the numbers associated with Five Points since the majority of the Art District boundary is within Five

Points, and the areas in Globeville and Elyria & Swansea are predominantly industrial with limited residential populations.

V: 2003 River North Plan

Since the *2003 River North Plan* represents the initial efforts at developing this space, I chose to start my analysis by examining the intentions of that plan, followed by examining the reality of development in the area.

a. Plan Vision

Given the focus of this case study on questions of demographic shifts, I chose to focus solely on those opportunities and goals that directly relate to demographics or are reasonably associated with demographic shifts as demonstrated in the literature review.

The 2003 plan stated its purpose as “to promote the area, identify appropriate locations for growth, establish a multi-modal transportation system and provide a regulatory environment that makes mixed-use development possible” (C.C.D. 2003).

The following are listed “opportunities” for the River North Plan area (C.C.D. 2003):

- “If RTD’s FasTracks Vision Plan is approved by voters and subject to the results of the Final I-70 East Corridor EIS, a major opportunity exists to create an exceptional Transit Oriented Development; its prime location between downtown and DIA with rapid transit connections to each creates numerous and exciting opportunities for new development”

- “The twin north-south corridors, with Brighton Boulevard providing primarily vehicular access between I-70 and downtown and the South Platte River providing a linear open space amenity with pedestrian and regional bicycle access, create exciting development and open space opportunities”

These two stated opportunities reflect the underutilized nature of the area by recognizing the immense and immediate potential for TOD and open space development, two processes which, despite providing benefits to a city, have been demonstrated to be associated with potential gentrification and displacement.

The following are listed “goals” for the River North Plan area (C.C.D. 2003):

- “Maintain viable existing businesses in such a way that they are compatible with new development and new development is compatible with them”
- “Create opportunities for employees of current and future employers to live within the study boundaries and seek to connect residents of adjacent neighborhoods with jobs within the Plan’s boundaries”
- “Build upon the unique land uses that exist and identify redevelopment sites and opportunities that foster the creation of a compatible mix of uses”
- “Establish a unique Transit Oriented Development in the vicinity of the proposed 40th and 40th station in which the station is incorporated

into the development and facilitate the redevelopment of the Denargo Market area into an exciting mixed-use community”

- “Attract new development along the South Platte River, especially new residential development that takes advantage of the river and enhances it as an open space corridor”
- “By adding new development to the current uses and structures, create a unique environment both in terms of an eclectic mix of uses and exciting, innovative architecture”

These stated goals focus heavily on redevelopment of sites for new and different uses than the traditional uses. In summary, it calls for new residential properties, new properties for a “mix of uses,” TOD, and enhancements to the river. The two goals that seem to suggest maintaining the area call for new business and old business to be “compatible,” and for new development to be added to the “current uses and structures.” I will revisit these opportunities and goals throughout this case study; however, my first focus will be on the reality of the city’s stated goal of “maintain(ing) viable existing businesses in such a way that they are compatible with new development” by examining the existing conditions of the area as of 2003.

b. 2003 Existing Conditions

The following data comes from the *2003 River North Plan* and shows that 95% of the total land in the plan was zoned as industrial, with warehouses, railroad tracks and yards, and factory/food processing taking up 60% of the total

land. 154 of the parcels, totaling 9% of the total land were vacant, and only a 1.5% of the total was residential. Of further significance, the boundary's floor to area ration (FAR), the ratio between building square footage and the land square footage was only 0.25. This signifies mostly single story, flat buildings, and a number which the City of Denver signifies as representing underutilized land.

Land Use	Parcels	Acres	Percent
Railroad Property	51	131.95	21.4%
Misc. Warehouse	109	131.82	21.4%
RTD (Regional Transportation District)	6	59.19	9.6%
Vacant	154	55.36	9%
Bottling & Distribution	8	50.39	8.2%
Factory	24	48.26	7.8%
Auto Service	37	35.05	5.7%
Theater	1	30.40	4.9%
Surfacing	43	21.35	3.5%
Other/in transition	20	15.47	2.5%
Office	14	13.33	2.2%
Residential	78	9.40	1.5%
Food Processing	6	7.06	1.1%
Restaurant/Retail	13	3.93	0.6%
Misc/Civic	4	2.71	0.4%
Total	568	615.69	100%

Table 1: 2003 River North Land Use
Source: 2003 River North Plan

In looking at the existing land use conditions as of 2003, I question the reality of being able to maintain existing business conditions while implementing mixed uses, new residential space, new outdoor space, and TOD. Given that 42.8% of the land use in 2003 was railroad yards and warehouses with large amounts of space additionally dedicated to factory and manufacturing industries, I question what business uses the city imagined were compatible uses and what amenities the city imagined would attract residents to the new developments.

Furthermore, if only 9% of the land is vacant, then to implement the large-scale redevelopment of River North for residence, businesses, open space, and TOD, the city must have imagined large-scale closure of many of the existing industrial spaces, which does not seem compatible with the stated goal of maintaining “viable existing businesses.”

Throughout this case study it will be important to return often to the stated opportunities and goals of the plan, as well as these 2003 existing conditions to understand how the area has changed in the subsequent 14 years in terms of zoning, land use, and area demographics.

VI: Case Study

To answer my primary thesis question, I first need to address the sub-question regarding the demographic shifts and gentrification happening around River North. In analyzing shifts in demographics, I focused solely on racial demographics. Academic literature has demonstrated that race can accurately serve as a proxy for relative class economic position (Oliver and Shapiro 1995; Charles and Hurst 2003; Conley 2010) and therefore, this study focuses solely on shifts in racial demographics under the assumption that they reflect economic shifts as well.

a. Racial Demographics

This analysis of racial demographics and potential changes took place in three forms. First I used an analysis of census data from 2000 and 2010 to see raw numbers concerning population shifts. I then did an analysis of shifts in racial populations from 2000 to 2015 and their correlations with infill projects as part of Denver's continued growth and development. Finally I performed an analysis that examined median income.

The most basic analysis of demographics comes from analyzing census data. Given that River North is predominantly in the Five Points neighborhood, I have used the demographic data for the three tracts that make up Five Points as a proxy for understanding shifts in populations both within and around River North. The *2003 River North Plan* highlights that at the time of the plan, only seventy-four single-family structures and five other residential structures existed inside the plan boundary. However, as demonstrated previously, the RiNo Arts District and

areas marketed as RiNo have extended into residential areas of Five Points.

Therefore, while the River North Plan can be excused from focusing on residential demographics given the small number of residents, an analysis of developments effects on the surrounding residential neighborhood could prove illuminating about demographic shifts.

For contextualizing the River North area, it is important to understand Denver demographics as a whole. In 2000, the African-American population made up 11% of the total population, and the Hispanic population made up 32% of the total population, with Non-Hispanic White representing the majority of the city at nearly 57% of Denver's total population.

In 2000, the total population of the three census tracts that make up Five Points was 8,875 people, 43% Hispanic, 26% African-American, and 27% Non-Hispanic White (U.S. Census Bureau 2000^A). These numbers demonstrate the dominant minority identity Five Points had throughout the Twentieth Century, with demographic numbers at odds with the dominant demographics of the city.

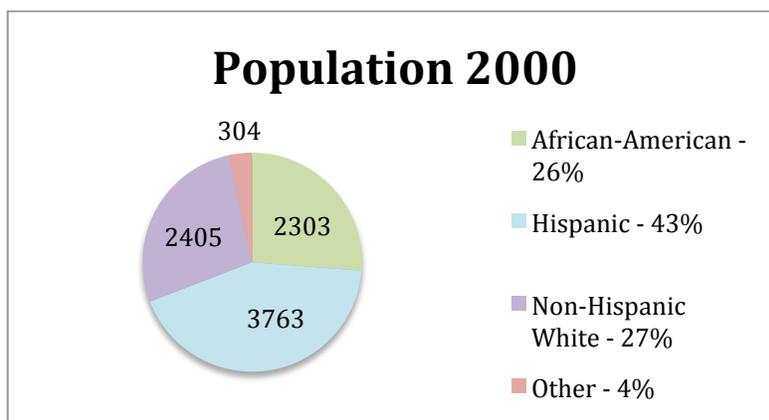


Figure 6: Five Points Population Demographics 2000
Source: U.S. Census Bureau

Over the decade between 2000 and 2010, while the city had total population growth of 13%, Five Points' total population grew by 45% (U.S. Census Bureau 2010). By 2010 the population of Five Points was 12,710 people, 57% Non-Hispanic White, 22% Hispanic, and 16% African-American (U.S. Census Bureau 2010). These numbers show a total population growth of about almost 4,000 people over ten years; however, the Hispanic population decreased by almost 1,000 people and the African-American population decreased by about 300 people. This means that while other ethnicities decreased in population the Non-Hispanic White population grew by about 5,000 people over 10 years. Even if the City of Denver is correct, and there is some misreporting of ethnicities, a shift in thousands of people appears to be more than an anomaly, but a significant shift in racial demographics.

