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Black middle-class neighborhoods in Louisville through multiple lenses.

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MULTIPLE LENSES

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DEDICATION

This dissertation is dedicated to Dr. Clarence R. Talley and all those he loved and who

loved him back. Dr. Talley was instrumental in kindling my love for meaningful

scholarship and left us all way too soon.

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ABSTRACT

BLACK MIDDLE-CLASS NEIGHBORHOODS IN LOUISVILLE THROUGH

MULTIPLE LENSES

Jamar M. Wheeler

April 10, 2020

This dissertation is an articles-based, mixed methods study that analyzes Black middle-class neighborhood attainment in Louisville. The importance of this study lies in filling existing gaps in the research literature on Black middle-class neighborhoods in mid-sized cities as well as gaps in explaining how the neighborhood perceptions of middle-class Blacks shape their future visions of intergenerational mobility.

Racialized social structure theory is the theoretical framework that is employed to make sense of the adverse positionality of Black middle-class neighborhoods. Racialized social structure theory posits that individuals are placed in racial categories that are hierarchically arranged, which, at the neighborhood level, translates to White and Black householders advancing their material interests in competing ways. These competing interests are asymmetrical in terms of power relations, which means that the neighborhood choices of the Black middle-class are constrained by the routinized ways that the racialized social structure diminishes their claims to middle-class status.

The first and second articles primarily utilize the 2016 *American Community Survey* to compare Black middle-class neighborhood attainment across similarly sized

urban areas and to analyze the spatial proximity of Black middle-class households and households considered poor, respectively. These articles find that the segregation levels faced by the Black middle class affect how many Black middle-class households live in prototypical middle-class neighborhoods and show that durable geographical patterns are interwoven with the racial characterizations of neighborhoods, both yielding disadvantages to neighborhoods with growing Black populations. In the third article, the perspectives of middle-class Blacks are brought to the forefront and uncover that a great deal of ownership is expressed by respondents in terms of the home buying process and their neighborhood lives and a relationship is found between familial class background and neighborhood preferences.

Overall, Black middle-class neighborhoods in Louisville are socioeconomically heterogeneous, but this heterogeneity is largely shaped the inverse relationship between the number of Black households and economic advantage. This translates to Black middle-class households making neighborhood choices that are constrained by trade-offs between living in neighborhoods conducive to wealth-building or living in neighborhoods that are less economically advantaged, but allow for more social comfort.

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INTRODUCTION

The research question animating my dissertation is *What is the contemporary state of Black middle-class neighborhood life in Louisville, a mid-sized city in the mid-South region, according to Black middle-class residents themselves and an array of place-based census data?* I take a multi-focal approach in addressing this question, namely comparing Black middle-class neighborhood attainment in my primary metropolitan area to metropolitan areas that shared its 2016 population characteristics, analyzing the relationship between Black middle-class (BMC) neighborhoods and spatial poverty, and uncovering first-hand perceptions of neighborhood life from BMC residents.

Drawing from the intersectionality paradigm, an analysis of how anti-black racism inflects with class and place-based dynamics offers opportunities to deepen and broaden critical race scholarship as well as our understanding of the unique racialized disadvantages that accompany life in a Black body (Collins 2015). At the same time, the findings that emerge from this study will also reveal complexities that go hand-in-hand with studying a group as heterogeneous as the Black middle class.

The Louisville, KY metropolitan area serves as the focal site for my dissertation as a location that combines a unique history in the annals of racial residential segregation, both in terms of Supreme Court cases (*Buchanan v. Warley*, *Meredith v. Jefferson County Board of Education*) and the level of violence that has greeted attempts at integration (Rothstein 2017). In Richard Rothstein's recent book, *The Color of Law*, Louisville

makes several appearances with a fairly long passage on the Braden and Wade families attempt to obtain housing in Shively, a municipality that now has the distinction of housing the largest concentration of middle-class Blacks within one of its census tracts.

However, more pertinent is Louisville's status as a mid-sized city that is geographically surrounded by competing mid-sized cities. From an academic perspective, mid-sized cities are under-studied in the Black middle-class literature. From a policy perspective Louisville competes with other cities in close proximity in terms of both growth and in attracting college-educated professionals (McReynolds 2017). Studying mid-sized cities to close existing gaps in the literature and comparatively analyzing Louisville as a focal urbanized area (UA) among others that share its population characteristics are repeating themes throughout the text.

This is an articles-based dissertation, and as such I dedicate a section to delineating both the relevant literature and the methods that I will employ to address my research questions. In the first article, I address the question of how mid-sized cities vary with respect to the extent that Black middle-class households reside in neighborhoods that are readily identifiable as middle class, given their socioeconomic characteristics and the degree of homeownership. The second article focuses on the relationship between Black middle-class attainment and spatial poverty, with a special emphasis on geographically mapping this relationship using GIS software. Additionally, I analyze in detail how living in different types of neighborhoods translate to the socioeconomic fortunes of middle-class Blacks. Lastly, the third article uncovers how various Black middle-class neighborhoods are perceived by middle-class Blacks themselves. It is through these conversations that connections will be made between neighborhood

contexts, feelings of comfort and contentment, and future visions of intergenerational succession.

My mixed-methods research approach is premised on a worldview that sees complementarity between knowledge produced from a detached viewpoint that seeks to delineate the statistical characteristics of places and more grounded viewpoints that can illumine how place-based social realities are experienced and interpreted. This study leverages the ability of census data to vigorously estimate the socioeconomic realities of neighborhoods, the ability of spatial analysis to situate neighborhoods in space, both geographically and with respect to their socioeconomic characteristics, and the ability of interviews to uncover beliefs, worldviews, and social experiences (Baur et al. 2014, Young 2004).

LITERATURE REVIEW: THE CASE OF THE BLACK MIDDLE-CLASS

Before the civil rights movement, the Black middle-class was small in number, mainly consisting of doctors, lawyers, teachers, entertainers, and small business owners serving segregated Black communities (Lacy 2007, Landry and Marsh 2011, Pattillo 1999). As a consequence of the legislative victories brought about through the struggle for social equality and equal protection, the size of the Black middle-class greatly expanded, as well-positioned American Blacks accessed middle-class jobs and took advantage of educational opportunities not present before (Feagin and Sikes 1994, Lacy 2007, Landry and Marsh 2011, Wilson 2012). The case of the Black middle-class is contextualized by numerous and overlapping sociohistorical realities, including the civil rights legacy, the history of racial residential segregation, the social meaning of Black middle-class membership, and finally, their neighborhood attainment, which is the focus of my research.

Defining Black Middle-Class Membership

The expansion of the Black middle-class in the echo of the civil rights movement was accompanied by identity-related questions. Commonsense perceptions of what it meant to inhabit Black bodies in terms of respectability conflicted with societal perceptions of having middle-class membership in the United States (Bettie 2003, Feagin and Sikes 1994). Much of the post-civil rights, Black middle-class story is defined by the struggle of asserting both Black and middle-class identities, despite the racialized

ideologies and practices that render blackness and middle-class membership as contradictory (Bettie 2003, Feagin and Sikes 1994).

One of the more enthusiastic debates within the sociological literature on the Black middle-class is who exactly should count as middle-class, or more specifically, which segment of the Black middle-class should be highlighted in terms of comparing their experience with the mainstream, White experience (Lacy 2007, Marsh et al. 2008, Marsh 2018, Pattillo 1999). Mary Pattillo (1999) largely sets the stage for this debate by using both quantitative and qualitative measures in defining the Black middle-class in her groundbreaking work, *Black Picket Fences*. In her analysis, the Black middle-class are the households with incomes two times greater than the federal poverty level, who are employed in white-collar occupations and tend to own their homes (Pattillo 1999). By setting the 'two times the poverty level' metric as a standard ($24,280 for individuals/$50,200 for a family of four in 2016 dollars), some argue that Pattillo privileges the lower middle-class segment of Blacks in her study, despite its numerical representation of the Black middle-class (Lacy 2007).

Contrasting with this standard, Karyn Lacy (2007), focused on individual incomes of $50,000 or greater in 2000 dollars ($73,239.45 in 2016 dollars) as the baseline middle-class standard in her study, along with other factors such as educational attainment, occupation, and quality of neighborhood. Ironically, when both baseline figures for individuals are compared on the basis of today's dollars, there is about a $50,000 gap. Lacy argued that her measure was more appropriate, due to the relative proportions of Blacks and Whites that had attained that income level (2007). Regarding the Black middle-class as a population, she defined those earning between $50K – $100K as the

core middle-class, those earning between $30K and $50K as the lower middle-class, and those earning above $100K as the elite middle-class.

From a less quantitative standpoint, Karyn Lacy (2007) contends that *strategic assimilation* is an apt description for how members of the Black middle-class (BMC) negotiate their identity. She argues that BMC individuals engage in boundary work to draw distinctions between themselves and members of the White middle-class, while also erecting boundaries between themselves and Blacks of lower socioeconomic status (Lacy 2007). Similarly, Kesha Moore (2008) found an interesting distinction among the Black middle-class, between those who seek to strongly identify with and enforce their middle-class status (i.e., middle class-minded) and those who pride themselves on their *class fluidity* (i.e., multi-class). While the middle class-minded segment tended to emphasize speaking proper English and maintaining strict boundaries between themselves and lower-class Blacks, the multi-class group privileges their ability to converse with low-income Blacks, those on their class level, as well as middle-class Whites (Moore 2008).

Adding to the theme of how the Black middle-class self-identifies, research shows that middle-class Blacks tend to view themselves as an aspirational standard for Blacks lower on the economic scale (Byrnes and Henricks 2014, Hyra 2006, Lacy 2007, Pattillo 1999, 2007). In shared neighborhood spaces, middle-class Blacks leverage their greater share of power and resources to enforce standards of conduct and property upkeep, whether in suburban contexts or in gentrifying areas of the central city (Byrnes and Henricks 2014, Hyra 2006, Khare, Joseph and Chaskin 2015, Pattillo 2007). Overall, these social patterns among the Black middle-class signify desires for community among themselves and for mantles of leadership in the context of representing the Black

collective. Such attitudes and postures lead to intra-racial tensions, especially in neighborhoods experiencing gentrification and involuntary displacement (Hyra 2006, Khare, Joseph and Chaskin 2015, Pattillo 2007).

While no single definition of Black middle-class membership is embraced universally, scholars within the field tend to agree that income, educational attainment, professional employment, homeownership capacity, and subscribing to a particular lifestyle and set of values are standard components of Black middle-class life. Seeking to realize the promise of the civil rights movement, middle-class Blacks pride themselves in achieving on par with Whites and having the same attainments to reflect these achievements. However, internal and external conflicts arise when little social space has been granted for such displays.

In comparison to the White middle-class, this group is newly emerging with less capacity to protect what they have gained. All of this, in a socioeconomic climate that imperils the middle-class way of life, in general (Oliver and Shapiro 1995, Pattillo 1999). In comparison to other non-White middle-class groups, the Black middle-class is unique in the extent of their residential distance from middle-class Whites (Iceland and Wilkes 2006, Timberlake and Iceland 2007, Woldoff and Ovadia 2009). This sense of having middle-class attributes on paper, while lacking the ability to outwardly display middle-class economic attainment is a common theme throughout the sociological literature on the Black middle-class (Adelman 2004, Alba, Logan and Stults 2000, Feagin and Sikes 1994, Pattillo 1999, Sharkey 2014).

Despite my misgivings about the replicability of her study in other urbanized areas, I borrow Karen Lacy's (2007) *core middle-class* conception, but I revise her focus

on individual incomes to reflect household incomes. I set the baseline figure to an annual household income of $75,000, with the uppermost household income set at $149,999. This income segment strongly aligns with Lacy's core middle-class income bracket, while also allowing for straightforward census data analyses. Such a figure also strikes a suitable balance between highlighting a population that is distinctly middle-class in terms of the income metric and having the capacity to own a home, creditworthiness notwithstanding.

In this articles-based dissertation, the core middle-class segment is employed in the quantitatively oriented first two articles and it also informs my recruitment strategy for the third article, which is based on semi-structured interviews. More qualitative components of middle-class membership such as college degree attainment and homeownership, are also scrutinized in my recruitment efforts.

<u>Brief History of Racial Residential Segregation</u>

For the American Black[1] population, reaching levels of socioeconomic attainment synonymous with middle-class membership has been a long journey, notwithstanding persisting disparities. From a historical lens, the interrelated patterns of Whites distancing themselves from Blacks and curtailing their free movement can be broken down into three distinct periods: legally sanctioned segregation, government-sponsored redlining and redistribution, and colorblind housing discrimination.

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[1] The term 'American Black' refers specifically to American citizens who are descendant from Africans transported to America through the Transatlantic Slave Trade. The more general term 'Black' refers to American residents with African ancestry, inclusive of African immigrants and descendants and Afro-Caribbeans and descendants.

In alignment with the prevailing form of racialization during that time, the period of legally sanctioned segregation was exemplified in racially restrictive covenants and what Richard Rothstein (2017) describes as *racial zoning*. If racial discrimination in housing was not outright legally sanctioned, various municipalities sought to cleverly evade the ramifications of legal rulings such as *Buchanan v. Warley*, which forbade local governments from actively prohibiting the sale of property along racial lines (Rothstein 2017). City after city actively challenged this Supreme Court decision by designing and implementing racial zoning ordinances that effectively designated which areas of the city would be Black and which areas would be White (Rothstein 2017). This legacy of legally sanctioned racial segregation set the stage for what would become one of the most definitive periods for the collective fortunes of Blacks and Whites.

The New Deal, in response to the economic casualties of the Great Depression, set a new precedent for the federal government's involvement in the socioeconomic affairs of its citizenry. In terms of housing, the federal government intervened through the creation of the Home Owners Loan Corporation (HOLC), which was tasked with purchasing troubled mortgages and refinancing them. Most significant to my focus, the HOLC institutionalized the practice of redlining (Massey and Denton 1993, Rothstein 2017). As the federal government's source of home appraisal information, Rothstein states unambiguously that the HOLC assigned neighborhoods "a red color if African Americans lived in it, even if it was a solid middle-class neighborhood" (2017:64). The systematic designation of Black neighborhoods as "risky" and many White neighborhoods as "safe" had major consequences. Neighborhoods deemed to be all-White and mass production home builders who demonstrated their commitment to

construct all-White subdivisions were rewarded with federally-insured loans that, in effect, acted as an economic boon to families and developers yielding foundations for wealth-creation (Rothstein 2017). In the meantime, thousands upon thousands of Black families were "denied the benefits of housing inflation and the subsequent vast increase in home equity assets." (Oliver and Shapiro 1995:22)

Since the passage of the Fair Housing Act in 1968, research shows that racial discrimination in housing has become more subtle (Feagin and Sikes 1994, Korver-Glenn 2018, Massey 2015). Keeping in mind the historical legacy highlighted in preceding paragraphs, contemporary housing discrimination is embedded in private policies and public policies that mutually reinforce each other. Both reflect the order of *neoliberal-colorblindness*, the hegemonic social paradigm of our time. While this will be discussed later in more detail, emphasizing *neoliberal-colorblindness* focuses attention on ruling postures that privilege market-based logics as best for governmental functioning and display reluctance to distribute resources to racially stigmatized groups (Harvey 2006, Omi and Winant 2015).

Housing discrimination in the private realm takes the form of avoidance strategies on the part of real estate brokers and property owners, in combination with racially-stratified social networks that enable White access to economically-advantaged neighborhoods, while constraining access for Blacks (Feagin and Sikes 1994, Korver-Glenn 2017). Feagin and Sikes (1994) document practices such as not calling back Black prospective buyers of properties and lying about properties being already sold or rented. Korver-Glenn (2018) finds that racial stereotyping occurs throughout the multi-stage process of selling and buying a home, each stage serving as a potential exit ramp for

Blacks and Latina/os going through the process, while the path for Whites goes undisturbed.

Contemporary housing discrimination in the public realm can be seen in recent efforts by the Office of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) to purportedly correct historical inequalities in housing. Research shows that the socioeconomic fallout of these policies has adversely affected areas of the city with high populations of racial minorities as well as those that are in economic decline (Bartlett 2017, Chaskin et al. 2012, Rothstein 2017). Rothstein (2017) criticizes affordable housing programs such as HOPE VI and its successor programs for perpetuating racialized residential segregation due to the small number of such properties in well-to-do, predominantly White areas of the city.

Black Middle-Class Segregation

The Black middle-class has been doubly affected by being historically shut out from opportunities to build wealth through suburbanized housing appreciation and through contemporary patterns that perpetuate cumulative advantages for Whites and disadvantages for Blacks (Oliver and Shapiro 1995). Historical discrimination, coupled with the more subtle, but no less compelling practices of the present-day, yield distinct patterns of marginalization and exploitation. A fairly recent example of such patterns was the housing crisis a decade ago in which banks targeted Blacks, middle-class Blacks included, with subprime mortgage loans, leading to the intergenerational wealth of many Black families being wiped out, while no significant sanctions were levied against the perpetrators (Desmond 2016, Rothstein 2017).

The forms of segregation that specifically affect the Black middle-class shape their neighborhood contexts in a variety of ways. While openly racist policies such as redlining and Whites-only suburbanization had a tremendous impact on the Black middle class, the colorblind policies of today are more subtle in nature and combine with white flight and its consequences to yield unique disadvantages in the neighborhood life of middle-class Blacks (Feagin and Sikes 1994, Pattillo 1999, Rothstein 2017). As Whites leave neighborhoods becoming progressively more Black and middle class, capital investment tends to follow behind the Whites, which precipitates the economic decline of these neighborhoods. This pattern, which seems to repeat itself across US cities, jeopardizes the ability of the Black middle class to maximize the wealth-building potential of their homeownership (Oliver and Shapiro 1995, Rothstein 2017).

RACIALIZED SOCIAL STRUCTURE THEORY AND THE BLACK MIDDLE-CLASS

Social scientific research shows that race continues to be socially significant with respect to socioeconomic attainment, the ability to build wealth, everyday interactions, and the levels of resilience and vigilance that must be employed to rise above disadvantaged circumstances (Chetty et al. 2018, Oliver and Shapiro 1995). In essence, race is a visioning concept that views the diversity in human phenotype as something that can be stratified. Racism is ultimately the enforcement of this concept of human stratification. Racism makes race relevant by connecting its premises to structures of economic and political power (Bonilla-Silva 2015, Omi and Winant 2015). A social structure premised on racial stratification was formally erected during the era of European colonization, which entailed the political domination of non-White populations in the Americas, Africa, and Asia and the extraction of their wealth, and their peoples, in the case of the Americas and Africa.

This *racialized social structure* can be called such because it was actively constructed by Whites to the detriment of non-Whites and this structure is actively defended by those served by it and attacked by those it harms (Bonilla-Silva 1997). This core element of racialization in action means that reconfigurations of the structure occur when external assaults are successful and new acts of resistance are launched once the racialized social structure is successfully reconfigured (Omi and Winant 2015). Familiar

developments in US history such as the transatlantic slave trade and the enforcement of slave codes, the Civil War and emancipation, Reconstruction, the Black Freedom Movement and civil rights legislation, and the rise of neoconservatism and neoliberalism are prime examples of the dynamic ways in which the racialized social structure is attacked and reorganized, and yet remains in place as a resilient component of American life (Du Bois 1935, Omi and Winant 2015, Zinn 2003).

One product of the continuing relevance of race and racism is the inability of the Black middle-class to access and sustain neighborhood attainment congruent with their socioeconomic profiles. This phenomenon can be linked to the unique character of Black-White social relations. Compared to any other coupling, the dynamic between Blacks and Whites is more visceral when considering the legacy of chattel slavery, the uniquely dehumanizing nature of the racialized stereotypes aimed at Blacks, the intractability of racial residential segregation, and the corollary need for Whites as a group to keep Blacks in a low social position as a means of safeguarding their sense of white racial identity (Alexander 2011, Anderson et al. 2012, Blumer 1958, Collins 2004, Hughey 2012, Lipsitz 1995, López 2006, Massey and Denton 1993, Mills 1997, Rothstein 2017). The prospects of a rising Black middle-class with the ability to secure desirable housing in economically-advantaged areas represents a threat to White people invested in propagating white racial identity, an identity that assumes their group is the *superior opposite* of Blacks and other non-White racial groups (Blumer 1958, Hughey 2012, López 2006).

The *racialized social structure* theoretical framework that I use to make sense of the neighborhood positionality of the Black middle class is influenced by Eduardo

Bonilla-Silva's *racialized social systems* thesis, while also incorporating other elements of critical race scholarship emphasizing relational dynamics between groups over individual characteristics and beliefs, especially *racial formation* theory. I agree that the fundamental logic operating within this racialized structure is the placement of social actors in racial categories that are hierarchically arranged (Bonilla-Silva 1997:469). Based on this racialized hierarchy, privileged groups at the top will seek to maintain their dominant position, and racially disadvantaged groups will seek to improve their social status and increase their access to valued resources and opportunities. Racialized groups, therefore, make *racialized claims* within the context of this social arrangement. Racialized claims, like *racial projects*, reflect politicized objectives that are animated by racial identity and seek an advantageous distribution of material and symbolic resources (Omi and Winant 2015). These claims seek the arbitration of the state and other social institutions that are influential in granting access to resources and opportunities.

Whiteness, as a racial claim, is animated by feelings of being the normative standard amongst humanity (Frankenberg 1993, López 2006). While there may be hegemonic battles between Whites with respect to how whiteness should be represented on the public stage, there is a sense of cultural agreement that whiteness is the standard by which non-White groups are to be judged and that their superior cultural position comes with proprietary rights to valued goods, statuses, and knowledge (Blumer 1958, Collins 2000, Harris 1993, Hughey 2012). These feelings among a wide cross-section of Whites translates to non-Whites being regarded as ontologically inferior, especially Blacks, as a racial group that has been regarded as the categorical opposite of Whites (Blumer 1958, López 2006, Tilly 1998).

