

Section 4: EXPLORING THE DIVERSITY WITHIN CAMBRIDGE IN 1990

This final section disaggregates and compares different portions of the rental housing stock by analyzing sample block groups drawn from the 1990 U.S. Census and covering over 40 percent of the City. This approach again confirms that:

- it is the rents in the rent-controlled housing stock that are remarkably low,
- a "housing emergency" exists only within the rent-controlled stock in that people want more such low-priced units than are available, and
- younger persons in higher status occupations have come to reside in the large majority of the controlled units -- gentrifying them.

This analysis of block groups from the 1990 U.S. Census STF3 data -- representing rent-controlled, public/assisted and market rate apartments -- elaborates several basic findings:

- The population living in the rent-controlled stock is generally advantaged with regard to income, race, age, education, employment, occupation, and residential mobility -- not the characteristics of constituency needing special shelter from market forces.
- Rents in controlled units are low, not because the units are smaller or because less affluent households live in these units, but simply because their rents are very effectively controlled. The result is simply a dramatically reduced rent burden for relatively well-off tenants.
- The diversity of Cambridge does not arise from the residents in rent-controlled units (who are in fact remarkably much like market rental tenants), but rather from those living in the public housing and assisted rental stock.

These findings confront those who hold that rent-controls effectively help the disadvantaged keep their housing affordable and safeguard the diversity of the City. Actually, rent controls only hold down rents without influencing who gets to live in the favorably priced units -- mainly younger, white, advantaged, childless households. Cambridge's "diversity" lives mainly in the balance of the housing stock, with public/assisted housing sheltering the disadvantaged, and market rentals serving more families.

Detailed analysis of the supporting data is contained in Appendix A. The Methodology for the selection of the respective Housing Type Sample Sets of census block groups is in Appendix B.