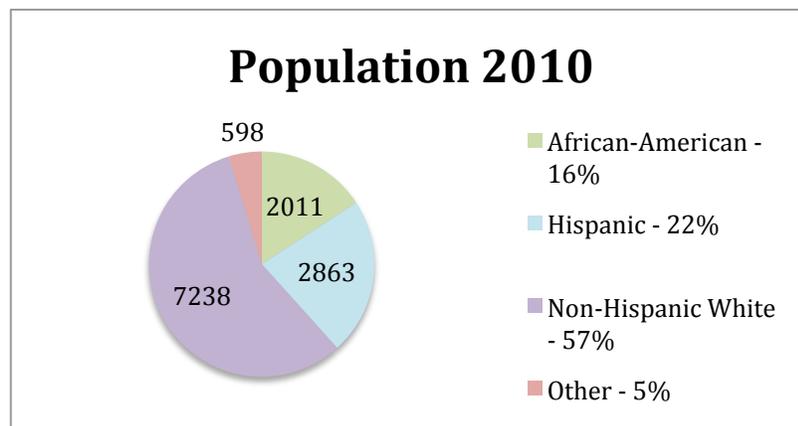


Figure 7: Five Points Population Demographics 2010
Source: U.S. Census Bureau

For 2015, there is no census but there is available data from the American Community Survey (ACS). Using the ACS 5-year population estimates for 2015, I further analyzed the demographic shifts over the five years when Denver had

13.8% population growth. The total population of Five Points rose to 14,768 people by 2015, a five-year growth of 2,058 residents, or 16%. The racial demographics changed further to 65% Non-Hispanic White, 21% Hispanic, and 11% African-American (ACS 2015). While the Hispanic population saw limited growth, 227 people, or 8% growth, the African-American population lost 465 people, or 23% decline. On the other hand, the Non-Hispanic White population grew by 2,296 people, or 32% growth. This again demonstrates immense growth in the area by a single demographic group while one demographic minority experienced large-scale loss.

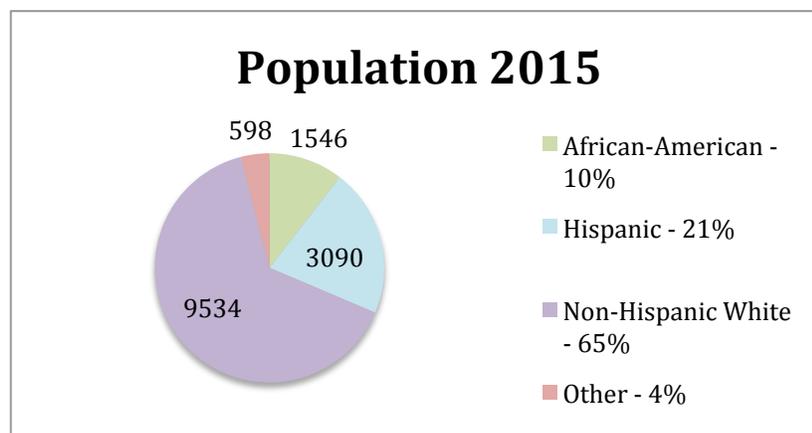


Figure 8: Five Points Population Demographics 2015
Source: American Community Survey 2015, Five-year estimates

In total, over the 15 years between 2000 and 2015, the population of Five Points grew by 6,002 people, or 68%. The African-American population declined by, 757 people, or -33%. The Hispanic population declined by 673 people, or -18%. The Non-Hispanic White population grew by 7,138 people, or +297%.

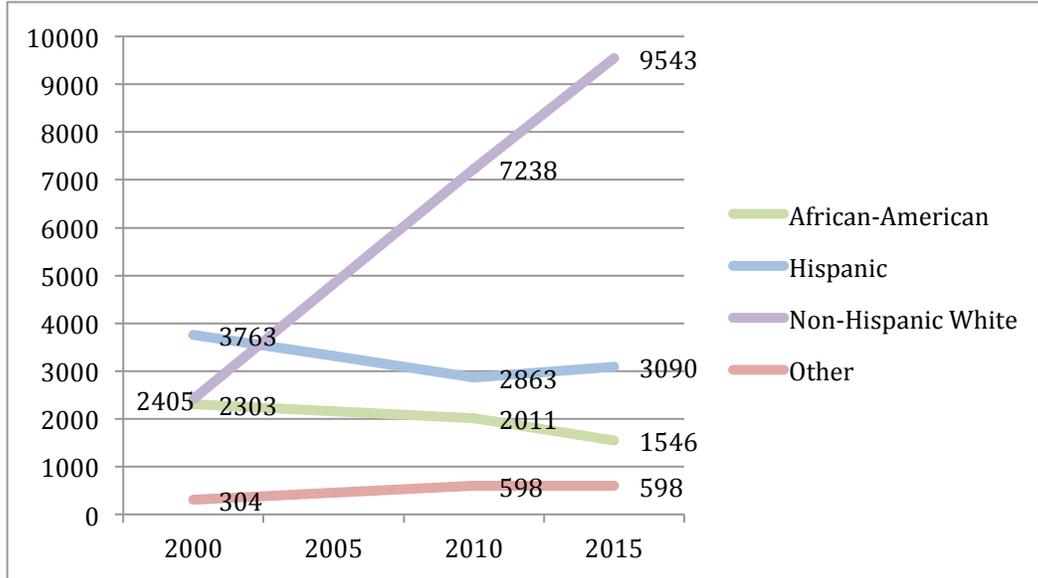


Figure 9: Five Points Population Growth 2000-2015
Source: U.S. Census Bureau & American Community Survey

While not all of the population growth and decline between 2000 and 2015 can be directly attributed to development in River North but also development in surrounding neighborhoods, the layers of overlap and contiguity raise questions about correlations between development and demographic shifts.

b. Demographic Shifts and Development

Due to the Denver Urban Renewal Authority's process of demolishing buildings throughout the latter half of the twentieth century, as well as the amount of underutilized or vacant land in River North, much of the new development throughout the city has occurred in the form of infill. Similar processes of rezoning and reinvestment are associated with racial and economic demographic shifts (Freeman 2009; Zukin et al. 2009). Therefore, I pursued an understanding of infill's relationship with these changing demographics.

Using available data from DenverInfill.com, where all infill projects throughout the city have been recorded since 2000, I was able to map the location of every built or under construction infill site between 2000 and 2014. In total infill accounted for 386 development projects over the 14-year period. Those projects were geolocated within census tract boundaries to associate projects with specific defined areas. I further mapped changes in racial population demographics in every census tract, mapping percent changes in African-American, Hispanic, and Non-Hispanic White for each census tract. This provided a picture of what areas saw the greatest levels of growth and decline by each self-identified racial demographic. (For specific steps on the creation of these maps, see Appendix A).

After overlapping areas of highest quantile decline in Hispanic population, highest quantile growth in Non-Hispanic White populations, and infill locations, I ran a correlation to determine how much infill is associated with displacement of Hispanic populations. Looking only at areas of highest quantile Hispanic decline there is a statistically significant Pearson correlation coefficient of +0.62, suggesting a moderately positive correlation between infill and Hispanic decline.