Given this historically rooted categorical pairing between Whites and Blacks, the racial claims tied to whiteness seek the tightly-fitted categorization of American Blacks as an immoral group that should be relegated to low social status akin to racial caste, due to their natural inferiority to Whites (Anderson et al. 2012, Mills 1997, Tilly 1998). The social meaning of *blackness* and the corollary ways in which blackness is culturally represented is tied to a caste-like ordering of ontological worth that shapes perceptions of moral worth and deservingness, and lends credence to forms of racialized social closure (Anderson et al. 2012, Collins 2000, Lamont and Molnar 2002, Mills 1997). Ultimately, the racialized categorical distinctions that are sought by those advancing whiteness are indelibly linked to politicized projects to distribute resources, opportunities, and justice in asymmetrical ways that maintain white privilege and the continuity of black disadvantage (Bonilla-Silva 1997, Omi and Winant 2015).

The claims of *Black middle-class succession* are animated by commitments to carry forward the legacy of the civil rights movement and the successive achievement of upward mobility. Those advocating for Black middle-class succession, whether in their everyday lives or through political actions, seek to order the distribution of resources, opportunities, and justice in alignment with interracial democracy, meaning a social order reflecting the full social, economic, and political participation of Blacks in US society, free of any racial impositions (Locke 1941, Omi and Winant 2015).

Black middle-class succession reflects a collective claiming of a stake in US society and its promise of freedom and prosperity. Despite varied perceptions of US history and this country's checkered ability to live up to this standard when it comes to American Blacks, the claims of Black middle-class succession aim for the realization of

the Black freedom of movement and the ability to build wealth in a land where their ancestors were formerly enslaved.

The racial claims of each group seek the arbitration of the state, as well as other institutions with authority over the distribution of resources and opportunities. The involvement of the state in arbitrating the claims of whiteness and the claims of Black middle-class succession highlights the politicized nature of articulating racial claims as well as the state's influential role in providing, sustaining, or holding back vital resources (Omi and Winant 2015). Given the politicized nature of racial claims and the fact that the racialized social structure takes on different forms congruent with the time period, it is important to be mindful of which ideas, policies, and cultural representations are dominant in a particular time.

Omi and Winant (2015) point out *neoliberal-colorblindness* as the dominant ideological framework holding hegemonic power in the present-day. As a framework rooted in the retreat of the redistributive state and a hands-off posture regarding the social uplift of Blacks and other racialized groups, its dominance translates to the contested terrain of racial claims being shaped and adjudicated in an asymmetrical manner due to the thumb-on-the-scale influence of neoliberal-colorblindness in the political field, (Harvey 2006, Omi and Winant 2015). In essence, neoliberalism and colorblindness are bound together through the racialized reaction to one of central aims of the civil rights movement, which was accessing the resources that were systemically denied to Blacks during the New Deal and post-WWII periods (Omi and Winant 2015).

Policy-wise, what was once a pro-state posture when Blacks and other racialized minorities were cut off from socially redistributed resources such as FHA-backed home

loans, quickly became an anti-state posture when the prospects for multi-racial equality appeared on the national horizon (Omi and Winant 2015). Additionally, the influence of neoliberal-colorblindness can be seen in the punitive implementation of social welfare policies, mass incarceration, the precarity of the public school system, and the rollback of corrective policies such as affirmative action (Alexander 2011, Ravitch 2016, Rios 2011, Roberts 2014). Most relevant to my dissertation is how neoliberal-colorblindness affects housing policy.

While the naming of my theoretical framework acknowledges the influence of Bonilla-Silva's thesis, one distinction that is not simply semantic, is my emphasis on *structure*. As I relayed in the beginning of this chapter, structure implies something this is built over time that requires design elements, material resources, and actual construction. The elements that produce the structure reflect purposiveness on the part of its builders and the desire for it to last into the future. At the same time, the material reality of any structure demands maintenance and the political reality of a social structure demands defense, primarily because the same structure that was built over time can be destroyed, whether through negligence or outside incursions. On the other hand, the term *system* implies a sort of naturalized self-regulation that can exist with little regard for human interaction. While humans may be involved, it is the system itself that has a determinative influence over their sense of agency.

I emphasize the term *structure* to give greater weight to human agency and the ways that individuals, communities, and social institutions co-construct our social world. Despite the weighty influence of social structures that pre-date our material existence in this world and the ways in which these structures shape our social conscience,

individually and collectively, human beings actively participate in shaping our social realities in ways that are reflexive, impactful, and creative (Berger and Luckmann 1966, Giddens 1990). It is the creative and reflexive agency of racially disadvantaged groups that necessitates the ongoing maintenance and defense of the racialized social structure, which is a clear sign of the importance of focusing on what is happening today as much as we focus on the past.

Additionally, my emphasis on structure is based on highlighting the structure of social relations and the fact that it is comprised by social ties that bind individuals to communities, communities to organizations, and organizations to governing social institutions (Fleury and Lee 2006). These social ties take the form of webbed relational networks that range from severely limited in terms of facilitating individual access to resources and opportunities to extremely advantageous (Burt 2007, Granovetter 1973). The degree of racialization within a society can be measured to a significant extent by analyzing the influence that race imposes on the range of one's social network at the micro-level, the way race impacts collective action and policymaking at the community and organizational levels, and the embeddedness of racialization with respect to institutional logics, institutional practices, and cultural representations at the macro-level.

We can safely assume that the economic attainment of middle-class Blacks is a process facilitated by the social network in which they are embedded, while this network is embedded within a racialized social structure that devalues blackness. Social networks can work for you or against you. While your individual network can lead to good jobs and the opportunity to hire a talented real estate agent, someone else's social network may be more advantageous and enhance their ability to land the house that you desire. A

proper appreciation of how embedded social networks influence certain outcomes is a necessary component of my theoretical framework that accounts for some of the nuances of Black middle-class neighborhood attainment. While the weight of the racialized social structure, in combination with racially stratified social networks, may prevent many Black households from entering economically advantaged neighborhoods, the social network of some could very well facilitate their access (Korver-Glenn 2017).

The racialized social structure acts as an enabling, constraining, and subjugating force in our everyday lives that encompasses both institutionalized logics and practices and the agency of individuals and groups at the interactional level of society. The racialized social hierarchy in place constrains interracial cooperation due to the rational interests involved in maintaining the privileges associated with dominant group membership and those that compel disrupting the status quo when one is a member of a racially disadvantaged group (Bonilla-Silva 1997). While the dominant pattern holds, it is not totalizing as my emphasis on the co-constructing influence of human agency demonstrates. Still, considering that this racialized structure has become a seemingly permanent element of society, it is important to recognize that the historically rooted *categorical pairing* of Blacks as exploitable objects and Whites as free subjects has been institutionalized in American society and shapes both the material disadvantages experienced by Blacks in the US and our collective tolerance of this social pattern (Mills 1997, 1998, Tilly 1998).

The Racialized Social Structure in Black Middle-Class Neighborhood Life

Middle-class social status is one of the most desirable goods in American life. It is this aspiration that continues to draw those from abroad to these shores and continues to stir the hopes of the poor born in this country. Unfortunately, the legacy of the badges of slavery and the strong cultural association linking being middle-class with being White, structures social perceptions revealing that middle-class status is racially contested. As previously mentioned, the racial contestation of middle-class status plays out through competing racial claims, namely the claims of *whiteness* and the countering claims of *Black middle-class succession*.

Whiteness, as a social identity combining race and culture, is indelibly linked to suburban neighborhood contexts and their role in framing perceptions of race, place, and belongingness (Hughey 2012, Lipsitz 1995). The positionality of Whites as the dominant racial group confers a specific set of privileges and expectations related to place and space. In the neighborhood context, this means that Whites as a group feel they have rights of proprietary claim over desirable places, which they can use to advance their place-based interests, whether this means excluding Blacks and other non-White groups from neighborhoods where Whites predominate or laying claim to neighborhoods where non-Whites predominate (Blumer 1958, Harris 1993). *White proprietary claim* is the animating force behind how whiteness is expressed in neighborhoods contexts as a racial claim seeking an advantageous distribution of resources, opportunities, and justice.

White proprietary claim over neighborhood spaces is strongly tied to how Blacks and other non-White groups are socially defined. The social meaning of blackness, in the neighborhood context is tied to White perceptions of a deficient cultural universe that

neatly maps onto the systemic devaluation of neighborhoods with a significant Black

presence (Anderson et al. 2012, Howell and Korver-Glenn 2018). Ultimately, the power

of white proprietary claim lies in its institutional receptivity. Stated differently,

institutional actors such as local governments and the real estate industry are responsive

to expressions of white proprietary claim over neighborhoods and provide the social

mechanisms necessary to enable common tactics, such as white flight, racialized

gentrification, and the turnover of properties from home-owned to rental units (Harris

1993).

Relationally speaking, white flight from neighborhoods with growing non-White

populations leads to the devaluation of these neighborhoods (Howell and Korver-Glenn

2018, Pattillo 1999). Racialized gentrification leads to the involuntary displacement of

those dependent on affordable housing in areas connected to public transportation

systems (Zuk et al. 2018). The speedy influx of rental properties into a limited number of

neighborhoods leads to accelerated declines in the value of surrounding properties

(Bartlett 2017). The relational dynamics of white proprietary claim reveal that the

neighborhood benefits that accrue to Whites, do so to the diminishment of the

neighborhood life of those on the opposite side of the coin.

Black middle-class succession at the neighborhood level is premised on choice

and living in neighborhoods that reflect one's socioeconomic standing. The ability to

choose one's neighborhood is a civil rights legacy viewed as a key component of

deepening Black ties to this nation and as foundational to building intergenerational

wealth. Accruing homeownership-based intergenerational wealth in the company of other

Blacks is also important, especially given the different, yet connected social pressures

associated with actively engaging in Black social life and living in majority-White neighborhoods as the one Black household or one in a few (Jackson, Thoits and Taylor 1995, Lacy 2007, Pattillo 2005).

In a more perfect social world, a tension between living in neighborhoods with significant numbers of other Blacks and homeownership-based wealth-building would not exist. However, what prevails in the system of place stratification are racialized social mappings that are structured in material form that link whiteness with relatively high dollar values and blackness with relatively low values (Howell and Korver-Glenn 2018, Massey 2013, Rothstein 2017). This materiality of race and place recursively shapes ideological conceptions, starting the cycle anew (Frankenberg 1993, Hughey 2012). It is within this larger context, that middle-class Blacks seek to realize their desires to choose their neighborhoods and enjoy the material benefits associated with homeownership. Regardless of how satisfied they are once they have keys in hands or how successfully they have managed to channel Black middle-class succession, social forces tied to the racialized social structure constrain the ability of middle-class Blacks to fully enjoy their homeownership experiences. So often, the compelling power of white proprietary claim shifts the ground under their feet in terms of property value declines and corollary changes to the quality and character of the neighborhoods they call home.

The implications of the racialized social structure for the Black middle-class generally, and Black middle-class neighborhood attainment, specifically, span racialized notions of deservingness and ontological fixity as well as the materiality of lived experience and one's location within the system of place stratification. Racialized ideologies and the notions they animate, combined with the prevailing material

circumstances of American Blacks, are mutually constitutive of anti-black racism and reinforce each other (Bonilla-Silva 2015, Frankenberg 1993, Golash-Boza 2016). While notions of Blacks as an undeserving racial group may take aim at low-income Blacks, the fixed nature of blackness as indicated by the lacking social recognition of Black middle-class identities portend that these notions apply to middle-class Blacks as well, caring little about middle-class respectability or socioeconomic attainment (Bettie 2003, Feagin and Sikes 1994). The apparent need for social distance still holds. In short, to be Black and middle-class is viewed in the field of whiteness as a contradiction that is not worthy of resolving, and therefore, the racial claims associated with whiteness aim to circumscribe middle-class Blacks within the bounds of blackness, which is a social category that is culturally represented as deviant through dominant apparatuses (Collins 2004, 2009, Cox 1983, Omi and Winant 2015).

At the neighborhood level, these ideological and material forces combine to produce the prevailing pattern of Black middle-class households being spatially linked to lower-class Blacks. Based on racial makeup preferences and the commonsense mappings undergirding perceptions of race, place, and belongingness as we have previously discussed, white flight commences once the number of Black households crosses the 20 percent threshold (Adelman 2005, Lewis, Emerson and Klineberg 2011). As the flight of capital investment accompanies white flight, resulting in the erosion of the tax base, these depreciating neighborhoods open up to lower-income Blacks (Pattillo 1999).

The fact that the presence of a significant number of Blacks is equated with the undesirability of a neighborhood in suburban contexts is a weighty social problem. While contemporary trends of Whites moving back to central city environments is a

complicating factor, this does not change the fact that majority-White suburban neighborhoods continue to ascend in terms of property value and offer homeowners robust opportunities to build wealth through housing appreciation (Owens 2012). The extent to which Black middle-class members are prevented from accessing similar wealth-building opportunities through housing appreciation is a signal that Blacks are a social group to be exploited and excluded, but never to prosper.

To summarize, the social significance of race at the present time is tied to the structural embeddedness of a racialized social hierarchy that naturalizes the dominant position of Whites and the subordination of non-White groups (Bonilla-Silva 2015, Golash-Boza 2016). Due to the fact that a racialized social hierarchy has a material foundation that exerts a strong influence on the distribution of resources, opportunities, and justice, Whites, as a group, seek to maintain their privileged position, while Blacks and other non-Whites seek upward movement in order to gain greater access to resources and opportunities (Bonilla-Silva 1997, Omi and Winant 2015). Whites view attempts by non-White groups, especially Blacks to 'move up the ladder' as an affront to their sense of identity, because their feeling of natural superiority aligns with the belief that they have exclusive rights and privileges to the 'goods of society,' including nonmaterial things such as status and deservingness (Blumer 1958, Itzigsohn and Brown 2015).

At the neighborhood level, the social forces tied to the racialized social structure reveal that the middle-class status of Blacks is racially contested. Research shows that the best chances for middle-class Blacks to enjoy the material benefits of homeownership to the fullest extent is to gain access and reside in in neighborhoods where they will be a token minority (Bonam, Yantis and Taylor 2020, Sharkey 2014, Woldoff and Ovadia

2009). Otherwise, their neighborhoods will be devalued based on their blackness and this devaluation will eventually cascade into visible signs of neighborhood decline and the influx of lower-income households (Bartlett 2017, Howell and Korver-Glenn 2018, Pattillo 1999, Rothstein 2017). These dynamics create a bifurcation in the aspirations of middle-class Blacks to live in neighborhoods where they can both enjoy the material fruits of homeownership and live in neighborhoods where a significant percentage of the population looks like them. The very existence of this bifurcation is a product of the US version of the racialized social structure and the intractable ways it maps blackness onto material disadvantage and lowliness of status.

Dissertation Overview

The articles making up this dissertation demonstrate how the racialized social structure has impacted Black middle-class neighborhood life in Louisville from varying levels of analysis. At the highest level of abstraction, the first article compares how Black middle-class neighborhood attainment in Louisville compares to urbanized areas that share its population characteristics. Black middle-class segregation emerges as the chief expression of the racialized social structure that limits the number of Black middle-class households living in neighborhoods that are identifiably middle-class. These same segregation levels also impact the number of Black middle-class households living in disadvantaged neighborhoods, considered such due to having a poverty rate of 20 percent or above. The twin dynamics of segregation limiting access to identifiably middle-class neighborhoods and the rather stark socioeconomic and racial makeup differences between identifiably middle-class neighborhoods and their counterparts, suggests that the middle-

class status of Black households is racially contested, despite how they may qualify socially and economically.

In the second article, the influence of the racialized social structure is analyzed from the perspective of the geographical proximity between Black middle neighborhoods and elements of spatial poverty. The geographical patterns that I uncovered suggest that a triangulation exists between urban geography, racial characterizations, and economic valuation when it comes to Black middle-class neighborhoods. In a mutually influencing and reinforcing manner, the way that neighborhoods are racially characterized appears to set the stage for how they are to be regarded and economically valuated. Additionally, specific neighborhoods are indelibly tied to the larger geographies that surround them, neighborhoods in more economically advantaged areas of the city receive positive spillover effects, while neighborhoods near economically struggling areas tend to absorb the associated stigma.

Most significantly, I find evidence that the place-making effects of the racialized social structure are demonstrated in the linkage between the racial and economic stability of neighborhoods, whether this means stability in economic advantage or disadvantage. Substantial changes in the racial demography of neighborhoods leads to their economic volatility, which in the context of Black middle-class neighborhoods means that declines in home value are linked to the growth of their Black populations.

The third article features the voices of Black middle-class residents and focuses on how Black middle-class individuals perceive their neighborhoods and how these perceptions shape their visions of intergeneration succession. This article is both a confounding component of my research and an element that deepens understanding on

the ways that the place-making aspects of the racialized social structure shapes the choices available to middle-class Blacks and can shift the trajectory of their neighborhoods over time. The confounding aspect of the third article is the degree that Black middle-class respondents claimed ownership over the home buying process and the sense of comfort that they articulated, regardless of the socioeconomic conditions of the neighborhood. At the same time, the influence of the racialized social structure can be seen in how Black middle-class respondents often expressed a sense of making trade-offs between race-based social comfort and living in an economically advantaged neighborhood and vice versa. It can also be seen in how some respondents report neighborhood changes over time, which in a multilayered fashion links growth in the Black population to changes in the socioeconomic character of neighborhoods and a more vigilant police presence.

Although each article has a particular focus and tells a different story, when their findings are integrated, it is apparent that structural racism impacts Black middle-class households in multiple ways. The first two articles detail how middle-class segregation and its social consequences adversely impact Black middle-class households with respect to the socioeconomic character of their neighborhoods, while the third article provides insight into how middle-class Blacks in Louisville think about their neighborhoods and their intergenerational mobility prospects within this larger context of structurally enforced disadvantage. It may be beneficial to view the first two articles as showing how the racialized social structure imposes constraints on Black middle households through racial residential segregation and in how local governing institutions geographically map disadvantage and disinvestment onto Black souls and the third article as detailing how

Black souls respond, in different ways, to this larger context and seek to realize their

dreams of intergenerational succession despite the odds.

ARTICLE I:

BLACK MIDDLE-CLASS NEIGHBORHOOD ATTAINMENT AMONG LIKE-
CITIES

Analyses of Black middle-class neighborhood attainment often involve the quantitative comparison of the average Black middle-class and the average White middle-class neighborhood and the socioeconomic outcomes that stem from any neighborhood differences (Adelman 2004, Alba, Logan and Stults 2000, Sharkey 2014). A corollary aspect of such analyses is documenting the extent that the Black middle class is segregated from the White middle class and the socioeconomic conditions of Black middle-class neighborhoods. The forthcoming analysis builds on this tradition from a different viewpoint. The animating question is '*To what extent do Black middle-class households reside in prototypical middle-class neighborhoods in select mid-sized metropolitan areas that share Black population characteristics?*' The uniqueness of this study lies in its focus on mid-sized rather than large metropolitan areas and my novel characterization of prototypical middle-class neighborhoods as those that can be identified as middle-class based on having relatively high concentrations of homeownership, college-educated individuals, and households earning an annual income between $75,000 and $149,999.

While discussing the extent that Black middle-class households reside in identifiably middle-class neighborhoods across the selected urbanized areas (UAs) is at the core of this study, its inner ring of concerns consist of the socioeconomic and racial

differences between identifiably middle-class neighborhoods and those that do not qualify as such, the role played by middle-class segregation, and the recent historical trajectories of these two neighborhood types. Ultimately, this robust and granular analysis will reveal that Black middle-class neighborhoods are heterogeneous in character, both across similarly sized UAs and within UAs. Additionally, the data will be analyzed through the racialized social structure theoretical lens, which will meaningfully contextualize the heterogeneity of Black middle-class neighborhoods.

Literature Review

The Black middle class is rich in diversity. Within this social group, differences range from the class background of one's family, individual choices regarding how to mark social boundaries between insiders and outsiders, and neighborhood experiences (Lacy 2007, Moore 2008). The type of diversity that concerns me most at this stage is diversity of neighborhood attainment. The quantitative analyses featured in the next section show that Black middle-class neighborhoods are uniquely disadvantaged compared to other racialized middle-class groups, whether White or non-White. However, the evidence suggests that this does not so much translate to most Black middle-class households living in poor neighborhoods, but more so indicates a tendency to live in neighborhoods that act as spatial buffers between majority-Black, poor neighborhoods and White middle-class neighborhoods (Alba, Logan and Stults 2000, Pattillo 1999). In the following sections, I review the literature that speaks to the neighborhood attainment of middle-class Blacks, the middle-class segregation faced by Blacks, and the differences between Black and White middle-class neighborhoods.

Black Middle-Class Neighborhood Attainment

Neighborhoods are potent sites for making sense of one's place within structures of stratification and one's sense of identity (Hughey 2012, Lacy 2007, Young 2004). When it comes to boundary work, neighborhoods inform perceptions of who belongs and who does not, who needs to change to fit the neighborhood aesthetic and who is readily welcomed (Lacy 2007, Lamont and Molnar 2002). The racial makeup of neighborhoods are rooted in distinct histories, with changes along racial lines serving as some of the most virulent examples of racial conflict (Rothstein 2017). In the United States, race and place are nearly synonymous, and this dynamic operates in the background, as middle-class Blacks aspire to live in the best quality neighborhoods they can afford and feel comfortable (Feagin and Sikes 1994, Pattillo 2005).

Many of the texts on Black middle-class neighborhood attainment are quantitative in nature and focus on national-level datasets. For example, in his analysis of dissimilarity indices for cities across the U.S., Robert Adelman (2004) found that segregation between middle-class Blacks and Whites declined by approximately 15 points between 1970 and 1990. While this level of decline cannot be dismissed outright, when uncovering the qualitative differences in neighborhood conditions for the average Black middle-class household in comparison with the average White middle-class household, Adelman (2004) finds that middle-class Blacks lived in neighborhoods that are about three times as impoverished. Adelman also uncovered an interesting relationship between large populations of Blacks within a metropolitan area and higher levels of middle-class segregation. This finding in particular influenced my UA selection

criteria, which is largely based on identifying UAs that share the Black population characteristics of my focal UA, Louisville.

Even starker are Sharkey's (2014) findings in a similar nationwide study, in which he compared the spatial characteristics of the Black and White middle class, using measures of advantage and disadvantage that centered on the poverty rate of census tracts and other characteristics of concentrated disadvantage (Sampson, Raudenbush and Earls 1997). While confirming that residential segregation, especially in the suburbs, is declining, the findings also show that middle- and upper-income Blacks are significantly disadvantaged with respect to neighborhood quality when compared to their White counterparts. On the one hand, while only 31% of middle/upper-income Blacks lived in advantaged census tracts that are surrounded by other advantaged tracts, 77% of middle/upper-income Whites did (Sharkey 2014:925). On the other hand, 52% of Blacks at the same income level lived in disadvantaged tracts that were surrounded by disadvantaged tracts, while only 11% of Whites lived under similar circumstances (Sharkey 2014:925). One of the most compelling findings from Sharkey's (2014) analysis revealed Black households making an annual income of at least $100,000 lived in disadvantaged neighborhoods more often than White households making less than $30,000 per year.

Complementary to these findings is an earlier piece by Richard Alba et al. (2000) that demonstrated that members of the Black middle class have been able to spatially separate from the Black poor, but still reside in neighborhoods different from middle-class Whites. In essence, the study found that members of the Black middle class tend to live in disadvantaged neighborhoods comprised by working-class Whites and others.

White middle-class neighborhoods, on the other hand, are more affluent, more White, and have less crime (Alba, Logan and Stults 2000).

Additionally, numerous studies have focused on the question of how socioeconomic status impacted the racial makeup of neighborhoods. For example, Iceland and Wilkes (2006:248) found that the importance of socioeconomic status in explaining residential segregation increased over the 1990 and 2000 periods. However, they also discovered that Blacks of all economic levels tended to be more segregated from Whites than Asians and Latina/os (Iceland and Wilkes 2006). William A.V. Clark's (2007) paper declared that the barriers to Black suburbanization have been minimized to the point where those who have the resources and capital can effectively live wherever they desire. Similarly asserting the fact that residential segregation decreased during the 1970-2000 period, Jeffrey Timberlake, et al. (2007), also argue for the sunnier side of segregation, even though his own findings reveal that Blacks continue to be highly segregated from Whites as a group in ways that stand in contrast to other non-White racial groups.

<u>Black Middle-Class Segregation Effects</u>

Previous research has established that one of the primary effects of racial residential segregation, writ large, is the spatial concentration of poverty along racial lines (Massey and Denton 1993, Rothstein 2017, Wilson 1987). In the U.S., this has meant the concentration of Black poverty in a relatively few central city neighborhoods, which has conversely meant that the poverty of Whites is absorbed across a much larger swath of a metropolitan area (Massey and Denton 1993). For members of the Black middle class, this dynamic has set the stage for their own residential patterns, since their

own neighborhoods are spatially connected to areas of the city that have been ghettoized through processes of residential segregation (Sharkey 2014).

Materially speaking, the segregation of the Black middle class has meant living in neighborhoods that are substantially poorer, more blighted, and suffering from more crime than the middle-class neighborhoods of their White counterparts (Adelman 2004). While Black middle-class households have increasingly moved into majority-White, economically advantaged neighborhoods, middle-class Blacks who do not live in such neighborhoods encounter spatial disadvantages that adversely affect their daily lives, the infrastructure of their neighborhoods, and the quality of their children's education (Pattillo 1999, Sampson and Sharkey 2008, Sharkey 2014).

Overall, the legacy of Black middle-class segregation is a durable distinction between Black middle-class neighborhoods and White middle-class neighborhoods. In a nutshell, Black middle-class neighborhoods tend to be racially diverse with a high percentage of Black households that are socioeconomically diverse. White middle-class neighborhoods, on the other hand, tend to be racially homogenous with a much smaller rate of socioeconomic diversity, especially when compared to Black middle-class neighborhoods (Adelman 2004, 2005, Alba, Logan and Stults 2000). In terms of racial demography, Adelman (2005) found that Black middle-class neighborhoods tend to be 60 percent Black and 30 percent White, while White middle-class neighborhoods tend to be 85 percent White and 10 percent Black.

What is most socio-culturally significant about these racialized differences between middle-class neighborhoods is the association of White middle-class neighborhoods with the prototypical definition of middle-class neighborhoods. Blacks

living within such neighborhoods are incorporated as token representatives of their racial group, whose presence may ironically act as a protective shield for white proprietary claim over the neighborhood. Blacks living outside of these majority-White, prototypical middle-class neighborhoods reside in neighborhoods that range from economically disadvantaged to *marginally middle-class*. While economically disadvantaged neighborhoods are most often majority-Black, marginally middle-class neighborhoods tend to be both economically and racially diverse, with Black middle-class households earning the highest incomes sharing neighborhood space with working class Whites and Blacks, and other groups.

The dynamics I have mentioned heretofore and previous research suggests that there should be substantial socioeconomic and demographic differences with respect to the spectrum of neighborhoods that have a considerable number of Black middle-class households. Due to the historical impacts of racialized residential segregation, I anticipate that the size of the Black population at the neighborhood level will align with relatively high poverty rates and relatively low median home values. Since White middle-class neighborhoods remain synonymous with the aesthetic of prototypical middle-class neighborhoods and the promise of the American dream, I anticipate that such neighborhoods, or *identifiably middle-class neighborhoods*, will be largely defined by their low percentage of Blacks as well as low rates of poverty.

Methods and Analysis

     This analysis is anchored in uncovering differences between the demographic and socioeconomic characteristics of BMC census tracts that fall outside of the identifiably middle-class category and those that do qualify as identifiably middle-class. This is done comparatively, using Black population dynamics as the common thread linking Louisville, my focal metropolitan area, to areas that are similar. Taking my cue from Adelman's (2004) finding that there is a relationship between the size of the Black population and levels of middle-class segregation and insights from other scholars regarding social significance of metropolitan areas, I use the following selection criteria, based on the 2016 American Community Survey (ACS), to determine which metropolitan areas compare most favorably to Louisville (Adelman 2004, Benner and Pastor 2013):

1) Metropolitan Statistical Area (MSA) population between 1M – 1.75M
2) Black percentage of MSA population between 10% - 20%,
3) Central city Black population between 100,000 – 200,000, and
4) Black percentage of central city population between 20% – 30%.

A matrix of MSAs that are typically compared to Louisville and how they fared based on my criteria is presented on the next page (Louisville Affordable Housing Trust Fund 2019, Greater Louisville Project 2018). For inclusion as a similar metropolitan area, each MSA had to satisfy three out of four criteria.

Table 1. Comparable MSAs and Criteria Satisfied

	Louisville	Nashville	Cincinnati	Indianapolis	Kansas City	Raleigh	Charlotte	Columbus	St. Louis
MSA POPULATION									
% BLACK IN MSA									
BLACK CITY POP.									
% BLACK IN CITY									
metrics satisfied	N/A	3	2	2	3	3	0	2	2

SOURCE: US Census, 2012-2016 5-year Estimates American Community Survey

In Table 1 (see previous page), we see that only the Nashville, Kansas City, and Raleigh MSAs met the criteria for inclusion. Cities that are conventionally compared with my focal MSA such as Cincinnati, Indianapolis, St. Louis, Columbus, and Charlotte failed to meet the criteria. In Table 2 (see below), I present 2016 population estimates from the ACS that show how Like-MSAs both satisfied and failed on certain metrics.

Table 2. Actual MSA Population Statistics for Like-MSAs

	Louisville	Nashville	Kansas City	Raleigh
MSA POPULATION	1,269,550	1,794,570	2,070,147	1,243,720
% BLACK IN MSA	14.1%	15.2%	12.5%	20.1%
BLACK POP. IN CITY	139,933	180,481	137,311	127,708
% BLACK IN CITY	22.8%	28.0%	29.1%	28.9%

SOURCE: US Census, 2012-2016 5-year Estimates American Community Survey

As a means of spotlighting census tracts with high concentrations of BMC households, I use a sampling technique that hierarchically orders tracts based on their relative proportion of BMC households. The relative proportion of BMC households within a census tract is calculated by determining the population weights for each census tract relative to the urbanized area (UA) population and multiplying each of these census tract population weights by the number of BMC households living within the census tract. After calculating the BMC proportion for each census tract, I use spreadsheet functionality to order census tracts in a descending manner, with the census tracts containing the highest values of BMC proportion at the apex. Census tracts are included in the sample as BMC census tracts in a descending fashion from having the highest proportionality of BMC households to having progressively lower proportionalities until at least 50% of all BMC households within the UA are accounted for in the sample.

Urbanized areas, are defined by the US Census Bureau as geographical areas that are densely populated and "contain a minimum residential population of at least 50,000 people" (US Census Bureau 2020). I contend that urbanized areas are a better geographical reflection of the place-based social ties that bind people to central cities due to its emphasis on "densely settled census tracts and blocks," when compared to more expansive geographical constructs (Sunstein 2010:37252). While I used urbanized areas to frame my selection of BMC census tracts, I used metropolitan statistical areas to select cities comparable to Louisville, due to this geographical construct's greater emphasis on macro-economic patterns that bind core cities to surrounding counties and towns (Sunstein 2010).

Middle-class neighborhoods, general speaking, refer to census tracts that have a high proportion of households that earn an annual household income between $75,000 and $149,999. However, acknowledging that middle-class membership is more multi-dimensional than household income, I include the concentration of homeownership and college-educated individuals to pinpoint *identifiably middle-class neighborhoods*. Census tracts are classified as identifiably middle class based on satisfying the following three neighborhood-level criteria simultaneously: 1) high concentration of households earning an annual income between $75,000 and $149,999, 2) high concentration of homeownership relative to the UA, and a 3) high concentration of individuals with at least a bachelor's degree. After applying the census tract population weight to calculate proportionality for each of three criteria, each pertinent census tract is included using the same sampling technique used to identify BMC neighborhoods, which is based on the

hierarchical ordering of census tracts with the highest proportional values for the specific criteria.

The population criteria for these samples is based on the sum of middle-class households within the UA for the income metric and the sum total of all households within the UA for the homeownership- and educational attainment-based metrics. Again, census tracts are included in my sample in descending order until at least 50% of the population is represented in each case. After identifying the census tracts that qualify as having a high proportionality of middle-class households, and those that have high concentrations of homeownership and individuals with at least a bachelor's degree. These three separate lists were cross-referenced to identify the census tracts that were found on all three lists. The census tracts that were found on all three lists are considered identifiably middle-class (ID-MC) neighborhoods due to simultaneously containing a high concentration of middle-class households, homeownership, and college-educated individuals relative to the UA.

After identifying Like-Cities, and within them, the BMC census tracts, the identifiably middle-class census tracts, and the BMC census tracts that are simultaneously identifiably middle-class, I conducted a number of comparative calculations. Each calculation was used to uncover socioeconomic and demographic dynamics either occurring between or within the Like-UAs.

I use the entropy index as a segregation measure that better accounts for multi-group segregation dynamics and pinpoints these dynamics with more granularity (Iceland 2004, White 1986). The entropy index is a measure that obeys the principle of transfers as households move from one neighborhood to another and allows for the decomposition

of subpopulations; both characteristics are critical to uncovering the segregation dynamics pertinent to the Black middle class (Iceland 2004, White 1986).

For the purposes of this analysis, the entropy index contrasts the proportion of Black middle-class households at the UA level with the proportion of Black middle-class households across census tracts, and therefore, represents the degree of racial residential segregation that Black middle-class households face within the selected UAs. This differs from the dissimilarity index, because the segregation of the Black middle-class is not limited to Black-White segregation, it also measures the extent that the Black middle class is segregated from Asian American and Latina/o middle-class households as well.

The social consequences of residing within or outside of identifiably middle-class neighborhoods are analyzed from a variety of angles, but categorically speaking, I focus on the extent of poverty in the neighborhood, median home values, and the percentage of Black households living within the specified neighborhood types. This focus reflects an intention to analyze these social dynamics from the standpoint of puzzling together the interconnectedness of race, class, and place.

The extent of poverty is analyzed at different geographical levels ranging from census tracts to urbanized areas and from the perspective of the number of households that are spatially connected to particular social sites. The poverty rates of individual census tracts are averaged with respect to the multiple geographical levels as well as on the basis of neighborhood types. Oftentimes, the percentage of Black middle-class households that are spatially connected to poor neighborhoods is highlighted, whether across or within UAs. The median home values of BMC census tracts are also averaged at multiple geographical levels and with respect to neighborhood types. The

heterogeneity of BMC neighborhoods across Like-UAs is centered on differences

between UAs regarding the extent that Black middle-class households within or outside

of identifiably middle-class neighborhoods, while the heterogeneity of BMC

neighborhoods within UAs is focused on the socioeconomic consequences of living

within these divergent neighborhood types.

I also conduct an analysis of census tracts that were comprised of the highest

proportions of Black middle-class households based on their recent histories. This is done

by tracking poverty rates, median household incomes, and median home value statistics

from 2010 – 2016. The socioeconomic statistics for each census tract are aligned with the

same statistics for the larger UA and differences over time that cross a threshold

equivalent to 10 percent are treated as significant insofar as the statistical trajectory

represents a linear decline or rise. I rely on the US Census Bureau's 2010, 2013, and

2016 ACS estimates for the underlying data. Additionally, I use an inflation calculator

that references *Consumer Price Index* data released by the U.S. Bureau of Labor

Statistics to ensure proper comparability between different time periods (CoinNews

Media Group 2020).

This historical analysis primarily focuses on indicators of socioeconomic decline

over time, which is common theme in Black middle-class neighborhood studies (Bartlett

2017, Byrnes and Henricks 2014, Pattillo 1999). Not only do I track poverty rates,

median household incomes, and median home values, I compare these measures to the

racial/ethnic population patterns and analyze indicators suggesting that Black middle-

class households have to stretch themselves economically vis-à-vis Whites to live in the

same neighborhoods (Alba, Logan and Stults 2000). This part of the analysis compares

Black and White median household incomes for 2010 and 2016 with respect to extent that median household incomes for each group increased over that span of time.

This article and the dissertation as a body of work relies heavily on the ACS to depict the socioeconomic realities of neighborhoods. Using ACS estimates in this way comes with some limitations, primarily differences in measurement error based on the geographical type. Research has found that measurement error with respect to census tracts tends to balloon in urban cores, but is minimized in suburban areas (Folch et al. 2016). Despite the fact that the majority of the census tracts featured in my analysis lie in the suburbs, my approach is to present my findings in a manner that maintains an arms-length distance from treating these estimates as perfect reflections of place-based social realities. For ease of reference purposes, I do not report measurement errors, but this in no way implies that these estimates as they are presented are free from limitations. Like many other scholars that use ACS estimates to study neighborhood dynamics, my usage is based on its convenience as a research tool and its decent track record in the field.

Findings

Before disclosing details related to the heterogeneity of BMC neighborhoods both across and within the Like-UAs, I present some summary statistics in Table 3 below, regarding each of the Like-UAs to provide some background on their similarities and differences. The uppermost rows show how these UAs aligned with respect to the inclusion criteria, while the lower rows display 2016 census data highlighting the socioeconomic and demographic dynamics relevant to this analysis.

Table 3. General Summary Statistics for Like-UAs

CATEGORY (2016 Data)	LOU	NASH	KC	RALE
MSA Population	1,269,550	1,794,570	2,070,147	1,243,720
Black Percentage in MSA	14.1%	15.2%	12.5%	20.1%
Black Population in City	139,933	180,481	137,311	127,708
Black Percentage in City	22.8%	28.0%	29.1%	28.9%
Median household income	$51,322	$56,685	$57,126	$70,067
Median home value	$161,400	$228,900	$169,500	$259,400
Poverty rate	13.0	12.2	11.7	9.6
BMC Strength	0.26	0.37	0.32	0.52
Racial/Ethnic Breakdown of MC				
Black	9.3%	11.9%	8.4%	13.9%
White	86.5%	81.7%	84.0%	76.2%
Asian	1.7%	2.8%	2.8%	6.1%
Latino/a	2.5%	3.5%	4.8%	3.8%

SOURCE: US Census, 2012-2016 5-year Estimates American Community Survey

When we bring the socioeconomic dynamics operating across the Like-UAs into focus, it becomes clear that the Raleigh UA stands out from the other UAs with respect to each of the socioeconomic indicators. Most noteworthy, in this regard, is the median household income number. Raleigh's median household income is $12,941 higher than that of the second-highest median household income UA (Kansas City), while the other three UAs are close together. Additionally, with respect to the Black Middle-Class Strength measure—the number of Black households earning an annual income between $75,000 and $149,999 compared to the number of Black households earning an annual income below $35,000—the value for Raleigh (0.52) is double the value found for Louisville (0.26) and 0.15 points higher than the second-place value found in Nashville.

The one measure with respect to socioeconomic dynamics that does not have a noticeable gap between UAs is the poverty rate. The poverty rate range among Like-UAs was 3.4. It is also clear that the racial demography of the middle-class households found in these UAs is quite similar. In each case, I find a strong Non-Latino/a White majority and a Black percentage that is relatively small, yet supersedes the combined percentage of households that are Asian and Latino/a. With this in mind, I can be confident that a small percentage of Black households within a census tract equates to a high percentage of White households in the majority of cases.

Heterogeneity of BMC Neighborhood Attainment across Like-UAs

The key distinguishing feature of this study compared to previous ones is its granular analysis of UAs, and what I found as a result is a significant degree of heterogeneity among UAs when it comes to the neighborhood attainment of Black middle-class households. The heterogeneity found among the Like-UAs hinges on differences in the levels of segregation between the Black middle-class households and their middle-class counterparts. The outcome of these differences was an inverse relationship between segregation levels and the number of Black middle-class households that reside outside of identifiably middle-class neighborhoods. Levels of segregation also seemed to impact the extent that Black middle-class households lived in neighborhoods considered poor.

According to existing residential segregation heuristics, the BMC segregation indices for the selected UAs range from low to moderate. The UA with the highest level of middle-class segregation was Kansas City (.478), while the lowest level was found in the Raleigh UA (.234). In Table 4 below, we see that the Nashville UA exists between Raleigh and the Louisville UA at a substantial distance from both, occupying its own tier with respect to BMC segregation. The Louisville UA has moderate BMC segregation that is, comparatively, just a bit lower than the level of segregation found in Kansas City (US Census Bureau 2016).

Table 4. Segregation (Entropy) Index among Like-UAs

	LOU	NASH	KC	RALE
BMC (entropy) segregation index	0.422	0.338	0.478	0.234

SOURCE: US Census, 2012-2016 5-year Estimates American Community Survey

Previous findings suggest that the residential segregation Black middle-class households face has a negative impact on them (Adelman 2004, Alba, Logan and Stults 2000, Pattillo 1999, Sharkey 2014). Therefore, we would anticipate that there is a relationship between existing segregation levels and the socioeconomic character of the average BMC neighborhood. The close proximity of BMC households to disadvantaged neighborhoods is a repeated theme throughout the literature that is often connected to segregation (Adelman 2004, Pattillo 1999, Sharkey 2014). In Figure 1 below, I display a comparison between the poverty rates of BMC neighborhoods and their respective UAs. In each case, the poverty rates in BMC neighborhoods exceeds that of the larger UA, which shows that BMC neighborhoods absorb more poverty than other neighborhoods within their UAs. In this respect, the Louisville UA was the most equitable among its counterparts with a 0.6-point gap, while Nashville was the least equitable with a 4.0-point gap between the poverty rates.

Figure 1. Average Poverty Rate for BMC Neighborhoods
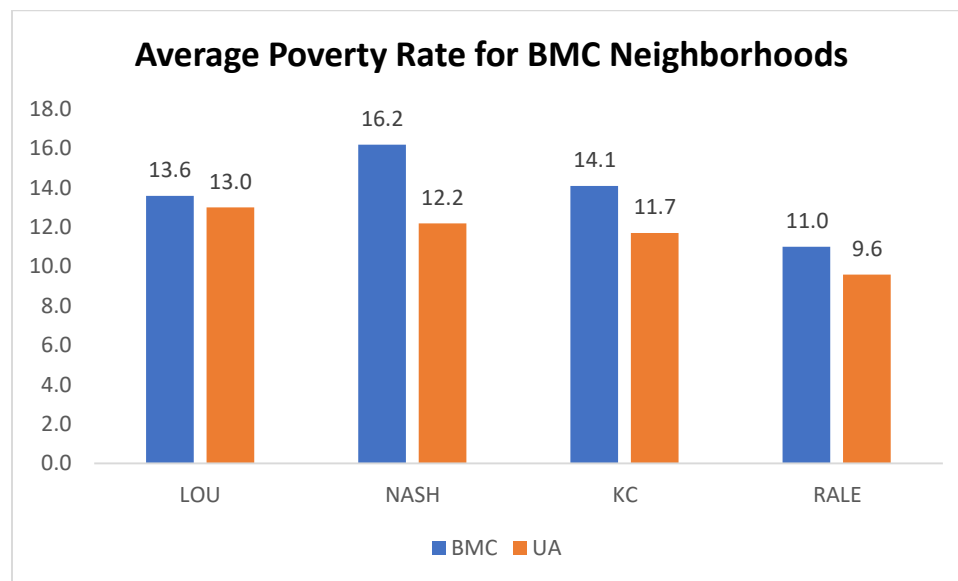
SOURCE: US Census, 2012-2016 5-year Estimates American Community Survey

In Table 5 below, the 2016 federal poverty rate is compared to the minimum dollar amount I used to classify Black middle-class households. Despite more than a $50,000 gap in annual household income between BMC households and those living below the poverty rate, three UAs out of the four selected have at least 20 percent of their BMC households residing in disadvantaged neighborhoods (see Figure 2 below). The Nashville UA sets this standard with 20.6 percent of its BMC households living in disadvantaged neighborhoods. In the case of the Louisville and Kansas City UAs, around 1-in-4 BMC households reside in such neighborhoods. The Raleigh UA is the exception, with less than 1-in-10 BMC households living in disadvantaged neighborhoods.