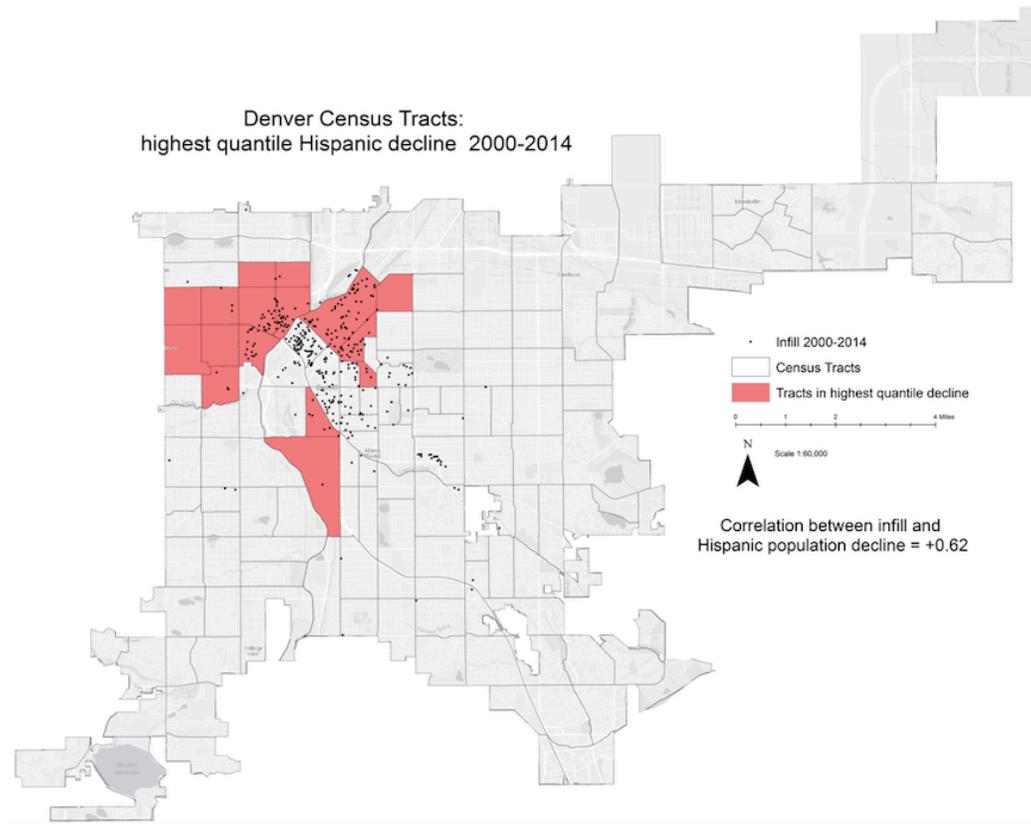


Figure 10: Hispanic Decline and Infill Correlation
Source: Anthony Lechuga

I further isolated the map and correlation to those areas where the highest quintile Hispanic decline overlapped with the highest quintile Non-Hispanic White growth at the census tract level. This produced a correlation between those factors and infill of +0.49, suggesting a moderately positive correlation between infill, Hispanic decline, and Non-Hispanic White growth.

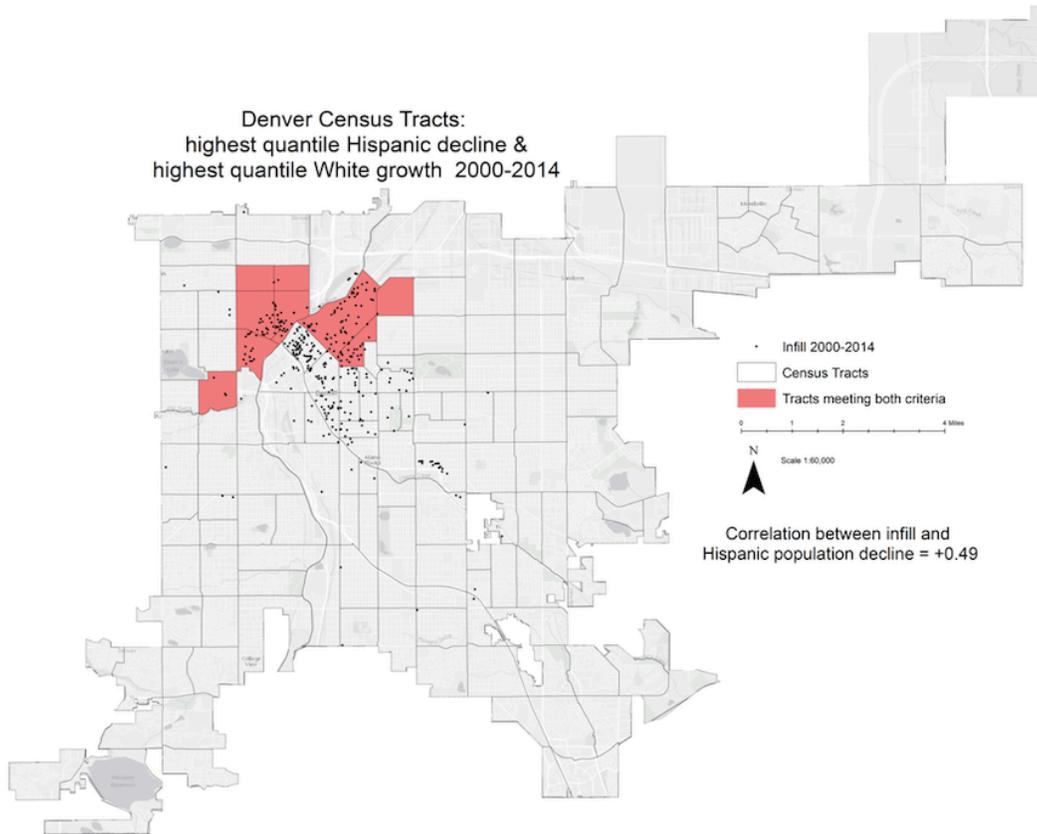


Figure 11: Hispanic decline, Non-White Hispanic growth, and Infill Correlation
Source: Anthony Lechuga

While this data shows moderate correlations between infill and population decline of a minority population, all suggesting gentrification induced displacement, this should not be interpreted as causation.

The combination of information and data presented thus far suggests that Denver has done little to ensure racial and economic demographics are maintained in the River North area during this time of growth and redevelopment. Throughout the past 14 years of planning, there has been little mention of racial demographics and no stated goals at creating scenarios for people to remain in their neighborhoods. The census and ACS data suggest that despite large population growth, the African-American and Hispanic populations have

decreased in the area around River North. Furthermore, despite increasing median incomes in the area, the African-American and Hispanic populations that have remained are now earning lower incomes than in 2000. The correlation figures between demographic shifts and infill projects further suggest that new development is associated with these shifts in racial and economic demographics. In light of this compounding evidence, it appears rather obvious that River North has and is continuing to undergo processes of gentrification-induced displacement.

c. Economic Shifts

To analyze if the rise in population in Five Points and development in River North had economic benefits for the area and population, I chose to consider the median incomes from 2000 and 2015 for the three census tracts that make up Five Points. The 2000 census collected information about median individual income, as did the ACS 5-year estimates for 2015. Using this data and converting the 2000 incomes into 2015 values, I was able to get a broad picture of the economic standing of the area and the racial demographics at both times. Over the 15 years, the median income of Five Points nearly doubled, suggesting a large shift in neighborhood economic character. A look at the racial demographics and associated incomes, however, shows that only the Non-Hispanic White population had a substantial rise in median incomes, while African-American and Hispanic populations saw decline in median income (ACS 2015^B; U.S. Census Bureau 2000^B).

	2000 Median Income (in 2015 inflation adjusted dollars)	2015 Median Income	Amount Change
Total Population	\$ 32,817	\$ 60,512	+ \$27,695
African-American	\$ 16,961	\$ 16,155	- \$806
Hispanic	\$ 32,260	\$ 31,023	- \$1,237
Non-Hispanic White	\$ 60,029	\$ 76,094	+ \$16,065

Table 2: Five Points Median Income 2000 and 2015
Source: U.S. Census Bureau & American Community Survey

This basic economic data suggests that River North holds appeal to wealthier Non-Hispanic White populations, perhaps providing economic benefits in terms of jobs to that particular demographic. It appears that other racial demographics are not benefitting economically from development in River North.

The combination of data from the U.S. Census and American Community Survey demonstrate immense population and economic growth in Five Points, but only for the Non-Hispanic White population. Not only did the Non-Hispanic White population grow enough to become the dominant population, but the actual numbers of Hispanic and African-American residents declined, highlighting not only inordinate Non-Hispanic White growth, but displacement of groups that were previously majority racial groups in the area. This population shift is accompanied by immense economic benefit to the Non-Hispanic White population, but reflects an economic detriment to other racial demographics. This shift in populations and economics seemed obvious to City Councilman Albus Brooks of the Ninth District, which includes Five Points. He asserted that these shifts in population were absolutely a product of gentrification, and further emphasized his belief that Five Points is one of the most gentrified zip codes in all

of the U.S. Therefore, population shifts in terms of racial and economic demographics are obviously in a state of dramatic swing.

d. River North Art District (RiNo)

While the name River North can be attributed to the City of Denver through the 2003 plan, the acronym RiNo is attributed to Tracy Weil of Weilworks LLC, who co-founded the art district with Jill Hadley Hooper of Ironton Studios in 2005. After recognizing the city was making plans for the mostly industrial area occupied, sometimes illegally, by artists, Tracy described the creation of RiNo as a means for being “able to band the creatives in the neighborhood.” Beginning with the creation of a small registered non-profit to trademark the phrase RiNo and the associated Rhino logo, the district grew from an original eight studios and galleries to fifty during the first year. Members can join the art district by paying annual fees, which help to fund the programming and growth of the area, and in return, are part of the marketing, programming, and voice of the RiNo Art District.