Table 5. Income Metrics across Like-UAs

	LOU	NASH	KC	RALE
Federal pov. rate	$24,250			
BMC income (min.)	$75,000			
Median hh income	$51,322.00	$56,685.00	$57,126.00	$70,067.00

SOURCE: US Census, 2012-2016 5-year Estimates American Community Survey

Figure 2. Percentage of BMC Households in Disadvantaged Tracts
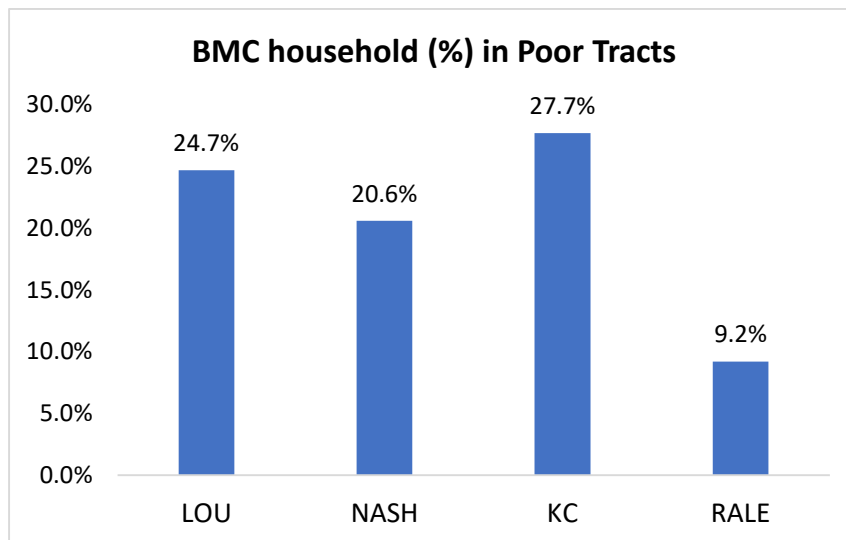
SOURCE: US Census, 2012-2016 5-year Estimates American Community Survey

As I shared at the beginning of this section, the primary distinction defining the heterogeneity of the BMC neighborhoods is whether or not they qualify as identifiably middle-class, with this designation applying to neighborhoods that simultaneously have a high concentration of households earning between $75,000 and $149,999, a high concentration of homeownership, and a high concentration of individuals who have earned at least a bachelor's degree. The spatial relationship between BMC households and identifiably middle-class neighborhoods is patterned in converse to the disadvantaged neighborhoods dynamic noted previously, as one would expect. However, in contrast to the two tiers dynamic, three tiers appear to emerge among the Like-UAs with respect to identifiably middle-class neighborhoods. There is a noteworthy 12.1 percentage point gap between Kansas City and Louisville, placing Kansas City on the low tier, while Louisville and Nashville seem to exist on the mid-tier (see Figure 3 below). With 69.8 percent of its BMC households living in identifiably middle-class neighborhoods, Raleigh is on a tier all its own.

Figure 3. Percentage of BMC Households in Identifiably Middle-Class Neighborhoods

Percentage of BMC Households in MC tracts

	LOU	NASH	KC	RALE
	34.4%	42.4%	22.3%	69.8%
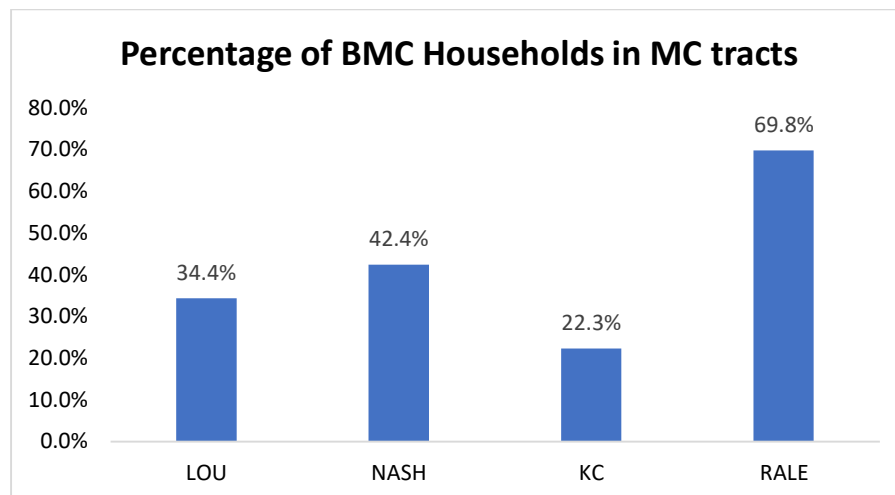
SOURCE: US Census, 2012-2016 5-year Estimates American Community Survey

The average poverty rate of BMC neighborhoods as measured in this analysis is indicative of the relative degree of disadvantage that one would anticipate as a member of the Black middle class living in one of these UAs. In contrast, the average poverty rate of identifiably middle-class neighborhoods reflects the degree of disadvantage one would anticipate when living in a prototypical middle-class neighborhood, which tend to be majority-White and spatially distant from disadvantages found in other areas of the metropolitan area. Gaps between the BMC and identifiably middle-class poverty rates represent the degree of neighborhood inequity between Black and non-Black middle-class households who live in prototypical neighborhoods. In essence, this measures neighborhood-level gap between differentiated middle-class households when it comes to absorbing the poverty of surrounding households (Massey and Denton 1993).

In Figure 4 (see next page), it is apparent that the largest poverty rate gap is found in Kansas City, but right behind Kansas City is Nashville. This result contrasts significantly with findings presented earlier, in which Nashville was consistently found to be second to Raleigh with respect to the positionality of its Black middle class. Similarly, the Louisville UA is also found in a unique position considering earlier findings. These contradictory findings seem to indicate that Nashville's BMC households residing outside of identifiably middle-class neighborhoods face uniquely disadvantaged circumstances, while BMC households in Louisville who are similarly positioned can anticipate more equitable neighborhood circumstances.

Figure 4. Poverty Rate Gap between BMC and Identifiably Middle-Class Tracts

Poverty Gap between BMC and ID-MC tracts

LOU	NASH	KC	RALE
6.6	8.7	8.9	4.2
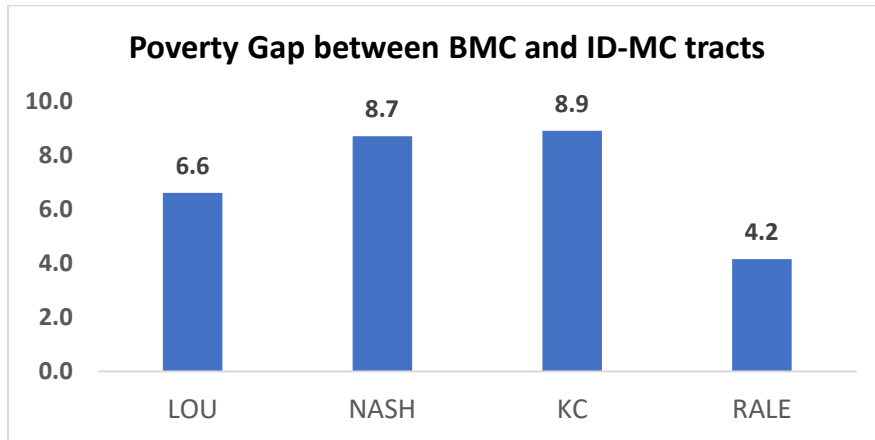
SOURCE: US Census, 2012-2016 5-year Estimates American Community Survey

In Figure 5 (see next page), we compare the average median home values of BMC neighborhoods with the average home values of identifiably middle-class (ID-MC) neighborhoods across UAs. The average median home values for the BMC neighborhoods are displayed as a percentage of those for ID-MC neighborhoods. While the relatively high percentage found for Raleigh aligns with its overall standing as the most progressive among the UAs across the board, the relatively low percentage found for Nashville is another contradictory indicator in relation to its standing among the Like-UAs to this point.

Figure 5. Percentage of Identifiably Middle-Class Home Value
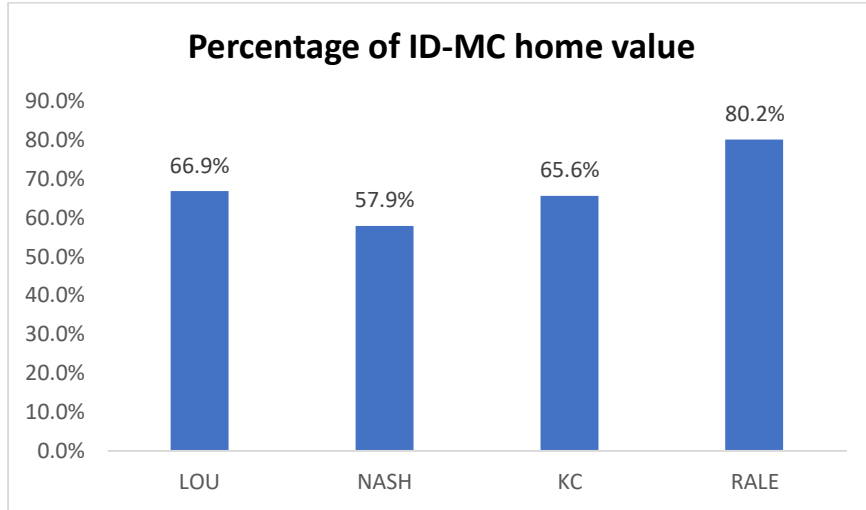
SOURCE: US Census, 2012-2016 5-year Estimates American Community Survey

In Table 6 (see below), I summarize the heterogeneity of BMC neighborhoods across the UAs by using a scorecard to rank each UA on various measures of neighborhood attainment. For each category, the darker hues correspond to higher rankings in regard to how it benefits the BMC households. Raleigh is clearly the most progressive among the UAs, ahead of its counterparts across all categories. Kansas City, on the other hand, stands out as being the most regressive across most of the measures, while Louisville and Nashville vie in the middle across several categories.

Table 6. BMC Neighborhood Attainment Scorecard among Like-UAs

	LOU	NASH	KC	RALE
BMC (entr.) segregation index	0.422	0.338	0.478	0.234
BMC strength (BMC:BLI)	0.26	0.37	0.32	0.52
Average poverty rate for BMC tracts	13.6	16.2	14.1	11.0
Perc. of BMC in pov tracts	24.7%	20.6%	27.7%	9.2%
Perc. of BMC in M-C neighborhoods	34.4%	42.4%	22.3%	69.8%
BMC---ID-MC neigh. poverty gap	6.6	8.7	8.9	4.2
Perc. of ID-MC home value	66.9%	57.9%	65.6%	80.2%

SOURCE: US Census, 2012-2016 5-year Estimates American Community Survey

I aggregated the multiple measures by using a simple ranking system across categories and by displaying the results graphically. Based on the progressive impact on Black middle-class households, Like-UAs are ranked from 1-4, with a 1-ranking representing the most progressive urbanized area for that measure. After each UA is scored on each of the seven measures shown in Table 6, their sums are averaged. Figure 6 (see below) displays the final results of the BMC Scorecard calculations. As expected, Raleigh is clearly in the first-place position and Kansas City is clearly fourth, but Louisville and Nashville are tied for second place among the UAs.

Figure 6. Scorecard Rankings for BMC Neighborhoods among Like-UAs
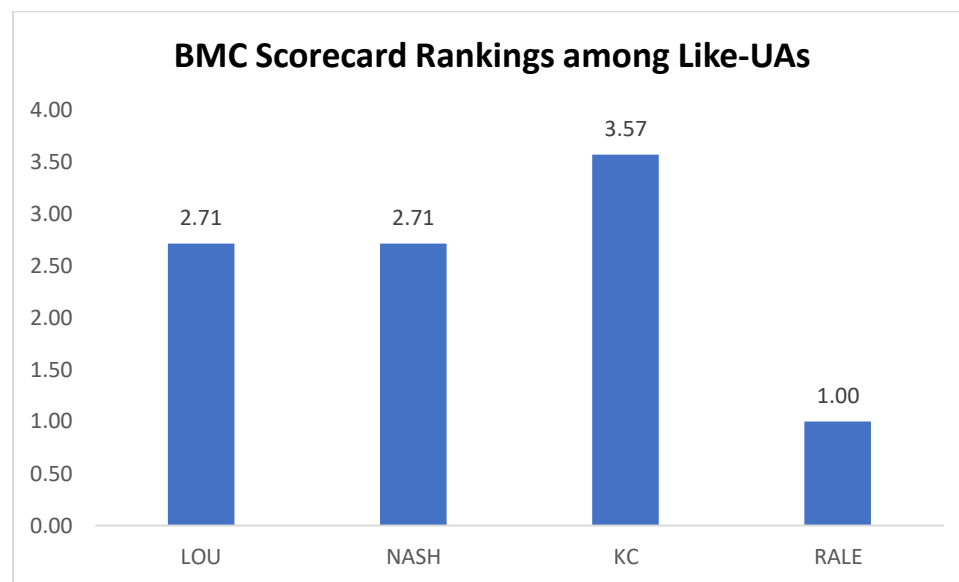
SOURCE: US Census, 2012-2016 5-year Estimates American Community Survey

The scorecard rankings somewhat align with the segregation indices found in each UA, but one puzzle that emerges is why Nashville's scorecard ranking did not align with its segregation index ranking. Instead of being on a tier by itself as it was with the segregation measure, it ties with Louisville in the scorecard rankings. All indications suggest that this discrepancy is due to the uniquely disadvantaged circumstances facing

Black middle-class households who reside outside of ID-MC neighborhoods in Nashville. While Nashville is ranked second among the UAs in terms of the percentage of BMC households residing in ID-MC neighborhoods, those who do not, reside in neighborhoods that are significantly poorer than their ID-MC counterparts. Additionally, when it comes to home values, BMC households in Nashville experience the least value in comparison to the value of ID-MC neighborhoods, while BMC households in Louisville experienced the second-most value in this respect.

In summary, the findings suggest that the segregation of middle-class Blacks is a significant driver of the BMC neighborhood heterogeneity that we see across the Like-UAs, but the similar positionality of Louisville and Nashville raises questions. Still, middle-class segregation shapes the extent that Black middle-class households reside in neighborhoods that are identifiably middle class. The unique positionality of Louisville and Nashville does not so much contradict the role played by segregation in shaping the extent that BMC households live in ID-MC neighborhoods; instead, it sheds light on the nature of those neighborhoods that do not qualify as ID-MC. In the case of Louisville, BMC households living outside of ID-MC neighborhoods do not experience the same disadvantages as do those similarly positioned in Nashville. The neighborhood differences between those living in ID-MC neighborhoods and those who do not are less stark, whether considering poverty rates or median home values.

When we focus on Louisville in relation to the other UAs, it is fairly clear that Louisville is weakly positioned with respect to the size of its Black middle class, the level of segregation experienced by its Black middle class, and in the general socioeconomic makeup of its BMC neighborhoods. However, when it comes to the equity between

neighborhood types, Black middle-class households living outside of ID-MC

neighborhoods do not fall far behind their Black middle-class counterparts in terms of

poverty levels and home values. In the next section, we will dedicate more focus to the

socioeconomic and demographic distinctions between BMC neighborhoods that qualify

as ID-MC and those that do not.

Heterogeneity of BMC Neighborhood Attainment within Like-UAs

      In the previous section, I presented data related to the heterogeneity of Black

middle-class neighborhood attainment across the Like-UAs. In this section, I focus

attention on the socioeconomic realities that are tied to living within (BMC+MC) and

outside of ID-MC neighborhoods (BMC-MC). The distinctions between the various

neighborhood types and how they are interrelated are presented in Graphic 1 (see below).

First, I provide a more robust representation of the poverty rate gap and show how BMC

neighborhoods differ from ID-MC neighborhoods when it comes to the percentage of

Black households. Then, I focus the rest of this section on the differences between living

in BMC-MC and BMC+MC neighborhoods.

Graphic 1. Relationships Among Neighborhood Categories
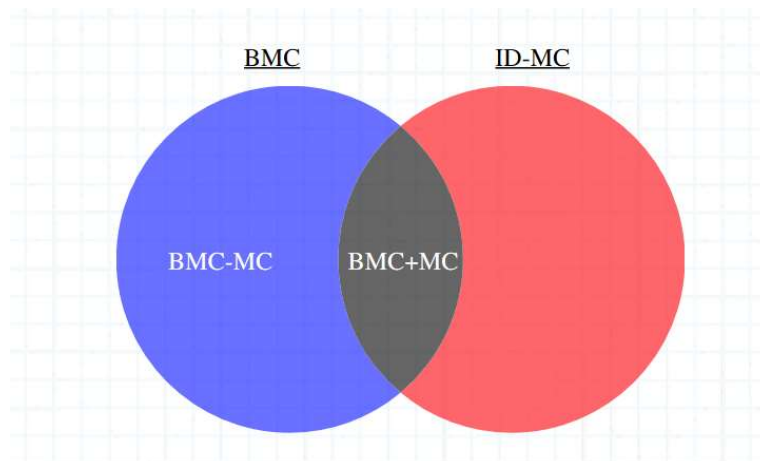
In Figure 7 (see below), I display the poverty rate differences between BMC census tracts and ID-MC census tracts. In essence, this is the same information shown in Figure 5 (see page 52), but in more detail. While just the poverty rate gap is shown in Figure 5, Figure 7 displays the actual poverty rates for BMC and ID-MC neighborhoods across the UAs.

Figure 7. Poverty Rate Differences between BMC and ID-MC Census Tracts
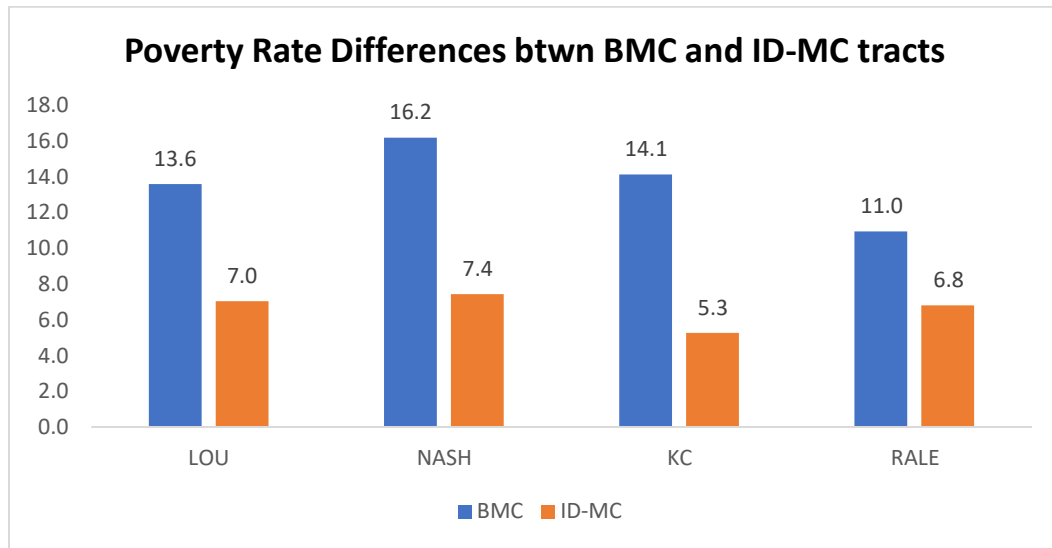
SOURCE: US Census, 2012-2016 5-year American Community Survey

One noteworthy aspect of Figure 7 is the fact that the poverty rate gap for Nashville is driven primarily by the level of poverty in its BMC neighborhoods. This is apparent when we compare the range of average poverty rates among BMC neighborhoods in Nashville, Louisville, and Raleigh to the corollary range among their ID-MC neighborhoods. It is also noteworthy that in Kansas City there is less nuance, the poverty rate for the ID-MC tracts is low compared to the relatively high poverty rate for its BMC neighborhoods.

There are some stark differences between the percentage of Black households living in BMC neighborhoods and those living in ID-MC neighborhoods. Figure 8 (see below) shows that substantial gaps exist in each of the UAs, but the gap is much narrower in Raleigh than in the other UAs. While the most pronounced gap in the percentage of Black households can be found in Nashville, Kansas City is not too far behind. The gap in Louisville (21.6) ranks second among the four, and its numerical value reflects a second-tier positioning when compared to Raleigh (14.9) on the first-tier and Nashville (29.9) and Kansas City (28) on the third.

Figure 8. Black Household Percentage Differences between BMC and ID-MC tracts
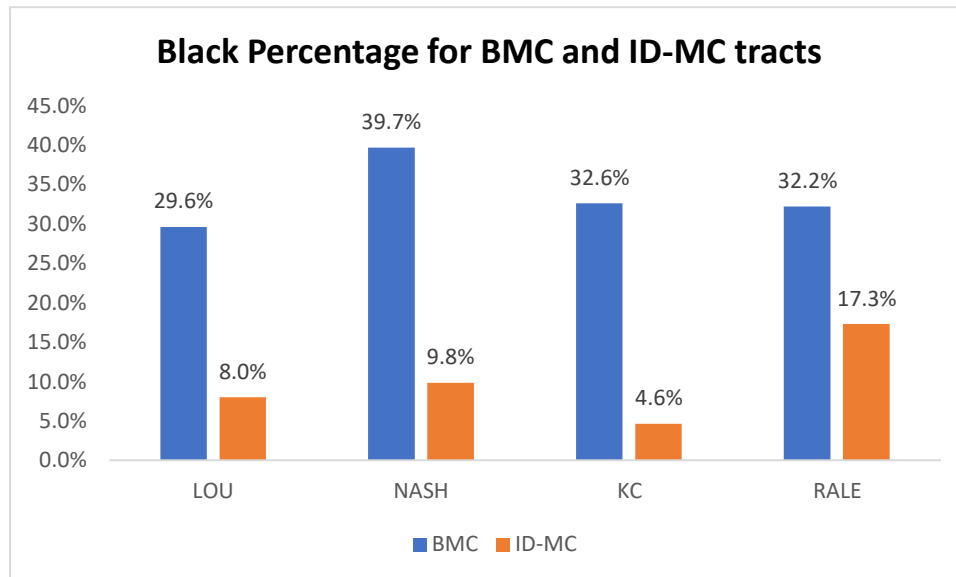
SOURCE: US Census, 2012-2016 5-year Estimates American Community Survey

Clearly, significant differences exist between the average socioeconomic and demographic characteristics of BMC census tracts and those that are identifiably middle-class. Even more substantial are the differences between BMC neighborhoods that qualify as identifiably middle class (BMC+MC) and the BMC census tracts that do not qualify (BMC-MC). These differences reflect the diversity of circumstances that Black

people earning similar incomes experience in their neighborhood lives. Such differences set the context for the look and feel of neighborhoods and the possible trade-offs members of the Black middle class negotiate in the interest of living comfortably.