The RiNo Art District consists of seven staff members and thirteen board members, all of whom serve to “chart directions” for the future of the area and “advocate for the arts and business community,” according to board treasurer Jonathan Kaplan of Plinth Gallery. The board consists of several artists, gallery owners, business owners, and representatives of multiple local development firms. The board hosts monthly Art District meetings open to the public that now attract

between up to 100 people representing artists, business people, residents, and folks from the beer industries according to Kaplan.

The initial programming started with a monthly first Friday gallery tour promoted and organized through the Art District. Programming now includes additional events focused on encouraging and supporting neighborhood character and sustainability in conjunction with artists, businesses, and residents, motivated primarily by promoting the arts, but also food, beverages, and other creative companies. According to Weil, they try to “engage surrounding neighborhoods” by “inviting all people to RiNo meetings, creat[ing] a sense of community that people feel is approachable” all through a “do-it-yourself organization.”

According to the board co-chair Chandler Romeo of Blue Silo Studios, the Art District evolved from people “join[ing] forces to promote the arts groups tucked away in the area” and now maintains the “arts persona and identity as the forefront” of their work, and “community cohesiveness [in an] area of change.”

The RiNo Art District has had immense success in promoting a sense of place through dedicated placemaking schemes through programming and marketing. Their trademarked logo has been used widely as a promotional tool and locational signifier. They use it, with slight variations, to identify galleries and studios as part of their monthly tours, to identify businesses within the BID, and to identify products made within RiNo.



Figure 12: River North Art District logo
Source: River North Art District

The area has been so well branded over the years that the name is synonymous with what Jonathan Kaplan referred to as a “coolness factor” and artistic “street cred.” However, Kaplan remarked that when he first moved to the area and bought property people would say, “don’t go there, don’t walk there, don’t move there.” This successful transformation of spatial identity from the negative associations with industrial Five Points to the positive associations of RiNo has extended beyond the arts community into a spatial signifier for other businesses on the fringe of RiNo and distinctly outside of the original planning boundary.

Speaking with Kate Kaufman, Operations Director of the Denver Central Market (DCM), brought to light the pervasive influence of the RiNo designation. Kaufman described the DCM as an “urban food hall and gourmet food market catering to the neighborhood and Denver” with “specialized vendors and regular groceries.” DCM is located outside of the original boundary of River North, but

is now on the edge of the RiNo Art District. When asked about why DCM associates with RiNo as opposed to the traditional neighborhood name of Five Points, Kaufman acknowledged that RiNo is, “generally known as hip and up and coming” and “being associated with the neighborhood is a good thing” for the businesses of the DCM. Kaufman further alluded to RiNo with an arts designation appeals to “people not comfortable with urban areas” and how Five Points is a neighborhood known to have a lot of homeless and a “pretty rough neighborhood.”

The single voice pressing back against the entirely positive associations with the River North moniker came from Councilman Brooks. He emphasized that River North is a rebranding, but not an official name. He acknowledged that the rebranding is associated with gentrification, and suggested that leaders of River North could do more to support Five Points and recognize its unique and important history. Justin Croft, of Zeppelin Development and president of the RiNo BID, countered this point by suggesting that River North has never been claimed by Five Points. Croft asserted that the predominant area of River North was historically an isolated industrial space wedged between train tracks and the South Platte River, a space that was never valued as a part of historic Five Points. Undeniably, the creation of a new association has generated a new perception of the area distinctly different from any historic associations with that part of the city.

This rebranding of an area is not new to Denver or other metropolitan areas. There is a precedent for acronym based neighborhood naming that

encourages growth of creative cultures as explained by Kaufman saying, “anytime you want food and culture to be prominent, you make it seem like LA or New York City where neighborhoods have names and designations.” Tracy Weil acknowledged that the RiNo designation now makes it like LoDo (Denver) and SoHo (NYC), but that this placemaking scheme is trademarked. Weil noted that people and businesses are eager to associate with the RiNo designation, and while you cannot trademark a location, the trademarking of the logo allows them to control aspects of the use of the RiNo association while encouraging people to become dues paying members of the Art District.

In addition to the promotional and advocacy work of the Art District, they also serve as oversight for the River North Business Improvement District (BID) and General Improvement District (GID). While the BID and GID have funding methodologies that will be explained shortly, all funds for the three organizations feed into the Art District, which oversees planning and spending in conjunction with the goals and opportunities of the BID and GID. According to Weil, the current annual budget for these three organizations is \$1.8 million, providing considerable funds for maintaining their full-time staff and conducting advocacy and promotional work, but also affording them some level of autonomy in decision making.

e. RiNo BID and GID

The RiNo BID and GID were formed in 2015 through a vote of residents and business owners within the proposed boundary in accordance with the 1992 Tax Payer’s Bill of Rights (TABOR). Justin Croft stated that the BID emerged

from developers recognizing the intense need for infrastructure improvement. He says they first formed an urban improvement district, consisting of only developers, which evolved to include various stakeholders in the area under the umbrella oversight of the RiNo Art District. The boundaries of the BID and GID are presented in Figure 13.



Figure 13: Boundaries of the BID and GID

Source: River North BID

The BID consists of a board of nine members from the RiNo BID area with various stipulations about the representational composition of the board. All commercial property owners within the boundary are charged an assessment rate of 0.004 (4 mills) of the assessed value of commercial properties, which is 29% of the market value of the property. According to Bryan Slekes of Great Divide Brewery and board member of the RiNo BID, the current budget of the BID is close to \$600,000 and growing every year. These funds are used for soft infrastructure as overseen by the BID for advocacy, marketing, placemaking, business support, and operations and administration. Slekes identified work such as wayfinding, benches, and advocacy for affordable artist housing as some of the primary objectives of the BID to date.

Furthermore, Slekes said the most successful aspect of the BID is their work with advocacy. By forming a BID, the business owners have given themselves a seat at the table when it comes to advocating on behalf of planning and design for their area. Identifying the future redevelopment of 35th Street between the Platte River and Wazee Street, an area that includes the Great Divide Barrel Bar, Slekes spoke about the power of the BID to advocate for 30-50% of the redesign to focus on space for pedestrians and cyclists to “influence this to look like a completely different street.” Because of their community presence and advocacy, the City of Denver has given power to the BID to contract with a design team for the redevelopment of 35th Street, an unusual relinquishment of power from the city. Slekes additionally identified current processes for designing RiNo Park and Brighton Boulevard as moments where the BID is at the table with the city, developers, and designers advocating on behalf of the local businesses. In the case of RiNo Park, they are even trying to get the city to afford them rights to operate and profit from programming in the public space.

When asked about Great Divide’s interest in being a part of the BID, Slekes highlighted Great Divide’s commitment to the city by building their large-scale canning facility in River North. He acknowledged that they could have easily purchased land outside the city at significantly minimal costs, but they want to continue to be known as a Denver company. Additionally, at their canning facility, they chose to build a street-front Barrel Bar instead of just constructing a large warehouse space. In this way, Slekes said they could, “create a walking

streetscape and invest in the community.” However not every business in the BID boundary may want to so ardently invest in the community.

Therefore, to continue that precedent of community investment, the BID is currently in the process of creating design guidelines and, in conjunction with the city, an urban design overlay. Slekes described this process emerging from recognition that as RiNo becomes a hot development spot, “there are some big companies that are not local, their equity partners are not local, and their vision is not always in line with the BID.” Through creating these design guidelines and overlays, the BID hopes to have more control over design and “keep that industrial grittiness of the neighborhood” according to Slekes.

A further advocacy and oversight group contracting with the RiNo Art District is the RiNo GID. This consists of a seven member advisory board that comprises of property owners within the GID boundary. Their board does include significant overlap with the boards of the Art District and BID, ensuring consistent vision across the three groups.

Due to the overlapping boundaries, all commercial properties in the GID boundary are also part of the BID. Therefore, in addition to the BID mill levy, those commercial properties pay an additional four mills of the assessed value of the property. While residential property owners pay nothing in the BID boundary, inside the GID boundary they also pay the four mill levy of their property’s assessed value. Furthermore, as part of the Brighton Boulevard redevelopment, all commercial and residential properties pay an additional \$200 per linear foot of their property fronting Brighton Boulevard.