In terms of the number of BMC households who reside within each type of neighborhood, Raleigh is the lone UA where the majority of the BMC households live in ID-MC neighborhoods. In the remaining UAs, the majority live in BMC-MC neighborhoods as shown in Figure 9 below. As I dig further into the differences between BMC+MC and BMC-MC neighborhoods, it will be important to keep in mind that the majority of BMC households living in Louisville, Nashville, and Kansas City are exposed to the neighborhood conditions that define BMC-MC neighborhoods.

Figure 9. BMC Household Percentages by Neighborhood Type (BMC+MC/BMC-MC)

BMC Household Percentage by Neighborhood

	LOU	NASH	KC	RALE
BMC+MC	34.4%	42.4%	22.3%	69.8%
BMC-MC	65.6%	57.6%	77.7%	30.2%
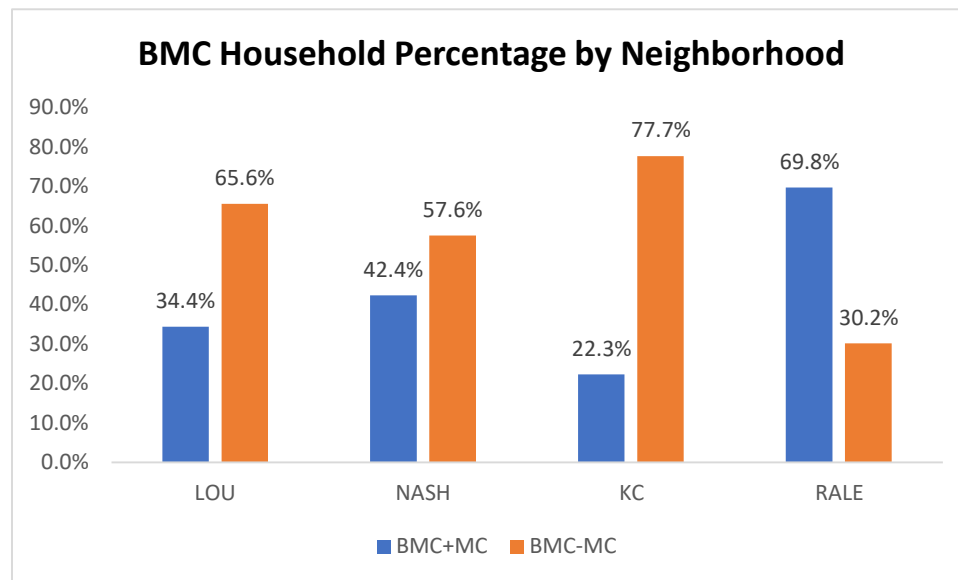
SOURCE: US Census, 2012-2016 5-year Estimates American Community Survey

The poverty rate gap between BMC+MC and BMC-MC census tracts was found to be larger than the gap between all BMC census tracts and those that are ID-MC (see Figure 10 below). These differences show that the gaps between BMC neighborhoods across the BMC+MC/BMC-MC threshold are greater than the differences between BMC neighborhoods and ID-MC neighborhoods. Stated differently, BMC neighborhoods that qualify as ID-MC neighborhoods are more economically similar to ID-MC neighborhoods, in general, than they are to BMC neighborhoods that do not qualify as ID-MC. This finding is another indicator of the high economic stakes involved in gaining access to these neighborhoods that are prototypes of middle-class neighborhoods.

Figure 10. Poverty Rate Gap between BMC+MC and BMC-MC neighborhoods

Poverty rate gap btwn BMC+MC/BMC-MC

	LOU	NASH	KC	RALE
	10.2	10.6	11.2	8.7
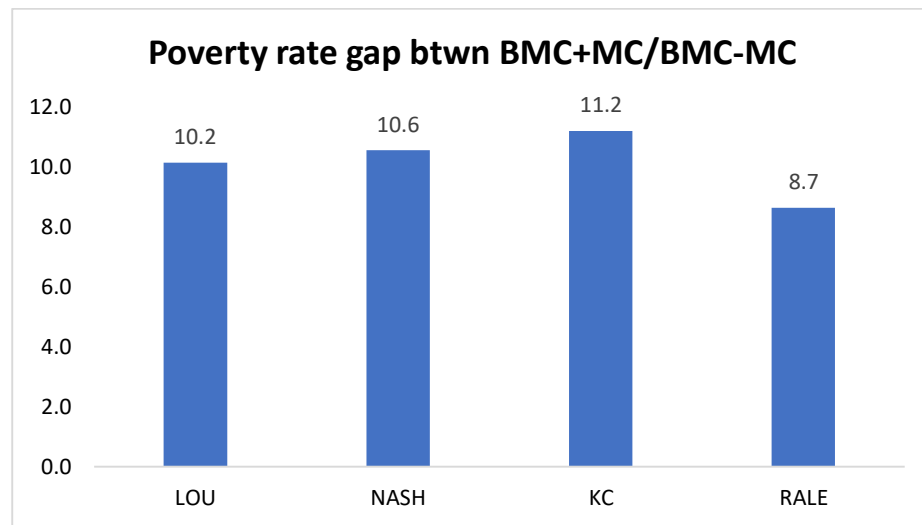
SOURCE: US Census, 2012-2016 5-year Estimates American Community Survey

A focus on average median home values lends further credence to the sense that BMC households living in ID-MC neighborhoods experience similar socioeconomic benefits as other middle-class households living in these types of neighborhoods. In Figure 11 (see next page), it is clear that the median home values for BMC+MC

neighborhoods are quite comparable to the median home values found for ID-MC

neighborhoods, in general. One curious exception to this rule is Nashville, where BMC

households in these neighborhoods experience home values that are only 70% of the

value experienced in other ID-MC neighborhoods. It is also apparent that wide gaps exist

between the median home values found for BMC+MC and BMC-MC neighborhoods.

This dynamic surely impacts the wealth-building capacity of Black households residing

outside of identifiably middle-class neighborhoods.

Figure 11. Percentage of Median Home Value Comparison (BMC+MC/BMC-MC)
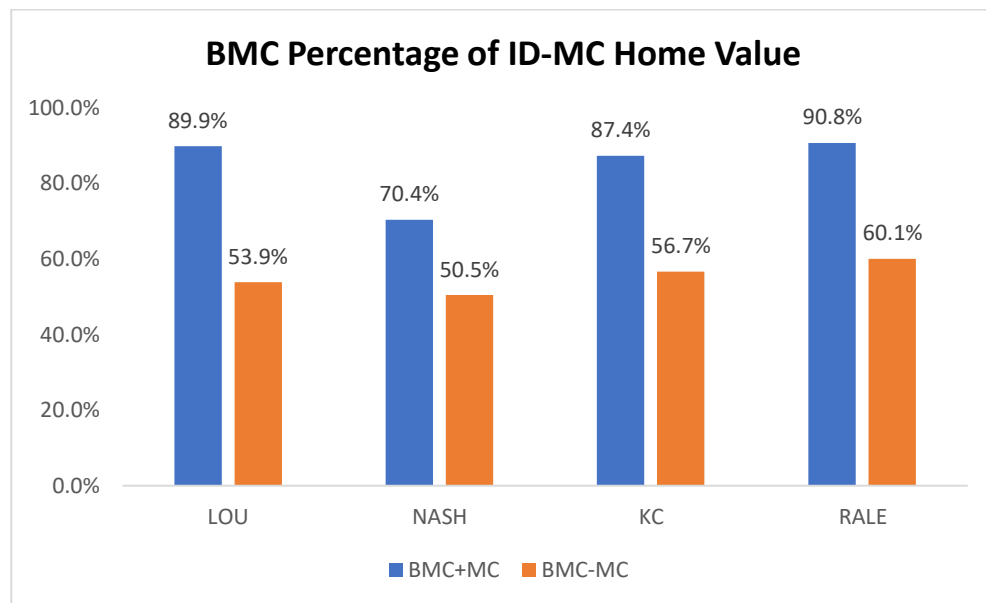
SOURCE: US Census, 2012-2016 5-year Estimates American Community Survey

Lastly, spotlighting the percentage of Black households residing in each

neighborhood type, regardless of class, reveals there are clear differences (see Figure 12

on next page). Most stark in this respect is Kansas City, where a 34.2 percentage point

gap can be found between BMC+MC and BMC-MC neighborhoods. Once again, the

shortest gap can be found in Raleigh, where there is a 20.5 percentage point gap.

Figure 12. Percentage of Black Households by Neighborhood Type

Percentage of Black Households by Neighborhood

Chart data:

Neighborhood	BMC+MC	BMC-MC
LOU	13.6%	39.9%
NASH	21.5%	50.4%
KC	8.4%	42.6%
RALE	25.1%	45.6%
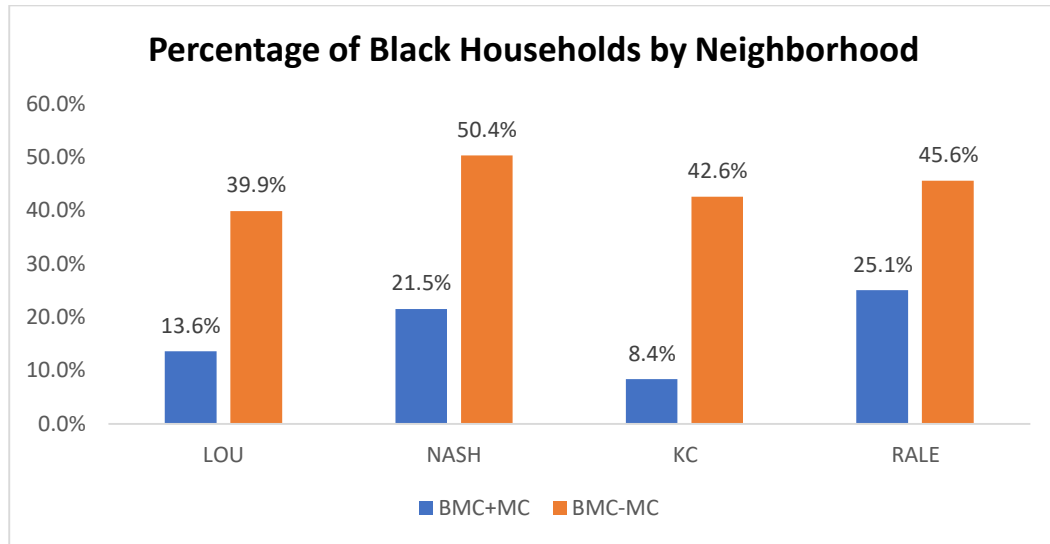
SOURCE: US Census, 2012-2016 5-year Estimates American Community Survey

In summary, the socioeconomic and demographic consequences for Black middle-class households living outside of identifiably middle-class neighborhoods is clear. Living outside of such neighborhoods means that you will experience a higher degree of neighborhood poverty, lower property values compared to other middle-class Blacks living in ID-MC neighborhoods, and a higher number of Black households in your vicinity. Members of the Black middle class, with similar profiles in terms of annual household income and educational attainment, inhabit distinctly different neighborhoods and these differences are likely consequential to the intergenerational mobility of Black households.

These findings not only demonstrate the socioeconomic differences between BMC+MC and BMC-MC neighborhoods, they also provide a context for some of the choices that middle-class Blacks make regarding neighborhoods to call home. The key trade-off demonstrated in the findings is living in majority-White settings where home

values are relatively high and poverty rates relatively low, or living in neighborhoods that are either racially-mixed to a strong degree or majority-Black, where the converse is true in terms of median home values and poverty rates. Lastly, it is important to remember that in Louisville, Nashville, and Kansas City, the majority of Black middle-class households reside in neighborhoods that are not identifiably middle-class, and therefore, live with the place-based disadvantages that those living in identifiably middle-class neighborhoods avoid.

<u>Historical Dynamics of Black Middle-Class Neighborhood Decline</u>

A fair question that could be asked given the rather stark differences found between BMC+MC and BMC-MC neighborhoods is how the socioeconomic and demographic dynamics at the neighborhood level developed over time. I address this question by limiting my analytical scope and focusing only on the top-five BMC-MC and BMC+MC census tracts with the highest proportion of Black middle-class households in each of the targeted UAs. After identifying these census tracts, I calculated the percentage of BMC households living in these top-five census tracts relative to the total number of BMC households sampled (see Figure 13 on next page). Although Kansas City stands out as an exception, it is noteworthy that at least 40% of BMC households are represented in the top five census tracts of the other three UAs.

Figure 13. Percentage of BMC Households in Top-5 Tracts by Neighborhood Type

Percentage of BMC Households in Top 5 tracts

	LOU	NASH	KC	RALE
Non Top-5	56.8%	58.2%	77.0%	49.4%
BMC+MC	19.4%	20.5%	9.7%	32.5%
BMC-MC	23.8%	21.3%	13.3%	18.1%

■ BMC-MC ■ BMC+MC ■ Non Top-5
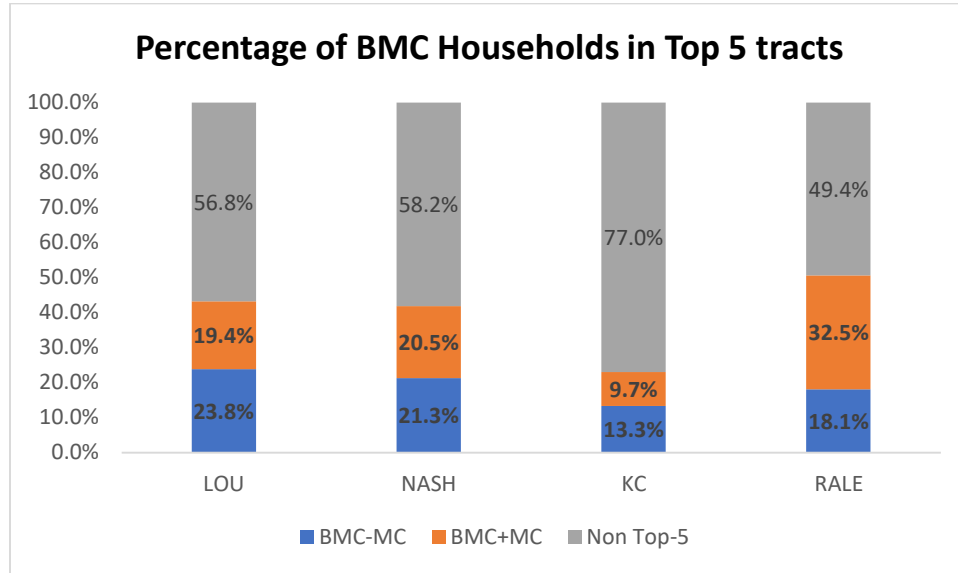
SOURCE: US Census, 2012-2016 5-year Estimates American Community Survey

Again, one of the primary themes in the literature on Black middle-class neighborhoods is their tendency to suffer socioeconomic decline over time. As I mentioned in the methods section, I use UA-level statistics as my baseline metric to track socioeconomic decline in the top-five census tracts. In Table 7 (see next page), I have tallied instances where a census tract shows a straight-line socioeconomic decline from 2010 – 2016 that surpasses a 10 percent significance threshold. For example, median home values in Nashville census tract 401.03 declined by 12 percentage points from 2010 – 2016 relative to the UA's median home values for the same years. Not only that, median home value declined across each time period, from 2010 – 2013 and from 2013 – 2016. Table 7 displays these types of instances of decline by the socioeconomic metric, urbanized area, and neighborhood type.

Table 7. Instances of Substantial Socioeconomic Decline (linear declines of at least 10%)

Neighborhood Type	Category	LOU	NASH	KC	RALE	*Totals*
BMC-MC	**Poverty rate**	2	2	2	1	7
	Median hh. Income	2	0	2	1	5
	Median home value	4	1	2	1	8
	Totals	8	3	6	3	20
BMC+MC	**Poverty rate**	1	2	2	2	7
	Median hh. Income	2	0	3	1	6
	Median home value	1	0	1	1	3
	Totals	4	2	6	4	16
	Totals	*12*	*5*	*12*	*7*	*36*

SOURCE: US Census, 2006-2010/2009-2013/2012-2016 5-year Estimates American Community Survey

These findings show that socioeconomic decline is fairly common in these census tracts and spans the categorical divide between BMC-MC and BMC+MC tracts. However, across UAs we see noteworthy differences in the total number of instances of socioeconomic decline and in the way these differences vary based on neighborhood type. Socioeconomic declines based on rises in the neighborhood poverty rate are most common and are equal across neighborhood types. The total number of decline-related instances from 2010 – 2016 for median household income and median home value are the same (11), yet median home value declines are more common in BMC-MC neighborhoods and median household income declines are slightly more common in BMC+MC neighborhoods.

Another way of viewing this data is to compare the instances of socioeconomic decline to the total number of measurements, which translate to the number of opportunities to note straight-line socioeconomic declines. In this respect, each UA had

30 opportunities to show an instance of socioeconomic decline, 15 for the BMC-MC category and 15 for the BMC+MC category, given the fact that five census tracts of each neighborhood type are being measured along three data categories (poverty rates, median household income, and median home values). From this viewpoint, Figure 14 (see below) displays the concentration of socioeconomic decline relative to the number of measurements across both neighborhood types and the Like-UAs.

Figure 14. Concentration of Socioeconomic Decline by Neighborhood Type
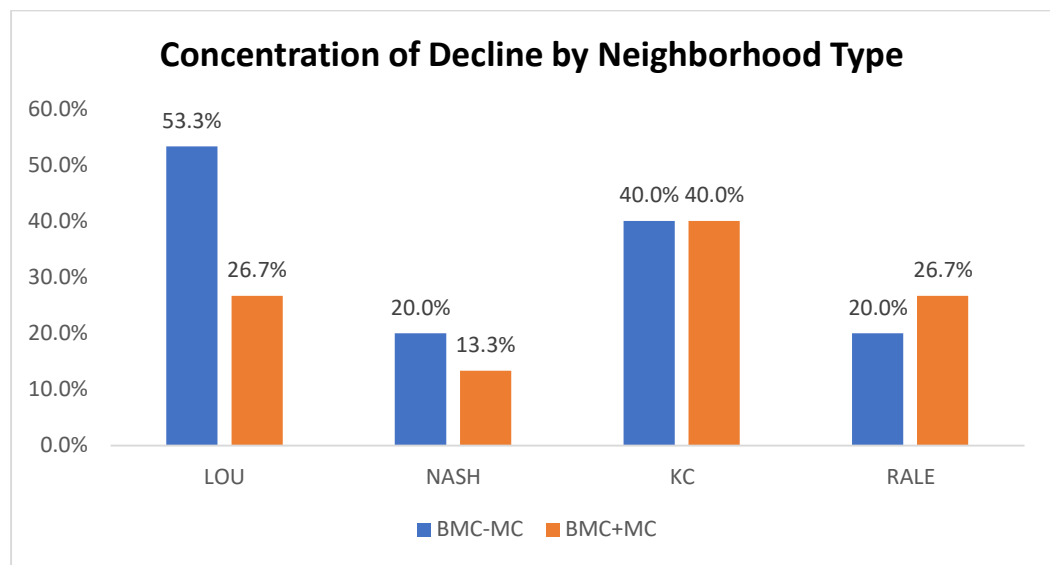
Louisville stands out as an UA with socioeconomic declines that are more pronounced in BMC-MC neighborhoods, with a 53.3% concentration rate. This is especially the case when it comes to median home value declines (see Table 7 on previous page). Four out of five of Louisville's BMC-MC census tracts experienced a substantial decline in home value relative to the UA's median home value. Figure 15 (see next page) is a clear illustration of the significance of this finding in comparison to the larger picture of median home value declines. Given the self-evident connection between

home value and intergenerational mobility, especially for a population that is heavily

reliant on homeownership as a path for wealth-building, this is a troubling finding (Oliver

and Shapiro 1995).

Figure 15. Concentration of Median Home Value Decline
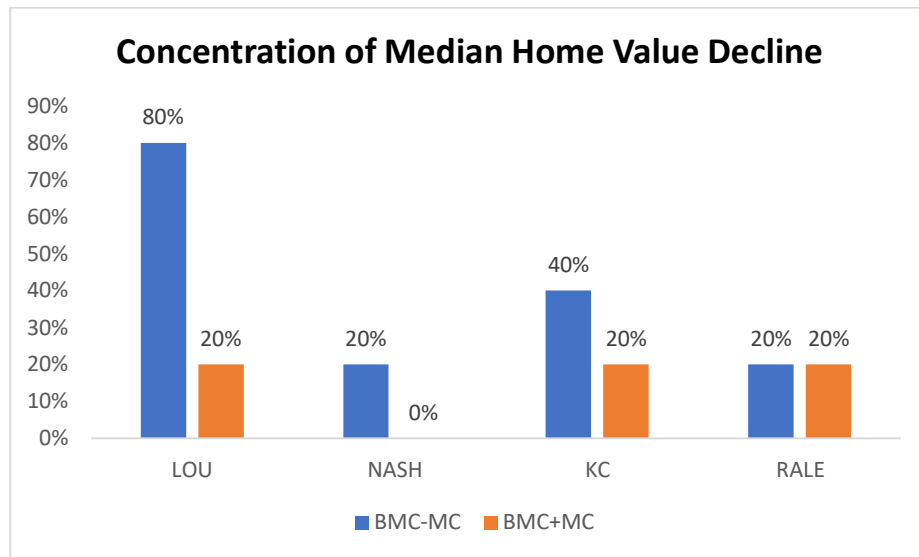
It would be logical to believe that there is a significant degree of alignment between

median household income and median home values. With this logic in mind, I analyzed

this relationship by summing both measures of socioeconomic decline across

neighborhood types. My findings are presented in Table 8 (see next page) and show that

there is substantial variance across UAs when it comes to median home value declines

relative to declines in median household income.