The GID began assessments in early 2016 and is tasked with providing additional funds to hard infrastructure and maintenance within the GID boundaries. These infrastructure improvements include pedestrian and landmark lights, trees, and irrigation on Brighton Boulevard, construction of access roads, conducting a lighting study for the area, and creating riverfront accessibility and improvements.

f. Perspectives on *2003 River North Plan* Opportunities and Goals

While conducting interviews with stakeholders, I asked questions related directly to the opportunities and goals of the *2003 River North Plan* to understand the relationship between the plan and the work of the RiNo Art District, BID, and GID. The questions related to those aspects of the plan that could be directly correlated with gentrification-induced displacement such as infrastructure improvements, greening projects, and business growth. By asking these questions, I sought to gain a better understanding of the correlation between changes, perceptions, and the demonstrated demographic shifts.

i. Connectivity

When asked about improved connections including the construction of bicycle facilities, most interviewees alluded to current and near-future construction. Kate Kaufman of DCM acknowledged that businesses have requirements for bike racks and they personally have received requests for more racks, but that the infrastructure in terms of bike lanes simply does not exist yet. She said, however, along with most other interviewees that plans, designs, and

construction projects are currently under way for bike infrastructure including a cycle track along Brighton Boulevard. Many of the interviewees further highlighted the construction of a bridge over the train tracks at both 38th and 35th Streets. The 38th Street bridge was constructed as part of the regional light rail expansion, which included a station stop at the same location. Despite the construction of new rail access, most interviewees did not see the new station as a source of interest for people in the area. The light rail is more of a means for regional transportation and so does not influence local small-scale patterns of movement. Interviewees from both DCM and Great Divide brewing acknowledged that the majority of their customer base would drive to get to their locations.

ii. Open Space Access

Regarding the 2003 Plan goal to improve neighborhood access to open space, the consensus was that little had been done thus far. The RiNo Art District, BID, and GID have been working alongside The Greenway Foundation on projects to clean the Platte River in the area. The Greenway Foundation, along with the City of Denver and other partners composed a plan in 2015/2016 for the creation of multiple parks along the waterfront as well as enhancements for storm water management and environmental protection. While little of this has been done, it is certainly under way, and the Art District has visions for RiNo Park along the Platte that they would like to oversee. These open space developments are limited to areas around the Platte River, leaving one interviewee expressing bafflement at the idea that there is any open space in the area.

iii. Mixed-Use Development and Business Improvement

Concerning goals to implement mixed-use development and encourage business growth the interviewees were adamant that this goal has been pursued zealously, especially with the creation and influence of the RiNo Art District and BID. Nevertheless, the board members of both groups have acknowledged that their efforts at improving access, infrastructure, and sense of place would not be possible without the \$28 million the City of Denver has earmarked for investments in rebuilding Brighton Boulevard as a major thoroughfare in RiNo. Furthermore, Denver has participated in the negotiation, planning, and future redevelopment of the National Western Stockshow, located on the edge of RiNo, at a price over \$1 billion over the next ten years. The City of Denver, along with significant Federal investment, will be pursuing a \$1.2 billion redevelopment of I-70 just northeast of RiNo, tearing down the current elevated highway and replacing it with a below-grade version. The belief is that these infrastructure projects will drastically alter the character of the surrounding area with trickling affects for RiNo.

The RiNo board members believe, however, that their creation of design guidelines will help to continue encouraging mixed-use development in line with the historic character of the area. Jamie Roupp of JLL, a third party service provider for real estate owners, confirmed that up to now most of the developers in RiNo have been local companies aligning their vision with local residents and character; however, an increasing number of the developers coming to Denver are

national and even international development firms. This echoed the sentiments of other interviewees who believe the RiNo design guidelines will create a precedent for mixed-use development to continue as the norm throughout RiNo.

iv. Housing and Demographics

The 2003 Plan set a goal of making housing in the planning area affordable to people at 50-60% of Average Median Income (AMI). In questioning interviewees about this I asked in terms of 2015 dollars; meaning that someone earning 50% AMI, or \$28,000, could live in RiNo. This proposition received emphatic responses that this was impossible. Interviewees highlighted the limited housing stock throughout the city, all housing in RiNo is new, and rents throughout the city have been rising beyond the means of many people. There are projects throughout RiNo that have sought to retain affordability specifically for artists, and that has been a big focus of the Art District board. Aside from accommodating artists, however, little has been implemented to encourage more generalized affordability.

The only noted exception to projects aimed at affordability for artists is a project by the Urban Land Conservancy (ULC). At the beginning of March 2017, the ULC received permission from the City of Denver to build an off-the-grid, solar powered village of eleven small shelters, a kitchen, bathroom, and shower as temporary housing for homeless on a parcel they own in RiNo, known as Beloved Community Village. This will provide temporary housing for twenty-two individuals in a 180-day pilot program, which the city hopes to move in a

consistently rotating 180-day cycle pending success of the pilot. The ULC, however, plans to eventually develop the parcel with a 16-story building providing affordable housing (McGhee 2017). The observed prevalence of homeless people in the area further demonstrates the economic inequality of the area.

Interviewees expressed opinions that inequalities in pay for job types within Denver exacerbate the affordability issue. When asked about reasons why RiNo is unaffordable to many Denver residents and inconsistent with local median incomes, most interviewees attributed the phenomenon to economic factors outside of their control and outside of their designated focus. Those on the Art District board emphasized their focus on preserving the arts; those on the BID board emphasized a focus was on promoting businesses. While multiple members of each board recognized that demographic shifts and gentrification are happening, they attributed the phenomena to economic factors outside their scope of influence. Multiple members highlighted current laws that attempt to encourage affordability.

g. The Role of the City of Denver

The City of Denver is perhaps the most powerful source for addressing issues of affordability throughout RiNo, and given the view of the various RiNo board members that the municipality should be the source of solutions concerning this problem, an examination of current perspectives and laws is necessary. According to Article IV – Affordable Housing, Section 27-101 – Legislative

Findings of the Denver Code of Ordinances, “Demographics and analyses of new housing indicate that a large majority of private development is geared toward high-priced housing development and does not serve households earning less than one hundred (100) percent of area median income” (Code of Ordinances 2017). Furthermore, they acknowledge that, “Market forces including continued population growth and unmet demand for new housing, result in highly priced housing, and a lack of economic incentive for developers to offer a more diversified price range of housing, and therefore such housing is not being created” (Code of Ordinances 2017). A final noteworthy citation includes recognizing:

Developers of new for sale housing are not meeting the need for dispersed, affordable housing. In reviewing public records and development trends from 2000—2014, the city council has concluded that average housing prices have increased forty-eight (48) percent since 2000 for all housing, and sixty-nine (69) percent for new housing, and that the affordability gap between median sale price and median income in Denver has widened by one hundred thousand dollars (\$100,000.00) since 2000 (Code of Ordinances 2017).

These series of recognitions by the City Council affirm the idea that gentrification and associated displacement have been and are currently occurring throughout the entire city, including River North. Throughout the past seventeen years leading up to these conclusions, the City of Denver has implemented a number of ordinances and incentives to attempt to curb this tide, although seemingly without success.

i. Inclusionary Housing Ordinance

The City of Denver's inclusionary housing ordinance attempts to secure affordable units in future developments. This inclusionary housing ordinance requires that any for-sale housing development with more than thirty units must include 10% as affordable. The ordinance recognizes two different types of development: high-cost and standard structure. For high-cost structures, those affordable units must be priced at 95% AMI; for standard structure, the affordable units must be priced at 80% AMI (City and County of Denver 2015^B). By those requirements, Denver's own inclusionary housing ordinance betrays one of the goals established in the River North Plan by not encouraging city-wide affordability at 50-60% AMI.

Jamie Roupp, however, emphasized that Denver's inclusionary housing ordinance has often been skirted because it only involves for-sale units. While this scheme may have seemed to be working to some degree in the early 2000's when 833 affordable units were built between 2001-2005 (C.C.D. 2015^B), the numbers since then have plummeted. In fact, over a ten-year period between 2006-2015, only 333 affordable units by requirements of the ordinance were constructed throughout the entire city, with no affordable units built in 2013 (C.C.D. 2015^B). The city has also created off-site and alternative satisfaction options including a cash-in-lieu option, allowing developers to buy their way out of providing affordable units. These alternative satisfaction schemes generated slightly more than \$4 million as of 2015, with \$2.7 million invested in the construction of 479 affordable units throughout the city, eleven at 30% AMI, fifty-six at 50% AMI,

379 at 60% AMI, three at 80% AMI, and thirty at 95% AMI (C.C.D. 2015^B). This reveals that during a time when the city was growing by over 100,000 people, developers built 1,166 affordable units, and the city built 479. None of those 1,645 units were built in River North. Councilman Brooks acknowledged that the IHO didn't work, and the city is no longer pursuing affordable housing by this means.

ii. Height Amendments in RiNo

In a more direct effort to bring affordable units to RiNo, the City of Denver generated the “38th & Blake Station Area Height Amendments” in September 2016. Recognizing the potential future growth around the newly constructed light rail station at 38th and Blake Streets, the city decided to amend the original height limits for building in the TOD area. This expansion is exemplified by the move of the World Trade Center Denver from the Central Business District to a recently designed three-building area they are calling the “New Global Campus.” This area is at 38th and Blake and consists of offices, retail, a hotel, conference space, and eventually housing (World Trade Center Denver 2016). In light of this type of development, the city raised the maximum heights in the area to accommodate for greater density.

The city's goal, however, is to use incentive-based maximum heights to generate affordability. While the maximum heights in the train station area cap out at eight stories, the new amendment allows a developer to build higher than the maximum allowable height in exchange for delivering specific community benefits. In this scenario, developers can now conceivably build up to sixteen

stories around the train station provided they include deliverable community benefits. The recommended community benefits as outlined in the amendment include ensuring greater design quality, establishing the river corridor as an amenity, or adopting affordable housing in mixed-income developments (C.C.D. 2016). Councilman Brooks stated that developers are already applying for permits that take advantage of these height amendments, and he hopes that at least 50% of new construction will opt to build within the elevated heights.

Jamie Roupp suggested, however, that these density tradeoffs are not likely to happen on a large scale because building a larger structure is more expensive, and building affordable units will not recoup any sunken costs of constructing a building above the maximum heights. Justin Croft further questioned the utility of the height amendments focused around this single transit stop. Croft highlighted the fact that Denver's light rail is really a system of commuter rails rather than a localized public transit system. Therefore people are not using this train station to get to work, they are primarily using it to get to the airport. Therefore, greater density will only produce more traffic and potentially have negative consequences for the street level experience. Thus, the construction of affordable units is not a guaranteed outcome of these height amendments.

iii. Affordable Housing Linkage Fee

To further supplement their dedication to affordable housing throughout the city, the City Council passed Ordinance 20160625, which amends Chapter 27 of the municipal code, by creating an affordable housing linkage fee (Code of

Ordinances 2016). This new ordinance states that beginning January 1, 2017, all new construction, excluding additions of less than 400 gross square feet to existing single-family or duplex buildings, will be charged an affordable housing fee (Code of Ordinances 2016). The project type and square footage determine the fee amount, which goes into a general fund controlled by the City of Denver for the construction of affordable housing. They estimate in this ordinance that 87,000 households in the city are cost-burdened, paying more than one-third of their monthly income on housing, and this fee will help the city ensure the construction of affordable housing. Councilman Brooks outlined the linkage fee as a means for creating what he called “gentrification with justice”. Councilman Brooks stated that the city has a plan for spending the money, and it will be spent on housing in the 30-60% AMI range.

As noted by Jamie Roupp, however, the city has revealed no current plan for how, when, and where this money will be spent. Justin Croft further questioned the realistic impact of the linkage fee since a large percentage of land in Denver consists of single-family homes, which are not affected by the linkage fee. His assertion is that limited space for large-scale construction that would pay into the linkage fee will produce limited funds for affordable housing.

h. Case Study Conclusion

After reviewing demographic information for the area around River North, the evidence points towards displacement of racial minorities, and an associated economic link between race and declining economic standing. The City of Denver has to date approved of the creation of the River North Art District, BID, and GID

as methods for providing community input, and at times control over the development and placemaking of the area. Those groups have established themselves as a voice for the area and ensured a place in the planning and development phase. The Art District board has worked to ensure that artists are given space to remain in place while the neighborhood changes. The BID board has worked to ensure that businesses are well represented and given opportunity to thrive, however they have existed for only a short time. All the boards have worked to ensure that RiNo retains its artistic and industrial identity amid rapid growth. All of the boards affirm that racial and economic demographics have and continue to undergo rapid transformation in RiNo, but those changes are outside the scope of their focus and must be addressed through government intervention.

Between 2000 and 2015, the City of Denver established a goal for maintaining 50-60% AMI affordability in RiNo, yet delivered no discernable method for meeting that goal. The City Council recognizes that the entire city, including areas in and around RiNo, has entered into an affordability crisis through regular market economics. Over that same time span, the Inclusionary Housing Ordinance led to the construction of 1,645 units despite population growth over 100,000 people. The city created height amendments with associated community benefits incentives as a means to address unaffordability within RiNo, but those rely on private developers choosing to build affordable units. Beginning in 2017, the city created a development linkage fee that they now believe will provide essential funds for addressing unaffordability and associated gentrification-induced displacement.

Shrouded in the effectiveness of the RiNo Art District, BID, and GID at maintaining affordability for artists, promoting business, and attempting to keep the neighborhood fabric intact, remains the undeniable fact that neighborhood racial and economic demographics have undergone a drastic shift over fifteen years, with few answers to address such shifts.

VII: Discussion of Findings

a. Analysis

The quantitative data presented throughout this case study demonstrably shows demographic changes throughout Five Points. While I recognize that Five Points is not a perfect proxy for the River North area, which includes much former industrial space and census tracts in Globeville and Elyria & Swansea neighborhoods, the data suggests large-scale demographic changes within the chosen boundaries for assessment. Not only is the Non-Hispanic White population of Five Points growing, but growing at enormous rates, 297% over fifteen years, all while the Hispanic and African-American populations declined. That data alone would suggest outcomes described in the literature as displacement.

The question of whether this displacement is in fact gentrification-induced displacement seems perceptibly demonstrated through the further quantitative analysis of economic shifts. The economic shifts demonstrated similar shifts as the racial shifts in which, while accounting for inflation, the Non-Hispanic Population saw economic gains of just over \$16,000 dollars in median salary while Hispanic and African-American populations saw a decrease in median income over 15 years. So even those people of emerging minority populations who are remaining in place are not seeing economic benefits from the influx of Non-Hispanic White residents. The economic gains in the area are isolated to only those members of a single racial demographic.

The interviews conducted through the case study showed that much of the housing being built in the area is for-rent and attracting mostly only wealthier Non-Hispanic White residents who can afford the high rents. Therefore, the analysis of correlation between infill, which is new construction rather than redevelopment of old properties, and demographic shifts presents important perspective. A correlation of +0.62 between Hispanic decline in population and infill, suggests that new construction attracts Non-Hispanic populations, and is associated with the removal of Hispanic populations from those areas. The correlation of +0.49 between infill, Hispanic decline, and Non-Hispanic White populations shows an association between new construction projects drawing in Non-Hispanic White populations at the expense of Hispanic populations. Therefore, the quantitative data suggests that yes, racial and economic demographic shifts are occurring in River North, and they are associated with new construction. The economic increases in the area, and, as multiple interviewees affirmed, the association between economics and race, both suggest that the demographic shifts are linked to what was referred to in the literature as gentrification-induced displacement.

Taking these findings as conclusive proof those demographic shifts have occurred, the question then becomes, how did this occur, and what has the City of Denver done to encourage or curb this trend? The choice to create the RiNo Art District came from a bottom-up approach responding to recognition of growing interest in development of the area. The interviews made clear the value residents and business owners place on this decision and the power the RiNo Art District

now hold concerning development through the area. They have been successful at creating a new placemaking strategy that is attractive to consumers and business interests. They have associated the area with art rather than industry, and as such have created a new market for investment. While it would be imprudent to blame the RiNo Art District as a driver of the demographic shifts in the area, the literature would suggest that placemaking schemes and the history of economic usurpation of cultural spaces are consistent with gentrification.

Importantly, the interviews revealed that the RiNo Art District has been instrumental in working with the city and developers to create living spaces for artist and galleries in an effort to maintain the presence and atmosphere of the arts throughout RiNo. However, when asked about racial and economic demographic shifts in the area, many interviewees recognized the phenomenon as gentrification, but insisted efforts to curb that form of gentrification were outside of their focus. Therefore, the city's choice to create and promote the RiNo Art District has probably done more to encourage demographic shifts in the surrounding areas than to maintain historic populations. While members of the Art District board may be correct that racial demographic shifts are outside their focus, and many have recognized the positive work they have done, it still begs the question of who bears responsibility for addressing demographic shifts.

Similarly, members of the BID and GID highlighted the great work they are doing to promote new businesses, residence, and infrastructure redevelopment. These two organizations emerged only recently, and after the population shift occurred. Their creation of design guidelines and their general

presence in development meetings and processes highlights their commitment to making the area better, especially their recognition that development should be consistent with values of the community and built environment. The literature, however, suggests that many of those efforts, such as transit projects, bike facilities, open space development, and boutique, craft, and artisanal businesses are all associated with gentrification. It would again be imprudent to blame the BID or GID, which have notably good intentions, for demographic shifts, but their efforts seem to be undeniably associated with demographic shifts. Similar to the Art District board, and correctly, interviewees saw racial demographic shifts as outside of their focus, once again forcing one to question who bears responsibility.