Table 8. Comparison of Home Value Declines Relative to Household Income

Data Category	LOU	NASH	KC	RALE
Home Value Decline (BMC-MC)	0.31	-0.24	0.02	0.10
Home Value Decline (BMC+MC)	0.06	0.18	-0.22	0.13
Differences in Decline	0.25	-0.42	0.24	-0.03

SOURCE: US Census, 2006-2010/2009-2013/2012-2016 5-year Estimates American Community Survey

While the Louisville and Kansas City statistics show that the home values relative to household incomes in BMC-MC neighborhoods experienced steeper declines than their BMC+MC counterparts, the Nashville and Raleigh numbers show the opposite, but to differing degrees. In Raleigh, BMC+MC neighborhoods show a slightly steeper decline in median home values compared to BMC-MC neighborhoods, but Nashville shows a much stronger decline in BMC+MC neighborhoods relative to BMC-MC neighborhoods. The median home values in BMC-MC neighborhoods in Nashville actually outpaced their median household income numbers. This is likely due to localized housing market dynamics, and the fact that Nashville was found to be the only UA where median home values ascended to a substantial degree lends further credence to Nashville's housing market being the driver of certain outcomes.

Previous research on Black middle-class neighborhoods found that members of the Black middle-class often live in neighborhoods where they are surrounded by people who are lower on the class scale (Adelman 2004, Alba, Logan and Stults 2000, Sharkey 2014). I analyzed the data with this finding in mind by comparing differences between Black and White median household incomes for 2010 and 2016. The extent to which Black median household incomes exceed that of Whites in 2016 when compared to 2010 income differences, is considered an *income deficit*, due to the implication that Black

households need to collectively earn more to reside in that neighborhood. Black – White median household income differences are summed across the census tracts according to neighborhood type (BMC-MC and BMC+MC) and averaged for years 2010 and 2016. The income deficit reflects the differences between the 2010 and 2016 Black – White median household averages (see Figure 16 below).

With the same implication in mind, the extent to which Black median household incomes in 2016 exceed Black median households in 2010 in comparison to White median household income differences for the same years is considered an *inflation deficit*. Stated differently, the income deficit measure directly compares Black and White median household incomes for 2010 and 2016, while the inflation deficit measure compares within-group median household income differences for 2010 and 2016.

Figure 16. Black-to-White Median Household Income Deficits by Neighborhood Type
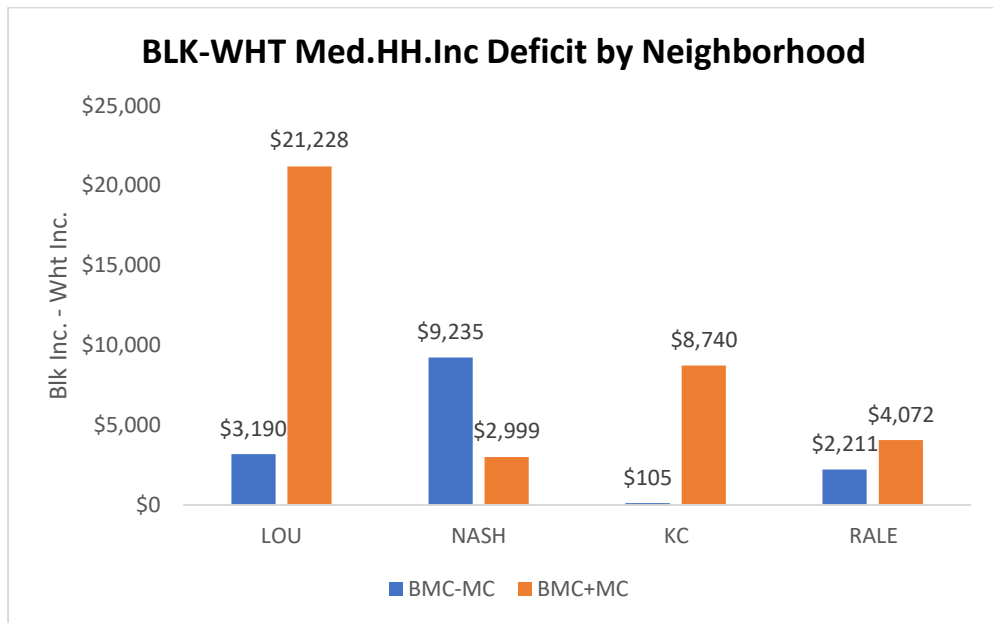
SOURCE: US Census, 2006-2010/2009-2013/2012-2016 5-year Estimates American Community Survey

It is clear from the findings shown in Figure 16 that when 2016 is compared to 2010, Black households had to overperform with respect to median household incomes compared to their White counterparts. For example, in BMC+MC neighborhoods in Louisville, when the average increase in median household incomes among the five census tracts is compared to the same increase among Whites living within the same census tracts, a gap of $21,228 is found by calculating the differences between Black and White median household income averages. Admittedly, this number is skewed based on an outlier, but this is the principle involved in the calculations. In BMC+MC neighborhoods, this imperative to earn more was comparatively stronger than in BMC-MC neighborhoods, except in Nashville, where Black households needed to earn more in BMC-MC neighborhoods.

When it comes to the inflation deficit calculations, a similar pattern emerges. In both cases, Louisville stands out as an UA that required substantially more from its Black households in 2016 compared to 2010. The dynamics reflected in Figure 17, effectively show how much more was collectively demanded from Black households compared to White households in terms of household income to secure housing within these divergent neighborhood types. The average rise in median household incomes among Black households when comparing 2016 to 2010 is juxtaposed to that of White households by calculating the difference between the two means. Mirroring the income deficit findings, more is demanded from Black households to live in BMC+MC neighborhoods, except in the case of Nashville (see Figure 17 on next page). Again, this is likely due to unique housing market patterns given the tremendous population growth Nashville has experienced in recent years.

Figure 17. Black-to-White Median Household Income Inflation Deficits by Neighborhood
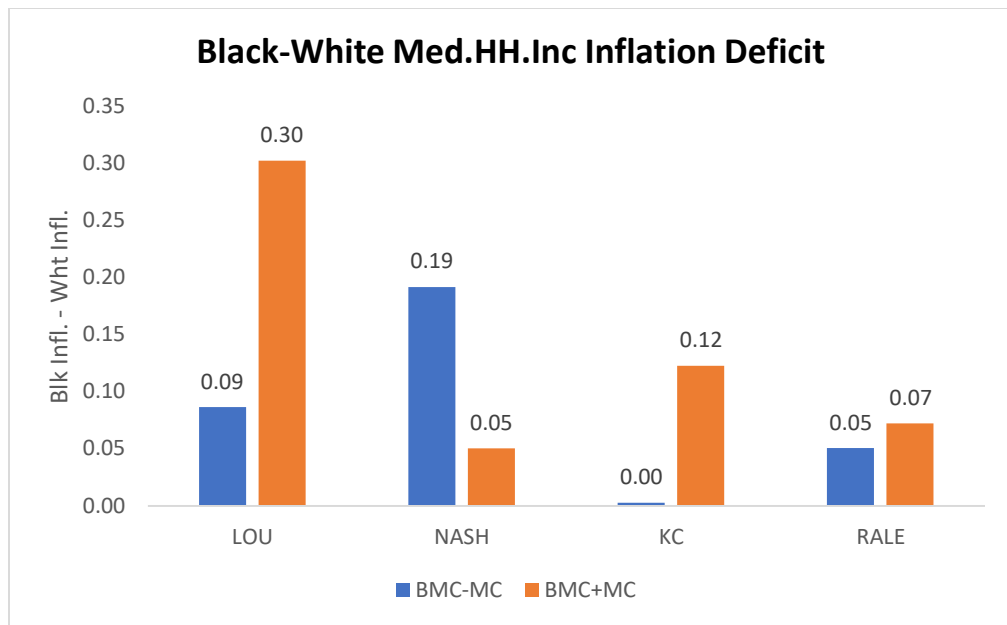
SOURCE: US Census, 2006-2010/2009-2013/2012-2016 5-year Estimates American Community Survey

Discussion

The Social Significance of Middle-Class Racial Residential Segregation

These findings suggest that the level of residential segregation that the Black middle class experiences in these UAs makes a substantial impact on the socioeconomic character of their neighborhoods. In Raleigh, where the middle-class segregation level impacting Blacks is relatively low, the majority of middle-class Blacks reside in identifiably middle-class neighborhoods. In Kansas City, where the middle-class segregation level is highest, less than 1-in-4 of the Black middle-class households live in such neighborhoods. However, neighborhood dynamics occurring in Louisville and Nashville show that segregation levels do not tell the entire story.

While all indications from the 2016 data suggest that segregation levels directly impact the percentage of Black middle-class households who reside in identifiably middle-class neighborhoods, other factors appear to be impacting the social conditions that Black middle-class households face when they live outside of these prototypical neighborhoods. In Nashville, an UA where 42.4 percent of BMC households lived in identifiably middle-class neighborhoods, the other 57.6 percent experienced neighborhoods that are significantly more impoverished than their counterparts and live in areas where home values command much less on the market. Louisville, on the other hand, is an UA where there are less Black middle-class households living in identifiably middle-class neighborhoods, but the social conditions they experience outside of such neighborhoods are more equitable, particularly when it comes to neighborhood poverty levels.

Overall, my findings strongly suggest that the social significance of middle-class segregation lies in how it impacts Black middle class access to neighborhoods that are more in keeping with their socioeconomic profiles. While we may imagine, or even dream of situations where majority-Black neighborhoods qualify as identifiably middle-class on a more regular basis, current evidence shows that these types of neighborhoods are still rare (Sharkey 2014). Within the scope of this study, for example, only two census tracts, one in Nashville and one in Raleigh were found be both majority-Black and identifiably middle-class. However, both of these census tracts have poverty rates above 15 percent and below-median home values relative to the UA.

So, for those motivated to live in neighborhoods that maximize their homeownership-based, wealth-building ability, the stakes are high with respect to first gaining access to identifiably middle-class neighborhoods, and then hoping that the neighborhood's home values hold steady over time, because the character of neighborhoods can surely change. It seems that this line between identifiably middle-class neighborhoods and those outside of this classification reflects a common trade-off for middle-class Blacks: live in a neighborhood more conducive for intergenerational mobility and grin-and-bear racial insecurity or live in neighborhoods where you feel racially comfortable, while having to grin-and-bear a relatively low return on your homeownership-based investment.

<u>The Dynamics of Black Middle-Class Heterogeneity</u>

The most compelling aspect of my findings is the rich heterogeneity that I uncovered through my methodological approach. My meso-level approach to analyzing census data highlighted the differences among mid-sized metropolitan areas with respect to Black middle-class neighborhood attainment as well as differences within UAs that pivot on whether or not Black middle-class households reside in identifiably middle-class neighborhoods. The picture that emerges reflects different realities with respect to how localized forces are managing Black middle-class populations and spatial poverty, and how they are managing the social conditions that result from living outside of identifiably middle-class neighborhoods.

Raleigh is an UA that has demonstrated a balance between integrating middle-class Blacks into identifiably middle-class neighborhoods and, in ways that are likely connected to this level of integration, absorbing households who are considered poor across its spatial landscape. Across the board, whether talking about the UA level or in its identifiably middle-class neighborhoods, Raleigh's poor residents are scattered across its neighborhoods, which means that Black middle-class neighborhoods are not left to incorporate an inordinate number of poor households in comparison to other neighborhoods. This combination translates to Raleigh's Black middle-class population living in identifiably middle-class neighborhoods more commonly, and even when they do not, still experiencing neighborhoods where the drop-off is not as severe in regard to poverty levels and home values.

My findings suggest that Kansas City is nearly the polar opposite of Raleigh. Only 22.3 percent of their Black middle-class households live in identifiably middle-class

neighborhoods and there are stark differences in the spatial poverty found in identifiably middle-class neighborhoods and throughout the UA when compared to the spatial poverty of Black middle-class neighborhoods that do not qualify as identifiably middle-class. While the poverty rate gap between its Black middle-class neighborhoods and the UA is the second highest, Kansas City's identifiably middle-class neighborhoods stand out as having the lowest percentage of Black households (4.6 percent) and the lowest poverty rate (5.3) among the Like-UAs. Comparatively, both numbers would qualify for third-tier status, with Louisville and Nashville on the second-tier, and Raleigh on the first-tier. These dynamics strongly suggest middle-class segregation in Kansas City negatively impacts its Black middle-class neighborhoods, forcing them to absorb an inordinate amount of spatial poverty. It also means that the few Black households who do reside in identifiably middle-class neighborhoods in Kansas City will experience a great degree of racial isolation in such neighborhoods, compared to the other UAs.

Louisville and Nashville are positioned in the middle of Raleigh and Kansas City, whose cases help to illumine the heterogeneity taking place in the former. The best way to distinguish these UAs is to say that in Louisville you have a lot to gain and less to lose when it comes to accessing identifiably middle-class neighborhoods, while in Nashville you have a lot to lose and less to gain in gaining access to such neighborhoods. With respect to what can be gained, Black middle-class households in Louisville who reside in identifiably middle-class neighborhoods experience median home values that are 89.9 percent of the median home values of identifiably middle-class neighborhoods as a category. This number is merely 0.9 percentage points behind Raleigh. Black middle-class households in Nashville living in identifiably middle-class neighborhoods only

experience 70.4 percent of the same value, the lowest among the Like-UAs. In terms of what there is to lose, Black middle-class households living outside of identifiably middle-class neighborhoods experience substantially more spatial poverty in Nashville than they do in Louisville and experience substantially lesser home values.

Overall, the dynamics of Black middle-class heterogeneity at the neighborhood level suggest that localized contexts are having a moderate effect on Black middle-class neighborhood life. It is fairly clear that middle-class segregation significantly influences Black middle-class access to identifiably middle-class neighborhoods, but the social conditions faced by those who do not gain access to these neighborhoods appear to take on a localized character.

Conclusion

<u>The Social Meaning of Black Middle-Class Heterogeneity in Neighborhood Attainment</u>

The heterogeneity of Black middle-class neighborhoods that I have documented in this article, found both between and within the selected UAs, reflects the durable consequences of racial residential segregation as well as the importance of localized dynamics in shaping the racial character of middle-class neighborhoods. In conjunction with segregation and localized responses to governing is what appears to be evidence of *opportunity hoarding* in two of the UAs. Opportunity hoarding is a term first coined by Charles Tilly (1998) that denotes how specific social groups gain niche access to valued resources and then seek to perpetuate the advantages that they have gained by categorically excluding other groups from access to the same resources.

The connection between Black middle-class segregation and the number of Black middle-class households living in neighborhoods that have the look, feel, and statistical profile of middle-class neighborhoods tells two stories simultaneously. Most obviously, my findings strongly suggest that racial residential segregation is a still a deleterious force in the lives of Black people, even those who are doing pretty well financially. This study is yet another signal that scholars and social practitioners alike must keep a vigilant eye on residential segregation, because it continues to yield distinct disadvantages in the lives of Black folks. At the same time, the findings also indicate that majority-Black, identifiably middle-class neighborhoods are in short supply. If such neighborhoods were more numerous, the facile connections between the size of neighborhoods' Black percentages and the level of disadvantage would be more difficult to ascertain and

members of the Black middle-class would be less compelled to choose between racial comfort or maximizing their intergenerational mobility prospects.

My findings also imply that there is more than racial residential segregation at play when it comes to between-UA differences in Black middle-class neighborhood attainment. The case of Nashville brought this to the forefront most dramatically, given the misalignment between its segregation index and its final positioning among the UAs in the BMC Scorecard Rankings. The cause of this misalignment was the rather dramatic socioeconomic differences between living within identifiably middle-class neighborhoods and living outside of such neighborhoods. While diagnosing the underlying causes of these differences is beyond the scope of this study, there seems to be some localized dynamics that are unique to Nashville at play, at least in the context of this four UA comparison.

The evidence of opportunity hoarding lends further credence to the sense that something local to Nashville was generating neighborhood disadvantages for its Black middle-class population in 2016. In Nashville, the fact that Black middle-class households residing in identifiably middle-class neighborhoods only experience 70.4 percent of the median home value for the category at large suggests that Nashville's Black middle-class population may be suffering from a form of opportunity hoarding that is excluding them from the most advantaged neighborhoods. The fact that only 2.0 percent of its Black middle-class households lived in low poverty neighborhoods, which is by far the lowest percentage among Like-UAs, substantiates my claim that a unique form of exclusion is taking place. On the other hand, opportunity hoarding in Kansas City seems to take on a more traditional form, with high levels of racial residential segregation

acting as an exclusionary barrier that keeps both middle-class Blacks and households considered poor out of their prototypical middle-class neighborhoods.

When it comes to Louisville, it is also clear that racial residential segregation seems to be playing the primary role in shaping differential access to prototypical middle-class neighborhoods, which shapes the disadvantaged social conditions faced by those living in other neighborhoods. At the same time, compared to the other UAs, the social conditions they face are not as drastically different as those living in prototypical middle-class neighborhoods. However, the noticeable declines in median home value in marginally middle-class neighborhoods that I discovered in the historical analysis of top-five census tracts are quite troubling and portend that the marginally middle-class neighborhoods of today could potentially develop into the disadvantaged, ghettoized neighborhoods of tomorrow. On the other hand, Louisville's Black middle-class households residing in prototypical middle-class neighborhoods seem to experience a great deal of stability that is very much in line with the other UAs, with the median home values they experience being very close to Raleigh's figure. Overall, it seems that finding ways to disrupt patterns of median home value declines in racially transitioning neighborhoods and vigilantly checking racial residential segregation across neighborhood, will yield benefits that could improve Louisville's positioning among similarly sized UAs with respect to Black middle-class neighborhood attainment.

Ultimately, evidence suggests that the story of neighborhood heterogeneity is largely fueled by differences in racial residential segregation levels as well as localized differences with respect to managing the social fallout of segregation in the governing realm. Governing is a term used in its most general form and is inclusive of local

government officials at the regional levels of a metropolitan area, business elites, and rentiers (Benner and Pastor 2013, Logan and Molotch 1987). In a nutshell, my findings show that Black middle-class neighborhood attainment is shaped by both bifurcations in their access to prototypical middle-class neighborhoods and the social consequences of living outside of these neighborhoods.

In three out of four UAs, a fairly straight line can be drawn between Black middle-class segregation and the quality of their neighborhoods, on average. Generally speaking, outside of the role that local governance plays in perpetuating or minimizing segregation, a hands-off policy seems to be in play. However, in Nashville, the coupling of a moderate segregation level with the exclusion of middle-class Blacks from its most advantaged neighborhoods indicates a more nuanced, multi-pronged form of local governance in the realm of place stratification. Either way, it is fairly clear that organized social action on the part of middle-class Blacks as a group is necessary to ensure that the places they call home will conduce to passing down a just financial legacy to their loved ones.

In the next article, my focus turns more specifically to Black middle-class neighborhoods in Louisville and their geographical relationship to elements of spatial poverty. Black middle-class neighborhoods are defined in the same way, and so are disadvantaged neighborhoods. The same Louisville BMC neighborhoods that were the focus of this article are arranged geographically in the next article with patterns of concentrated advantage and disadvantage in mind.

Additionally, like this article, I historically analyze the recent history of these neighborhoods to track the socioeconomic trajectory of BMC neighborhoods, mindful of

the tendency of such neighborhoods to decline over time. It is within this context that a new neighborhood definition emerges, existing between disadvantaged and identifiably middle-class neighborhoods. These *marginally middle-class* neighborhoods are identified as the most common setting for Black middle-class households in Louisville as neighborhoods with poverty rates below 20 percent, but do not qualify as identifiably middle-class. Overall, the forthcoming article explores the interconnections between urban geography, racial makeup, and the economic valuation of BMC neighborhoods and the factors involved in their volatility and stability.

ARTICLE II:

MAPPING BLACK MIDDLE-CLASS NEIGHBORHOOD ATTAINMENT AND

SPATIAL POVERTY FOR FOCAL URBANIZED AREA

This article explores the relationship between neighborhoods with a high proportion of Black middle-class households, relative to the Louisville metropolitan area, and elements of spatial poverty, such as a neighborhood's poverty rate and the concentration of subsidized housing. The central question that I seek to answer is *'What is the nature of the relationship between elements of spatial poverty and Black middle-class households from a neighborhoods-based perspective?'* I present a robust set of findings using multiple perspectives that demonstrate that the heterogeneity defining Black middle-class neighborhood life does not negate the troublesome and durable association between a significant Black presence in neighborhoods and the devaluing of neighborhoods.

Literature Review

<u>The Consequences of Living in Poor Neighborhoods</u>

In neighborhoods defined as disadvantaged due to the inordinate number of households living below the federal poverty level, it is common to find place-based disadvantages such as poor performing schools, inadequate social services and private amenities, poor access to fresh and nutritious foods, physical decay, violence, and a surveilling police presence (Rios 2011, Sampson, Sharkey and Raudenbush 2008, Wilson 2012). Past research has linked the existence of such neighborhoods to active processes, whether past or present, such as redlining, urban renewal, racial residential segregation, white flight, the outmigration of Black middle-class households, and unchecked systemic exploitation (Desmond 2017, Massey and Denton 1993, Rothstein 2017, Taylor 2019, Wilson 1987). A common term used to contextualize these interconnected processes is *ghettoization* (Ford and Griffin 1979).