An understanding of the Art District, BID, and GID reveal that Denver is willing to demonstrate investment in the creation of certain boards to oversee particular interests. These are groups created with the blessing, and at times financial backing, of the city government to maintain the arts and promote business. Most interviewees attributed demographic shifts to economic forces outside of their control and suggested that the City of Denver maintained responsibility for addressing them. One interviewee, however, said that certain government officials have asserted that they cannot interfere with the local market. Clearly, the government has the power to intervene in the market though in terms of protecting artists and businesses, so there must be a question of why more has not been done to protect racial diversity in the area.

Analysis of Denver's Inclusionary Housing Ordinance (IHO) shows little effectiveness at promoting affordability. Over fifteen years, while the population has risen dramatically, the number of affordable units has been relatively small to non-existent. As interviewees attested, the IHO applies only to for-sale units, which means that developers can simply skirt the issue by not building for-sale units. Therefore the adherence to a law that has little effectiveness and allows developers to skirt desired outcomes, shows a major flaw in the city's approach to affordable housing during a time of immense growth.

Similarly, the city has created new height amendments for the TOD area in RiNo, but the affordability associated with those amendments is an opt-in scenario. So as one interviewee indicated, most developers are not going to build a larger structure, at higher costs, only to lost money on those additional floors. These new height amendments came about in 2016, long after much of the demographic shifts occurred and so do little to undo the process of displacement. Historically, Denver created limited programs for addressing issues of affordability. Furthermore, given the demonstrated link between race and economic well being, they effectively allowed for racial minority populations to be priced out of the city generally, and RiNo specifically.

The City of Denver has essentially created powerful local governing boards whose actions are distantly associated with gentrification while providing no municipal oversight for curbing the negative by-product of maintaining arts, encouraging new business, and development. This pronounced change has been reported widely in Denver, but has also been recognized internationally. In a July,

2016 article for *The Guardian*, Caroline Tracey noted that the city rolled out six plans for the northeast neighborhoods of Denver nearly all at once. She goes on to say, “the mayor is seeing dollar signs, provided development continues creeping northward. But he’s being cunning about it; six major plans in one area, at one time, make it difficult to understand the extent of what is going on, and nearly impossible for residents to have their voices heard” (Tracey 2016). The article goes on to quote longstanding residents of northeastern Denver who point to decades of disinvestment, lack of community input, and general government indifference as signs that their property and neighborhood are only seeing attention now because of their growing real estate potential.

Further compounding the problem of gentrification throughout Denver is the government’s casual approach to the topic and lack of investment in people. In a 2016 article by Colorado Public Radio, the executive director of Denver’s Office of Economic Development Paul Washington argued that there are good and bad effects of gentrification, highlighting how gentrified neighborhoods have better schools, more job opportunities, and greater amenities (Estabrook 2016). To ensure Denver’s gentrification is positive Washington stated that the government was trying to make investments in affordable housing, parks, health services, and infrastructure (Estabrook 2016). Unfortunately, the city can say those things, but the reality is that affordable housing has not been successfully developed to this point and the city did not intervene to change failing policies to provide affordable housing. Washington acknowledged that the city needs new

dedicated funding streams, but also affirmed that the city cannot build its way out of this problem.

If the government acknowledges, as did many of the people I interviewed, that the economics of gentrification predicate the potential for displacement, then the question remains of what can be done? In the case of River North, power was given to the people. The city demonstrated its willingness to provide local citizens in the form of a non-profit with powers over placemaking, community-based programming, infrastructure, and design. Through providing the RiNo Art District with oversight of the BID and GID, the city ensured that people with community interests inside the River North boundary have a seat at the table to dictate changes in the area. The city has reinforced this power by providing significant funding to the projects to redevelop infrastructure with oversight by the RiNo Art District.

Perhaps similar powers should be afforded citywide to community groups. Councilman Albus Brooks informed me that a major commercial corridor through Five Points, Welton Street, also has a BID, representing the interests of 50-60 African-American businesses. The government has not released or written a plan for Five Points since the 1970's, however, and subsequently has not provided the Welton Street BID with oversight powers for development in their neighborhood. The spread of citywide neighborhood organization power structures as oversight for development, funds spending, and design would help ensure that all residents had a seat at the table and would demonstrate that Denver is investing in more people over dollar signs.

The January 2017 creation of a linkage fee for new construction to pay into an account for affordable housing may be a good start, but as noted by interviewees, the lack of a plan for the funds collected makes the linkage fee significantly less impactful at this point. Additionally, the linkage fee, much like the plans and policies related to RiNo, makes no reference to racial demographics and as such excuses the city from stated responsibility for addressing the issue of dwindling racial diversity throughout the city. In essence, there is nobody taking responsibility for representing racial demographics and diversity when it comes to conversations about urban redevelopment and economic investment.

In an effort to redevelop River North, the city has created governing boards that have laudably transformed a desolate industrial area into a destination and a neighborhood with a sense of place. Unfortunately, this positive transformation has been associated with racial and economic gentrification-induced displacement. While the city has taken actions that can reasonably be associated with encouraging gentrification, they have taken limited action to address gentrification, and none that directly reflect on issues related to race.

b. Gaps in the Findings

Although I requested interviews from twenty-four individuals, I only conducted interviews with nine. I never received responses from many and a few were unable to fit an interview into their schedule. As such, most of my interviews were with people directly working with the RiNo Art District, BID,

and GID. A more extensive list of interviewees, including previous residents or business owners who left RiNo or Five Points between 2000 and 2017 would provide a significantly broader picture.

Any issues with reporting race through the census could skew the data. Given that Hispanic is not listed as a race on the census has been a topic of conversation and confusion. Therefore, the City of Denver suggests that racial demographic data from the census is an inaccurate reflection of the true demographics in Denver. Given that there is no other source for racial demographic information, I used the census and ACS data, but if the city is correct, it should be noted that those figures are not absolute.

Further spatial analysis of surrounding census tracts outside of Five Points, but in the areas surrounding River North would provide a more thorough understanding of the demographic shifts. While many of those neighborhoods are separated from River North by the interstates or the South Platte River, understanding the shifts in their demographics would give a broader understanding of local trends. Similarly, comparison to citywide trends in demographic shifts would provide greater clarity to Denver's transformation.

My analysis of economic shifts relied entirely on looking at median income. There are many other methods for analyzing the economic situation of an area which would give a more comprehensive understanding. Including economic information about residence, but also the transition of business types would provide a more conclusive perspective on all aspects of economic shifts in RiNo.

c. Policy recommendations

The City of Denver's 2016 gentrification study intentionally omits racial demographics from their analysis. They attribute this to inaccurate racial reporting on behalf of Hispanics. Furthermore, there is demonstrated discussion of the census choice to not include "Hispanic" as a choice of race. In the case of Denver, however, which has a self-identifying Hispanic population of 32%, obviously the census designation is being used by nearly 1/3 of the population. Therefore, the city needs to either recognize the census data as the closest approximation of the population, or come up with a more comprehensive method for tracking racial demographics. The easiest choice would be for the city to start using census racial demographic data in analysis and planning. Both the quantitative and qualitative data from this case study show racial demographic shifts, which assume that any document from the city that does not include reference to race is akin to ignoring the presence of racial difference throughout Denver.

The only positive story I heard in the interviews was about the work of the Urban Land Conservancy constructing their temporary homeless village, later to be built out as affordable housing. While the city has demonstrated the ability to offer considerable governing and planning power to non-profit boards, the city should consider the further application of land trusts as a means for creating affordability. Bringing organizations like the ULC into the board of the Art District would provide a seat at the table for an organization that does see affordable housing as a priority. Of all the interviewees asked, none had heard of any conversation over the years about the city offering land to the RiNo Art

District as part of a land trust. This method, however, would give those boards greater power for determining the future and character of the neighborhood while generating projects for affordable housing.

The creation of the linkage fee for construction of affordable housing is a great move towards addressing issues identified by the city council. However, a comprehensive plan of locations and timelines would give credence to the stated efforts of the linkage fee. Given that this is a relatively new policy, I would expect that a rollout would be released sometime in the next year.

Some of the other policy attempts should see a massive overhaul. The IHO needs to be amended to include more than for-sale units, and should be expanded beyond the current AMI limits to include people of lower incomes. The policy needs to reflect dedicated options for those renting and making 50-60% of AMI. This change in policy would then align with the stated goals of the *2003 River North Plan* to included housing at 50-60% AMI.