Members of the Black middle class living in ghettoized neighborhoods face social disadvantages that are durable and self-reinforcing, due to the interconnectedness of poverty, limited educational opportunities, job dislocation, racial isolation, and neighborhood devaluation (Rothstein 2017, Sampson 2009, Wilson 1987). Based on previous research, a significant percentage of middle-class Blacks reside in such areas. A number of scholarly texts have explored why this is the case, and holistically, what emerges is a multifaceted vista featuring the systemic and racialized disinvestment in non-White spaces and the realized desires of middle-class Blacks to live in majority-Black spaces and experience neighborhoods that serve as a haven for anti-black racism (Lacy 2007, Pattillo 2005, 2007, Rothstein 2017).

Regardless of the extent that middle-class Blacks choose to live in disadvantaged neighborhoods, their lives are directly impacted by their surroundings. Such impacts range from the lack of recreational amenities, such as casual-dining restaurants and popular retail stores, to poorly functioning public schools and greater exposure to crime. Ultimately, these Black middle-class households are forced to manage neighborhood contexts that virtually no other racialized middle-class group endures (Iceland and Wilkes 2006, Timberlake and Iceland 2007). Given the ways that neighborhoods are conflated with one's position within the social hierarchy, middle-class Blacks living in disadvantaged neighborhoods are forced to contend with how their home bases are stigmatized and employ discursive and performative strategies to combat this stigma by association (Bartlett 2017, Khare, Joseph and Chaskin 2015, Lacy 2007, Lamont and Molnar 2002, Moore 2008).

<u>The Spatial Relationship between Black Middle-Class and Poor Neighborhoods</u>

Even when middle-class Blacks live outside of poor neighborhoods, they often remain spatially connected to them. Geographically, Black middle-class neighborhoods often share a border with disadvantaged neighborhoods; and in cases where they are more distant, there is still a tendency for Black middle-class neighborhoods to exist as spatial buffers between disadvantaged neighborhoods and White middle-class neighborhoods (Pattillo 1999, Sharkey 2014). This spatial connection between Black middle-class and disadvantaged neighborhoods is attributed to a number of factors, such as white flight from neighborhoods with growing Black populations, the limitations imposed by the racial wealth gap, and the colorblind racism of the real estate industry and federal

agencies involved in the administration of housing (Bartlett 2017, Korver-Glenn 2017, Lacy 2007, Oliver and Shapiro 1995, Pattillo 2005, Pattillo 1999, Rothstein 2017).

Past research indicates that the spatial relationship between Black middle-class neighborhoods and their poorer counterparts is a cyclical one. The cycle begins with Black middle-class families buying homes in majority-White middle-class neighborhoods. Then, once their numbers go from a token to a significant representation of around 15 to 20 percent, white flight commences (Lewis, Emerson and Klineberg 2011, Pattillo 1999). In the place of these White middle-class families come Black middle-class families, which further fuels the pace of the racial transition. Given the intractable ways that the racial character of a neighborhood is yoked with how neighborhoods are economically valuated, the property values of racially transitioning middle-class neighborhoods decline relative to other middle-class neighborhoods (Howell and Korver-Glenn 2018, Massey and Denton 1993, Rothstein 2017).

This predictable feature of neighborhood stratification as a system sets the stage for private and public interventions. In the private realm, rentiers turnover houses from home-owned to rental properties (Bartlett 2017, Rothstein 2017). Public interventions like HOPE VI and its successor programs, administered by the Office of Housing and Urban Development (HUD), establish housing units in declining Black middle-class neighborhoods, which helps them to achieve the goals of deconcentrating public housing without upsetting well-to-do Whites who would openly and loudly protest subsidized housing coming into their neighborhoods (Dwyer 2012, Hanlon 2015, Rothstein 2017). In both cases, decreases in land costs are used as motivation or justification for these interventions.

Contemporary HUD Projects and the Order of Neoliberal-Colorblindness

Neoliberal-colorblindness, as a dominant policy frame, has played a formative role in HUD policies and in the hands-off posture that is displayed in the enforcement of fair housing (Hanlon 2015, Massey 2015). The HOPE VI program was a game-changer for public housing. It successfully changed the physical face of public housing through its focus on demolishing old housing and rebuilding units in a more visually-appealing fashion (Hanlon 2012, Popkin et al. 2004). However, HOPE VI has been criticized by scholars for the way it displaced economically-vulnerable residents, while paving the way for downtown redevelopment and gentrification (Bartlett 2017, Chaskin and Joseph 2015, Clark and Negrey 2017, Fraser et al. 2013, Hanlon 2012, 2015, Popkin et al. 2004, Roberts 2014, Rothstein 2017).

The HOPE VI program and its successor, the Choice Neighborhoods Initiative, are the epitome of neoliberal-colorblind policy, given their focus on individualistic outcomes, workforce participation, public-private partnerships, and the willful blindness shown with respect to the racialized consequences associated with the dispersal of low-income residents into already struggling neighborhoods (Chaskin et al. 2012, Dwyer 2012, Popkin et al. 2004). Residents displaced by these urban revitalization initiatives are disproportionately housed in areas of the city that are neither White, nor economically advantaged (Bartlett 2017, Chaskin and Joseph 2015, Popkin et al. 2004, Rothstein 2017). White middle-class neighborhoods and those higher on the place stratification ladder are spared the costs of absorbing the poverty of displaced residents, leaving Black middle-class neighborhoods and those lower on the scale to manage the social costs of including poor households into their residential environments.

Clearly, Black middle-class households contend with spatial poverty to a unique degree, primarily due to the contradictory forces of anti-black racism and pro-Black cohesion. While anti-black racism propels white flight, black disinvestment, and forms of opportunity hoarding that are concomitant with neoliberal-colorblindness, pro-Black cohesion is what compels middle-class Blacks to remain in majority-Black neighborhoods that are struggling economically (Pattillo 2005, Rothstein 2017). However, many members of the Black middle-class are residing increasingly in economically advantaged neighborhoods (Adelman 2004, Iceland and Wilkes 2006, Sharkey 2014, Timberlake and Iceland 2007). These neighborhoods are spatially distinct from those we have focused on to this point, due to how distant they are from poor neighborhoods. At the same time, these economically advantaged neighborhoods are almost always majority-White. The significant number of Black middle-class households living in such neighborhoods highlights the rich heterogeneity of Black middle-class neighborhood life.

If neighborhood types are ordered along a spectrum based on poverty rates, then it could be said that neighborhoods with high concentrations of Black middle-class households range from *disadvantaged* to *advantaged*. In the middle of this spectrum, *unstable* neighborhoods are close to, but distinct from, disadvantaged neighborhoods and *stable* neighborhoods are those between unstable and advantaged on the poverty classification spectrum. In this article, disadvantaged neighborhoods are 2016 ACS census tracts that have a poverty rate of 20 percent or higher according to the standard set by the US Office of Health and Human Services. Unstable neighborhoods are census tracts with a poverty rate ranging from 12.5-19.99 percent. Stable neighborhoods are

those with a 5-12.49 percent poverty rate, while advantaged neighborhoods are census tracts with a poverty rate that is less than 5 percent.

I analyze the relationship between the concentration of BMC households and spatial poverty by using census data and GIS mappings to frame my focus on the qualitative differences between the wide array of neighborhoods that members of Louisville's Black middle-class call home. I present the distribution of BMC census tracts along poverty classifications ranging from disadvantaged (20-39.99% poverty rate), to unstable (12.5-19.99% poverty rate), to stable (5-12.49% poverty rate), to advantaged (0-4.99% poverty rate). I also highlight differences between three neighborhood types: *disadvantaged*, *marginally middle-class*, and *identifiably middle-class,* through a statistical focus on the top-five census tracts for each neighborhood type, based on the proportion of Black middle-class households. For contextual purposes, I will also offer a brief comparison of how Louisville compares with its Like-UAs with respect to the distribution of Black middle-class neighborhoods along poverty categories.

Methods and Analysis

The 2016 *American Community Survey* (ACS) serves as the primary source for the socioeconomic and racial demographic data, while the data on subsidized housing units comes from publicly available HUD sources that are furnished through ArcGIS, a geographical information system that is maintained by Esri (2019). Black middle-class households are those identified as 'Black/African American Alone' by the ACS who earn an annual household income between $75,000 and $149,999. Black middle-class neighborhoods are census tracts with a relatively high proportion of Black middle-class households, with this proportion based on the number of Black middle-class households living within the census tract combined with the population weight of the census tract relative to the UA population. Spatial poverty consists of the census tract's poverty rate and the concentration of households using housing choice vouchers, which is the subsidized housing program that receives the largest share of funding from HUD (Chaskin et al. 2012).

A series of GIS mappings are used to graphically represent the extent of spatial poverty for BMC census tracts. This is done by uploading poverty rate related census tract data to ArcGIS and using this program's features to integrate poverty to shapefiles downloaded from the US Census Bureau website and by accessing the housing choice voucher data from HUD made available by ESRI, as explained earlier. The same uploading procedures notwithstanding, the median home value for each census tract in the BMC sample will also be graphically represented to further highlight the geographical concentration of advantage and disadvantage. Lastly, using the distribution of census tracts along poverty classifications as a heuristic, I formulate a GIS scorecard based on

how each census tract was rank-ordered in terms of their poverty rates, the concentration of housing choice voucher households, median home values, and the concentration of homeownership. After rank-ordering the census tracts along each of the metrics outlined, they are classified into groups that consist of the same number of census tracts that were found to be disadvantaged, unstable, stable, and advantaged, based on poverty rates. Each individual census tract receives a score from 1-4, based on its ranking and classification. Then, after the scores for each census tract are summed and averaged, their scores are rounded to the nearest integer and mapped using ArcGIS.

In addition to the analyzing BMC census tracts along poverty rate classifications ranging from disadvantaged---advantaged, I also categorize BMC census tracts into three neighborhood types: *disadvantaged*, *marginally middle-class*, and *identifiably middle-class*. Disadvantaged BMC neighborhoods are definitionally the same, census tracts with a poverty rate of 20 percent or above. Marginally middle-class neighborhoods are those with a poverty rate below 20 percent that do not qualify as identifiably middle class, while identifiably middle-class neighborhoods are those found to have high concentrations of homeownership, college-educated individuals, and households that earn an annual household income between $75,000 and $149,999.

My analysis of the top-five census tracts for each of the three neighborhood types I identified (disadvantaged, marginally middle-class, and identifiably middle-class) feature a historical analysis that ranges from the year 2000 – 2016. Along this general range of years, the years 2000, 2010, 2013, and 2016 of the ACS serve as my time points. The racial/ethnic demography of these census tracts is broken down into four racial/ethnic categories: Whites (non-Latino/Hispanic), Blacks, Asians, and Latina/os,

with my primary focus being White and Black households, given the low percentage of Asian and Latina/o households. The socioeconomic indicators that I focus on are poverty rates, median household incomes, and median home values at the census tract level, relative to the same indicators at the Louisville metropolitan area (UA) level.

Findings

I begin this summary of my analytical findings by showing the distribution of Black middle-class (BMC) households in Louisville by neighborhood poverty classification (advantaged---disadvantaged). Then, I compare the Louisville UA with its Like-UAs in terms of how its Black middle-class households are distributed along poverty classifications. This brief comparison helps contextualize poverty-related BMC neighborhood dynamics operating in Louisville to Like-UAs

Next, I switch gears by presenting geographical renderings of the relationship between BMC neighborhoods and spatial poverty. In addition to showing this spatial relationship by layering BMC neighborhoods according to their poverty rates and the concentration of housing choice voucher households within or adjacent to their neighborhoods, I also graphically represent the median home values of BMC neighborhoods. Lastly, I create a GIS scorecard that is inclusive of the three measures, plus the concentration of homeownership found in each neighborhood. The results of this GIS scorecard are then mapped using the ArcGIS application as a more nuanced way of showing how neighborhood geographies interconnect with neighborhood inequalities, compared to using only poverty rates as a metric of disadvantage.

I conclude this section with a historical analysis of the top-5 neighborhoods segmented by neighborhood types. Analyzing neighborhoods from this standpoint reveals the degree that disadvantaged, marginally middle-class, and identifiably middle-class neighborhoods change over time with respect to their socioeconomic and racial demographic characteristics. A detailed look at the socioeconomic characteristics of census tracts by neighborhood type reveals both the social consequences of living in one neighborhood type versus another as well as the width of the socioeconomic gaps between neighborhood types. Patterns related to the stability and volatility of socioeconomic dynamics according the neighborhood type portend what may lie ahead for neighborhoods suspended between disadvantaged and prototypically middle-class.

In Figure 18 (see next page), we see that the distribution of Black middle-class households does not resemble a normal curve, due to the percentage of BMC households that lived in disadvantaged neighborhoods, resulting in an uptick instead of a downward pattern synonymous with normal curves. That said, three out of four BMC households lived in less poor neighborhoods and 54.6 percent lived in neighborhoods that were either stable or advantaged.

Figure 18. Distribution of BMC Households by Poverty Rate Classifications
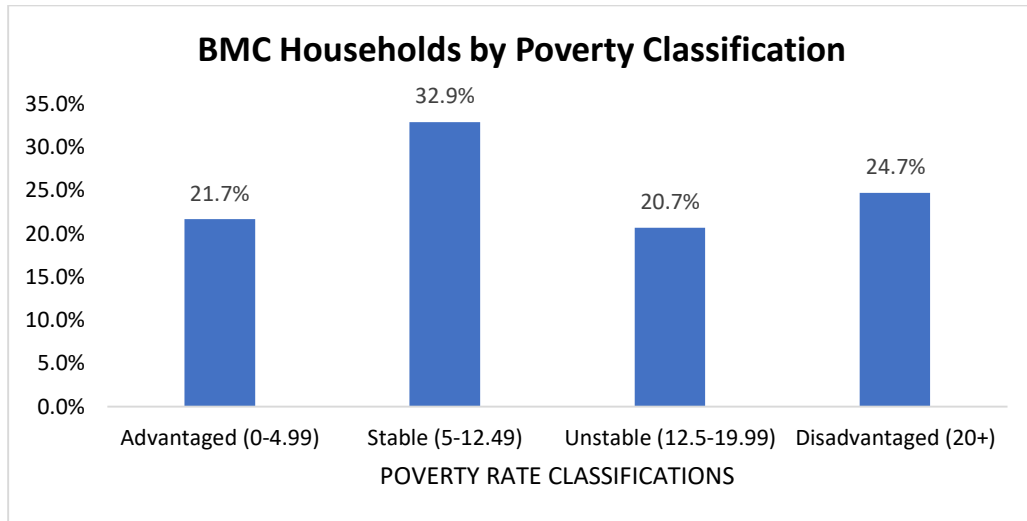
SOURCE: US Census, 2012-2016 5-year Estimates American Community Survey

When I compared the Louisville UA distribution with those of its Like-UAs in terms of Black population characteristics, I determined that Louisville had the highest percentage of BMC households who lived in advantaged neighborhoods, but ranked third among the UAs with respect to the percentage of households living in disadvantaged neighborhoods. In regard to the middle categories ranging from stable to unstable, there are strong similarities between Louisville and Kansas City, while the BMC households in Nashville and Raleigh are highly concentrated in these middle categories at 77.1 percent and 77.9 percent, respectively (see Figure 19 on next page).

SOURCE: US Census, 2012-2016 5-year Estimates American Community Survey

Additionally, when it comes to tracing the linear pattern of the distribution, Louisville is comparable to the Kansas City UA, while Nashville is comparable to Raleigh in terms of having a pattern that approximates a normal distribution. I display these patterns more clearly in Figures 20 and 21 (see next page). The findings I discussed in the first article suggest that the distribution of BMC households along neighborhood poverty classifications is tied to the level of middle-class segregation that occurs within an UA. The segregation indices for Louisville (.422) and Kansas City (.478) were found to be the highest among the Like-UAs and to be at the moderate-to-high level, heuristically. Nashville's middle-class segregation index (.338) was found to be at a moderate level, while Raleigh's was found to be relatively low (.234).

Figure 20. Louisville-Kansas City Comparison of BMC Households Distribution

LOU-KC Distribution of BMC Households
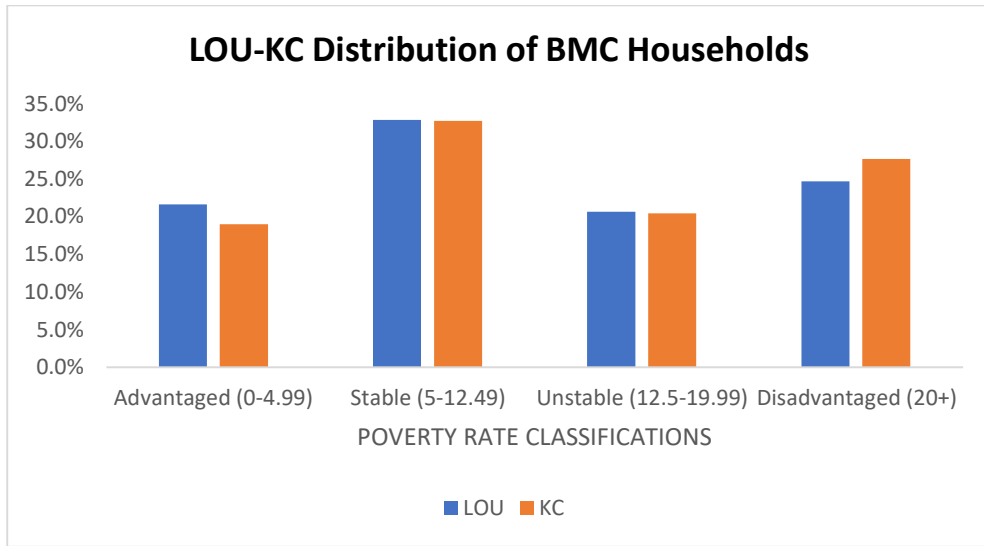
SOURCE: US Census, 2012-2016 5-year Estimates American Community Survey

Figure 21. Nashville-Raleigh Comparison of BMC Households Distribution

NASH-RALE Distribution of BMC Households
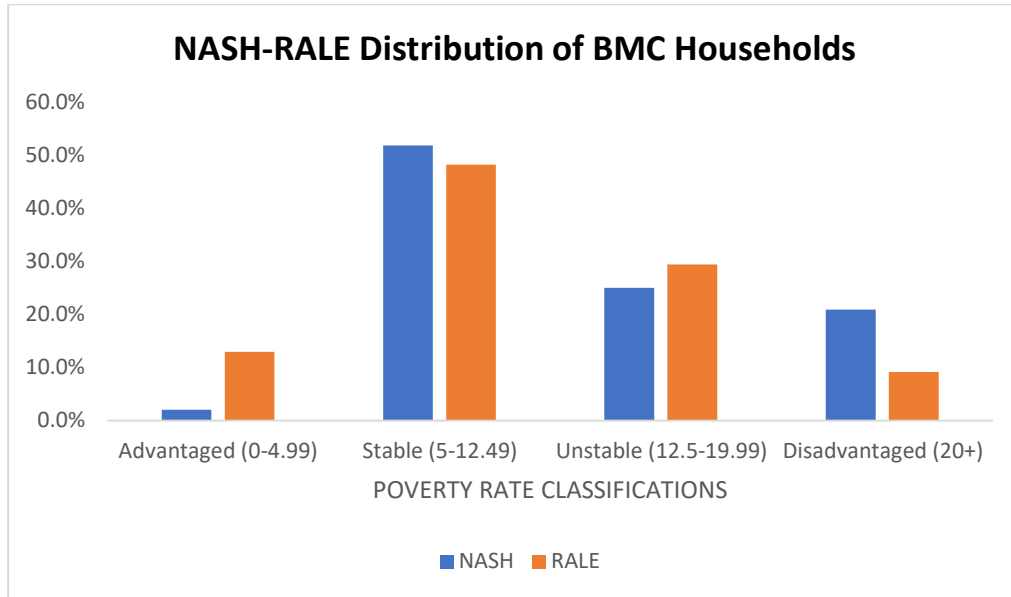
SOURCE: US Census, 2012-2016 5-year Estimates American Community Survey

BMC Neighborhoods and Spatial Poverty through GIS Mappings

In terms of mapping the relationship between spatial poverty and Black middle-class neighborhoods that is most likely a product of racialized middle-class segregation, I began by determining the number of census tracts that qualify as Black middle class within the Louisville UA. Using 2016 ACS data, I determined through my sample of the census tracts with the highest proportion of Black middle-class households, that 36 census tracts are sufficient to represent at least half of all such households residing in the UA.

Spatially, these census tracts tend to lie on the periphery of the central city's core (see Graphic 2 on next page). Among these 36 census tracts, there are no definitive patterns in terms of clustering, which indicates a spatial form of heterogeneity among neighborhoods in which BMC households reside. That said, Census Tract 126.01, in the darkest purple in the western portion of Graphic 2, was by far the census tract with the highest proportion of BMC households, outnumbering the census tract with the second-highest proportion by 254 households.