Furthermore, the city should adapt its opt-in height amendment policies. By recognizing that development is booming in RiNo, the city should recognize a unique opportunity to be demanding with developers. Instead of providing opt-in programs or incentives for locating in RiNo, the city should be making stronger demands on developers regardless of height bonuses. In this way, the city could make demands about affordable housing while still allowing for rapid development.

d. Conclusion

Five Points, as a reflection of RiNo, underwent rapid demographic shifts between 2000-2015. The redevelopment of former industrial spaces led to a 68% growth in population, represented entirely by growth in the Non-Hispanic White population. The correlation between race and economic well being in Five Points confirms that this transformation is gentrification-induced displacement. The notable work of government sanctioned local governance bodies has transformed the area in many positive ways, but those changes can be associated with encouraging demographic shifts. The city needs to continue supporting the good work of those groups, but provide representation and laws that simultaneously address racial demographics. The policies of the city to create affordable housing have produced no results in RiNo because of their opt-in nature. Therefore, the city must address affordability and racial demographics as conjoined issues by outlining plans for newly acquired linkage fee funds, and creating mandatory and more expansive affordable housing policies, especially for rapidly developing areas, with direct reference to maintaining racial diversity.

Appendix A

Steps for mapping racial demographic growth, decline, and infill

Data Sources

To complete this project I used the following data sources:

1. U.S. Census bureau decennial population data from 2000 (Table)
2. American Community Survey (ACS) data from 2014 (Table)
3. Open Denver Data Catalog:
 - a. Census tracts (shapefile, polygons)
 - b. City boundary (shapefile, polygon)
 - c. Neighborhood boundaries (shapefile, polygons)
4. DenverInfill.com (a site run by Ken Schroepfel, professor of urban planning at C.U. Denver which has tracked every infill project in Denver since 2000), (this data was in the form of an online table for 200-2009, and a Google map for 2010-2014)

Steps

Mapping infill sites:

1. Mapping infill sites
 - 1.1. The data for infill sites from 2000-2009 was available online at DenverInfill.com. This data was available only in the form of an online table. Therefore, I copied the table into an Excel file. I needed to clean up the data by deleting blank rows, and deleting any project labeled as “under construction” or “planned”. Some of the sites had an actual address listed, others had a site name, and yet others had a building nickname. Therefore, I had to search the Internet to find the address of the sites using a nickname and copy it into the Excel file. In total, the number of sites came to 146. To geocode the sites would require full addresses for all the sites, which I didn’t have. Therefore I used Google My Maps to upload the excel file, allowing Google to search for all the sites and place them accurately on the map. From that I was able to download the map as a KMZ file. This file needed to be converted to KML, so I uploaded it to Google Earth and re-saved it as a KML. From there, I was able to convert the KML file into a shapefile in ArcMap.
 - 1.2. On DenverInfill.com the sites from 2000-2014, 240 total, were stored in a Google My Map. Therefore, to get these sites into ArcMap required downloading the map as KMZ, uploading it to Google Earth, downloading it as KML, and then converting the KML to a shapefile in ArcMap.
 - 1.3. When this process was done, I had two shapefiles showing my 386 infill project sites between 2000-2014.
2. Mapping demographics of 2000 and 2014
 - 2.1. To first prepare my map I downloaded the Census Tract boundaries for Denver, the Denver city boundary, and the Denver neighborhood boundaries.

- 2.2. I downloaded a table of the census tract population data for 2000 for Denver County from the Census Bureau website.
 - 2.2.1. This data needed to be cleaned up in Excel by appropriately writing out column labels and adding zeros to the census tract numbers, a step unique to Colorado and a few other states.
 - 2.2.2. I could then put the table into ArcMap. Once in ArcMap the table could be joined to the census tracts using the census tract ID number so that each tract could then be associated with the appropriate population data from the table.
 - 2.2.3. Included in the table was a number reflecting the percentage of each race, occupying each particular census tract.
- 2.3. This same process was completed using the 2014 census tract population data with a geographic boundary of Denver County.
- 2.4. When this was complete, I had two shapefiles showing the census tracts from 2000 and 2014 each with associated population data.
3. Mapping Demographic Shifts
 - 3.1. To map shifts in the demographics I joined the 2000 census tracts and population data to the 2014 census tracts and population data. This produced a single attribute table that contained each census tract and its population data for 2000 and 2014 (“Census00_14”).
 - 3.2. Within the joined table, “Census00_14”, I created a new field, and used the field calculator to measure shifts in demographics. I did this by subtracting the percentage of residents that self-identified as Black in 2000 from the residents that self-identified as Black in 2014. This created a number for each census tract showing the change in percentage of residents of a given race between 2000 and 2014.
 - 3.3. I repeated the process for self-identifying Hispanic and White residents. In the end, I had three new added fields that showed the percent change in population between 2000 and 2014 for those 3 racial demographics.
 - 3.4. I knew that the census tract containing Denver International Airport (DIA) would skew the data because that area was not an inhabited location until the construction of the airport in 1995. By 2000 there was limited housing near the airport, but by 2014, there was large-scale construction in the area. The percentage growth in this one census tract was over 1000% and would clearly skew the rest of the data. Therefore, I selected that census tract, switched the selection to highlight every census tract except DIA, and then created a new layer (Census00_14_2) from the selection. This allowed me to exclude a census tract that I knew would highly skew my data.
 - 3.5. I then mapped each racial demographic change independently of the other races using the layer “Census00_14_2”. To do this I selected by attribute for all census tracts showing Hispanic percentage change greater than or equal to one. This highlighted all the census tracts that showed an increase in the overall percentage of Hispanic residents. I created a new layer from that selection and labeled it “Hispanic Growth”. From the original layer, “Census00_14_2”, I selected for all census tracts showing

- percentage change less than one. I created a new layer from that selection and labeled it “Hispanic Decline”
- 3.6. By turning on both “Hispanic Growth” and “Hispanic Decline”, I could then symbolize each layer into quantiles with growth colored in shades of blue and decline in shades of red. This showed the stark contrast between possible growth and decline within different census tracts.
 - 3.7. This process was repeated for both Black populations and White populations, resulting in three maps (Shown in the Maps section of this paper) showing all census tracts and whether that race showed percentage increase or decrease between 2000 and 2014, symbolized into quantiles.
 - 3.8. I used the neighborhood boundaries layer in all of these maps because the neighborhood names are strong identifiers for Denver residents and would help to easily orient people whereas the census tract boundaries would confuse people.
4. Isolating areas of highest decline and growth
 - 4.1. Looking at the three maps it became obvious that the areas with the highest decline were in Black and Hispanic census tracts, and the White population saw incredible growth in those same census tracts. There were limited census tracts with infill projects in the areas of Black decline. However, there were large numbers of infill projects in the Hispanic decline.
 - 4.2. Therefore, to identify those areas of highest decline I selected by attribute those areas within the highest quantile of Hispanic decline. This produced sixteen census tracts representing between 12% and 45% decline. I then created a new layer from that selection to isolate those census tracts for further analysis.
 - 4.3. I then did a select by location to query how many infill locations were located within each of the sixteen census tracts within the highest quantile Hispanic decline. This added a column to the attribute table telling me how many infill projects were in each of those census tracts.
 - 4.4. Similarly, I then selected by attribute those areas within the highest quantile of White growth. This produced eighteen census tracts representing between 45% and 69% growth.
 - 4.5. I then ran an intersect of the map showing highest quantile Hispanic decline and highest quantile White growth to isolate only those census tracts that were in the highest quantile of White growth and Hispanic decline. This resulted in a layer of nine census tracts showing the largest demographic shifts of Hispanic to White population between 2000 and 2014.
 5. Correlations
 - 5.1. I used the information from the isolated sixteen census tracts showing the highest quantile decline attribute table to create an Excel spreadsheet with one column for percentage decline and one column for number of infill projects. I then used Excel to run a correlation between the two attributes.
 - 5.2. Similarly, I created two columns in Excel for the percentage change and number of infill projects, but only for those nine sites that were both in

the highest quantile Hispanic decline and highest quantile White growth. I then used Excel to run a correlation between the two attributes.

- 5.3. Both of these maps showed positive correlations between infill and demographic shifts, and are in the Maps section of this paper.

Errors

Two census tracts changed shape between 2000 and 2014. One of the tracts was split into four, the other split into two. Both were far outside of the location of infill projects and so I simply ignored the problem. This resulted in null values for six census tracts that I changed simply to zero for the purposes of mapping.

The rezoning of areas such as Union Station from an industrial space into a new 40-acre residential neighborhood would create skewed implications for infill projects. I intentionally only chose those census tracts in the highest quantile because if I ran an analysis of city-wide decline by race and the location of infill projects, areas like union station would weigh heavily in showing that there is not correlation. However, I think those former industrial spaces that are now areas of housing are accurate portrayals of the reality of changing demographics.

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