Graphic 2. Proportion of BMC Households in BMC Neighborhoods
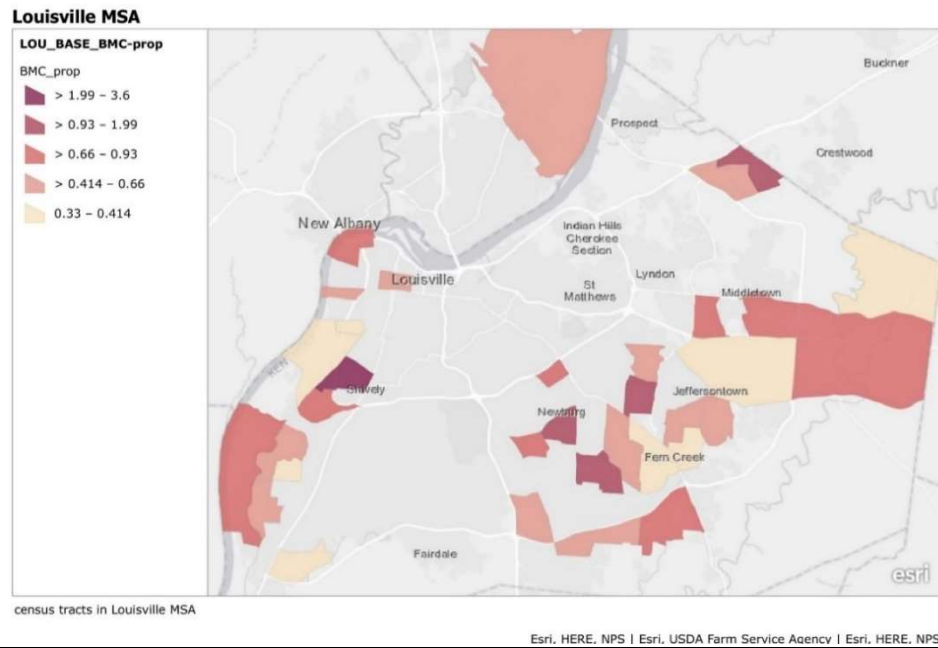
SOURCE: US Census, 2012-2016 5-year Estimates American Community Survey

The first step in analyzing the relationship between high concentrations of Black middle-class households and spatial poverty, according to ACS 2016 data, is looking at the poverty rates of Black middle-class neighborhoods themselves. As discussed in the methods section, BMC neighborhoods are classified into four categories based on their poverty rates: disadvantaged (n=8), unstable (n=6), stable (n=14), and advantaged (n=8). In this respect, I was able to determine that there are definitive spatial patterns when it comes to neighborhood poverty within BMC neighborhoods (see Graphic 3 on next page). First, it is clear that the most impoverished BMC neighborhoods are located in the northwestern and central regions of Louisville Metro, the county-merged city that anchors the UA. Both regions of the city feature high concentrations of Black and low-income households. Interestingly, only three out of the eight BMC neighborhoods

classified as disadvantaged had been redlined in the 1938 Residential Security Maps

produced by the HOLC (Poe 2017).

Graphic 3. Neighborhood Poverty within BMC Neighborhoods
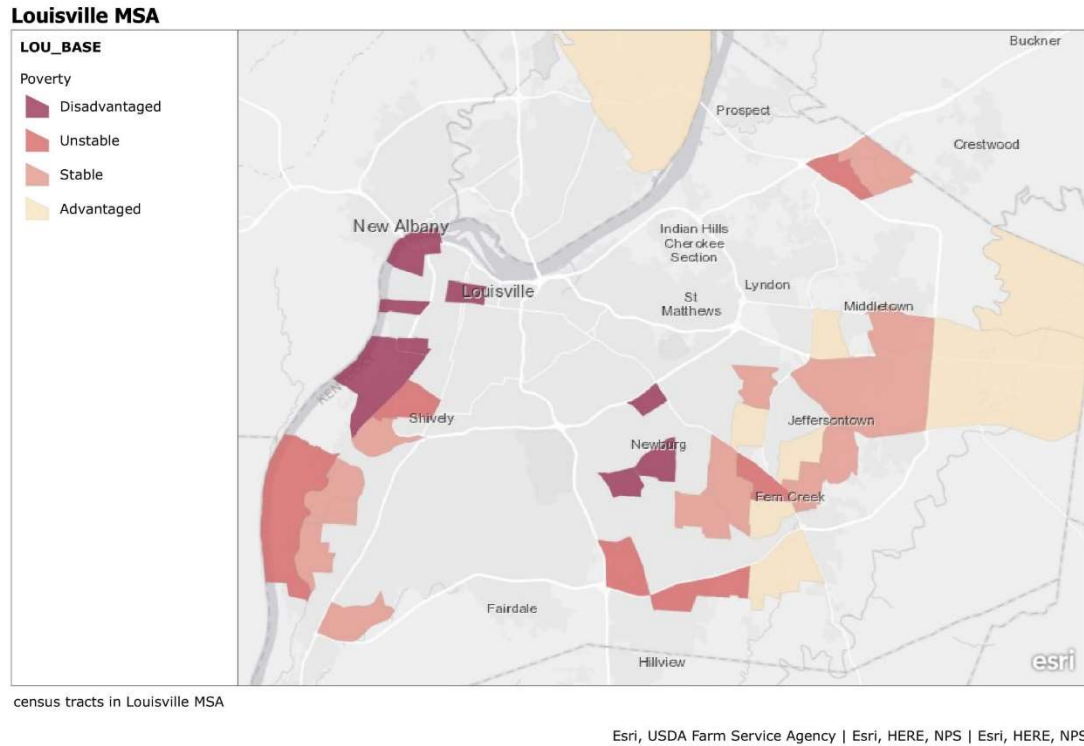
The spatial patterns associated with unstable and stable neighborhoods are more

diffuse. That said, one noteworthy pattern is the sense of continuity between the

impoverished northwest neighborhoods and the neighborhoods flowing southward.

Census Tract 126.01, with the highest concentration of BMC households, is classified as

unstable along with Census Tract 127.03 on the southwestern edge of the Louisville

Metro boundary. The remaining BMC census tracts in the southwestern region are all

classified as stable, in terms of their neighborhood poverty rate and share this

classification with census tracts throughout the UA. But what distinguishes these stable

southwestern census tracts from their BMC counterparts in the east is their lack of proximity to advantaged BMC census tracts. Each of the BMC census tracts classified as advantaged, due to low poverty rates, are in the eastern portion of Louisville Metro or in southern Indiana.

Alongside neighborhood poverty rates, the other major dimension of spatial poverty that I used to determine Black middle-class proximity to spatial poverty is the concentration of federally subsidized housing units within and around BMC neighborhoods. Graphic 4 (see next page) shows definitive spatial patterns with respect to the concentration of housing choice voucher (HCV) households within BMC neighborhoods. This spatial pattern is similar to the pattern found for neighborhood poverty levels, with a few distinctions.

First, I determined that two census tracts in particular were heavily concentrated with HCV households, namely Census Tract 24.00 in the northwest and Census Tract (CT) 113.02 in the central region of Louisville Metro. There is a gap of 80 households between the census tracts with the second- and third-highest HCV concentrations, which is by far the largest gap in the number of HCV households between any two census tracts. The classification of neighborhoods headed by the census tract with the third-highest HCV concentration, in the second-darkest hue, cluster in the northwestern part of the city, but another census tract with the same classification shares a boundary with CT 113.02.

Graphic 4. BMC Neighborhoods by Concentration of Housing Choice Vouchers

census tracts in Louisville MSA

Esri, HERE, NPS | Esri, USDA Farm Service Agency | Esri, HERE, NPS
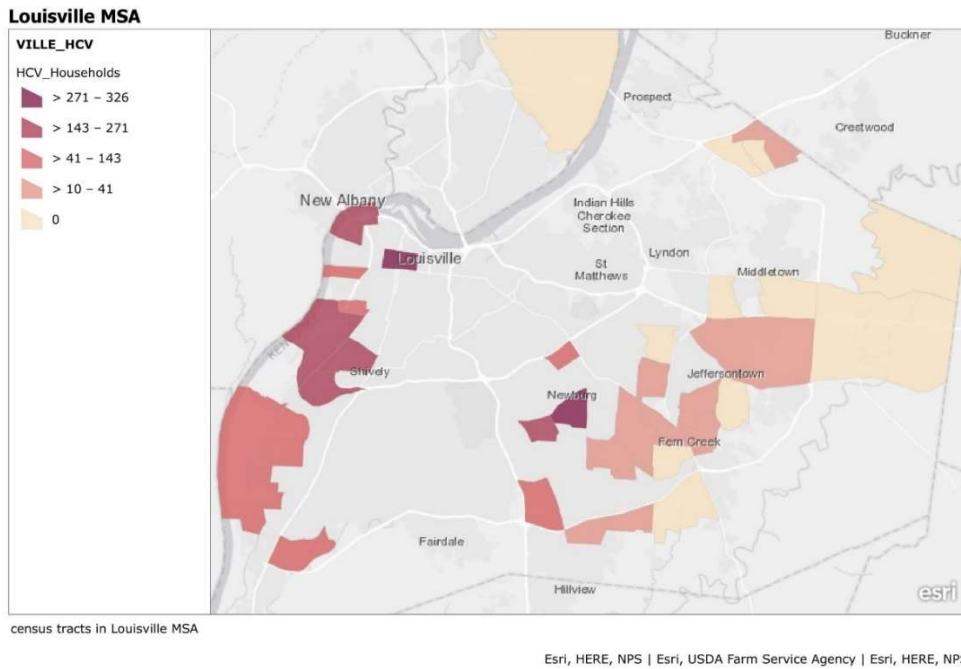
SOURCE: US Census, 2012-2016 5-year Estimates American Community Survey

The second distinction between the neighborhood poverty rates and the concentration of HCV households is the positioning of CT 126.01 and CT 126.04, tracts that were classified as unstable and stable, respectively. Both of these census tracts are classified as having heavy concentrations of HCV households. Out of the 36 census tracts, CT 126.01 ranks fifth on the list, while CT 126.04 ranks fourth. Both of these census tracts are in close proximity to Shively, which is labeled on the map. Census tracts classified as being in the middle with respect to HCV concentration are especially clustered in the southwestern part of the city, with a few tracts in the northwest and central regions sharing this classification. Again, census tracts with relatively low concentrations of HCV households are in the eastern part of the city, in close proximity to BMC neighborhoods with no HCV households.

While the housing choice voucher program is the primary way that federally subsidized housing is distributed today, public housing buildings are still in use. Graphic 5 (see below) displays the spatial relationship between BMC neighborhoods layered according to HCV concentration and how public housing buildings are clustered throughout the Louisville UA. Once again, it is clear to see that the most substantial and numerous public housing building clusters are located in the northwestern region of city, even spilling over into New Albany, a city in southern Indiana that is bridge-accessible from northwest Louisville. Of greater significance is CT 14.00, a neighborhood that underwent a seismic transformation through the HOPE VI program that maintains a heavy concentration of public housing units. Census Tract 14.00 becomes a confounding neighborhood given its relatively high median home value compared to nearby neighborhoods, if we fail to factor in the number of public housing units within its borders and its purposively created mixed-income character.

Graphic 5. BMC Neighborhoods by Concentration of Federally Subsidized Housing
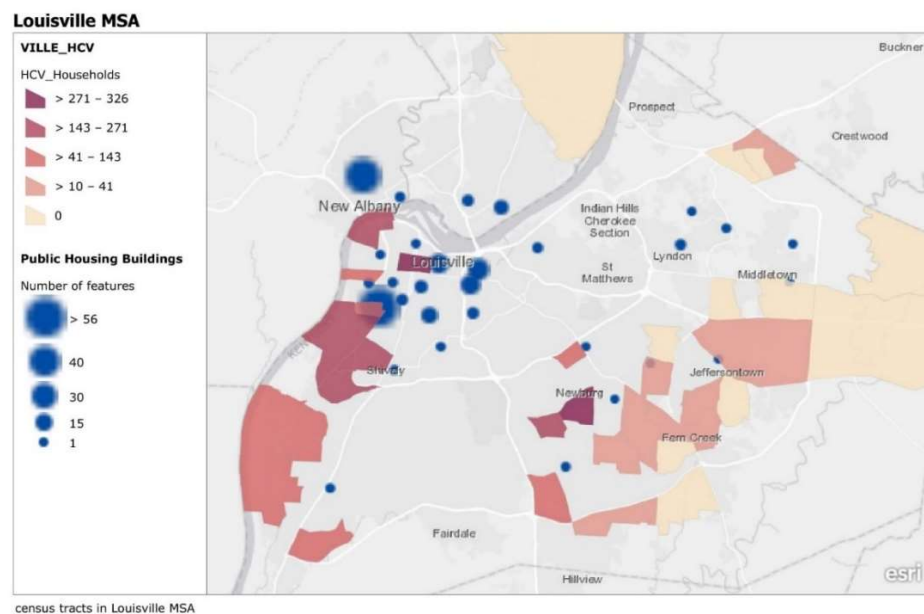
SOURCE: US Census, 2012-2016 5-year Estimates American Community Survey

The spatial pattern associated with median home values is much aligned with those discussed previously. In the same manner that one or two census tracts have stood out in previous measures, the two most eastern census tracts, CT 103.07 and CT 116.01, stand out as having especially high median home values (see Graphic 6 below). The one with the lesser median home value (116.01) is separated from the BMC census tract in third place (CT 107.05) by over $100,000 in this respect. In the northwest region of Louisville Metro, CT 14.00 stands out as the only neighborhood with a moderate median home value, one that surpasses not only close-by neighborhoods in the northwest, but also many of the southwestern neighborhoods. Overall, it is clear the highest median home values cluster in the eastern region of the city and, in general, cascade downward when attention is turned westward.

Graphic 6. BMC Neighborhoods by Median Home Values
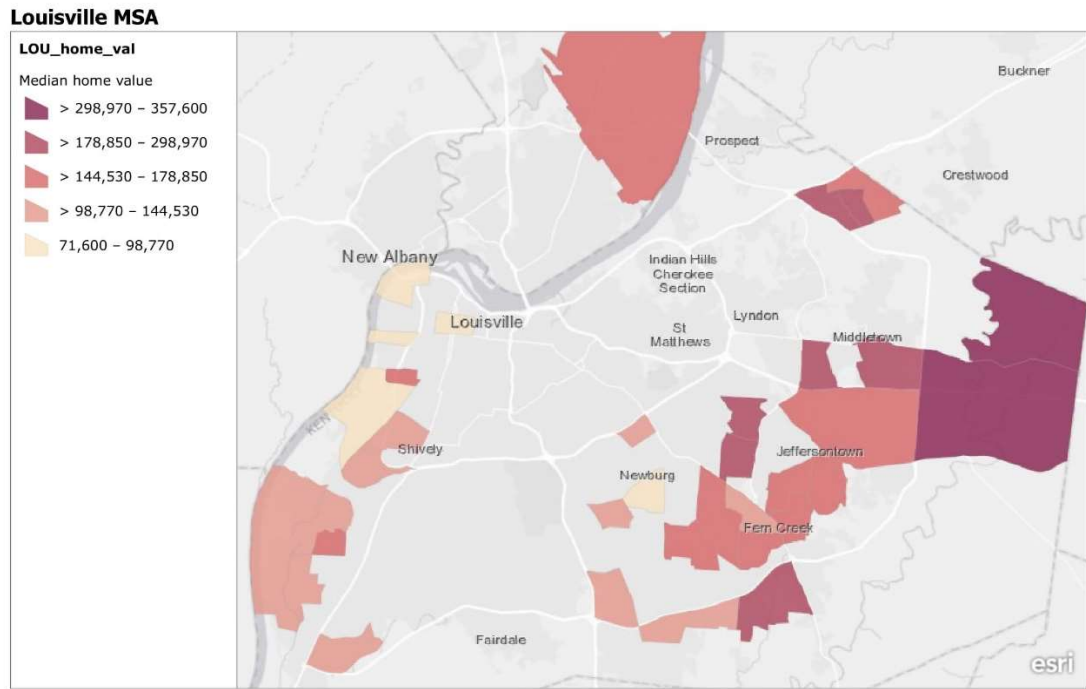
SOURCE: US Census, 2012-2016 5-year Estimates American Community Survey

There are clearly strong spatial patterns when it comes to the distribution of BMC neighborhoods and poverty-related characteristics. Additionally, the findings indicate that there is an association between spatial poverty and median home values, as one would expect. However, census tracts that run counter to expectation were also found, which brings into question the reliability of using poverty rates alone to signify neighborhood disadvantage. With this in mind, I employed a scorecard-based analysis to both pinpoint discrepancies between neighborhood poverty rates and other indicators of spatial disadvantage and to put forth a spatial map that may be more congruent with a BMC neighborhood's true standing within the complex of neighborhood-based stratification.

The *GIS Scorecard* is arranged using the distributional assumptions of the neighborhood poverty classifications. This done primarily to maintain the disadvantaged—advantaged classification scheme, while presenting the categorical alignment of BMC census tracts in a more nuanced way with respect to concentrated disadvantage and advantage. In essence, based on the number of census tracts found for each neighborhood poverty classification, each census tract is rank-ordered by *HCV concentration*, *median home value*, and *the concentration of homeownership* and placed into the requisite category along the disadvantaged—advantaged classification scheme. The concentration of homeownership is added to represent a key characteristic of middle-class neighborhood life that is used to identify prototypical middle-class neighborhoods. The original poverty rate-based classification is also included in the scorecard. In Table 9 (see next page), I provide a clear illustration of how the GIS Scorecard is organized.

Table 9. GIS Scorecard Classification Scheme

Classification	Pov. Classification	HCV Households	Med. Home Value	Homeownership
1 - Disadvantaged	Bottom 8	Bottom 8	Bottom 8	Bottom 8
2 - Unstable	Mid-bottom 6	Mid-bottom 6	Mid-bottom 6	Mid-bottom 6
3 - Stable	Mid-top 14	Mid-top 14	Mid-top 14	Mid-top 14
4 - Advantaged	Top 8	Top 8	Top 8	Top 8

Once the census tracts were rank-ordered and classified in alignment with each of the spatial measures, the numerical values of their classifications were summed and averaged, and then rounded to the nearest integer to correspond with the particular classification (see Table 9 above). The results were then uploaded into ArcGIS to produce a spatial mapping of the scorecard. Generally speaking, the mapping of the GIS Scorecard closely aligns with previous renderings of the BMC census tracts. The most disadvantaged census tracts remained in the northwestern and central regions of the city, while the most advantaged census tracts are clustered in the eastern region (see Graphic 7 on next page).

Graphic 7. BMC Neighborhoods by GIS Scorecard Classifications
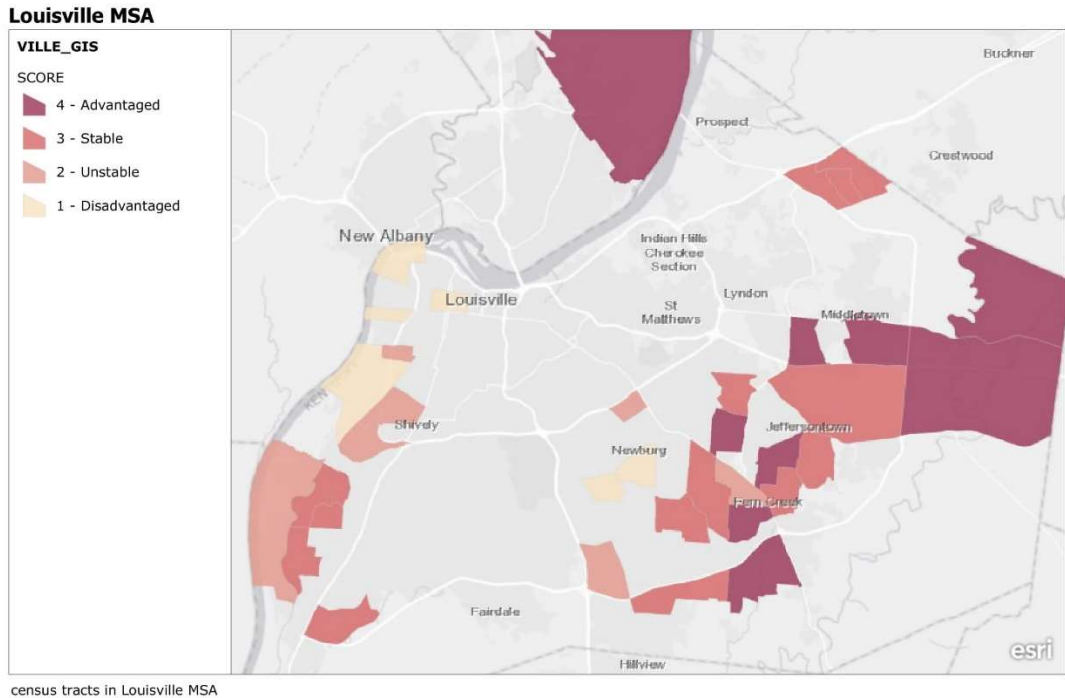
However, one discrepancy that was immediately noticeable is the number of census tracts that fell under each classification. The number of disadvantaged census tracts dropped from eight to six when the GIS Scorecard was applied. The number of unstable census tracts changed from six to seven, and the number of advantaged census tracts changed from eight to nine. Although individual census tracts originally classified as stable switched categories, the total number of census tracts under that category remained the same (n=14).

Census tracts 14.00, shown us the lone northwest census tract classified as unstable and CT 112.00 (classified as unstable in the middle of Graphic 6) have the distinction of being originally classified as disadvantaged, but having their classifications changed to the unstable classification. In the case of CT 14.00, its higher-level

classification was due to the neighborhood's relatively high median home value and its comparatively low number of HCV households. An intricate aspect of CT 14.00 is the fact that it is a HOPE VI neighborhood with a large number of public housing units. Still, even if public housing was included and CT 14.00 was scored as a '1' for the subsidized housing measure, it would still have a score of 1.5, which would round its score to a '2,' meaning that it would still be classified as unstable instead of disadvantaged. In the case of CT 112.00, in the central region of Louisville, its change from disadvantaged to unstable was due to its relatively moderate concentration of homeownership and HCV households.

Two census tracts that were originally classified as unstable (CT 103.19 and CT 117.07), due to their poverty rates, were classified at a higher level due to their relatively high median home values and their relatively low number of HCV households. Census Tract 117.07 also registered a relatively high concentration of homeownership. On the other hand, the one census tract that was classified as stable, but whose classification changed in a downward direction was CT 126.04. This was due to its relatively low median home value and its relatively high number of HCV households. Lastly, CT 104.02 was a census tract that was originally classified as stable, but its classification changed to advantaged due to its relatively high concentration of homeownership, its relatively high median home value, and its low number of HCV households.

When BMC households are distributed across GIS Scorecard classifications rather than neighborhood poverty classifications, some distinct patterns emerge. First, the pattern of the figure resembles a normal distribution, unlike the pattern found for the neighborhood poverty classifications (see Figure 22 on next page).

<u>Figure 22. Distribution of BMC Households by GIS Scorecard Classification</u>

Distribution of BMC Households by GIS Score
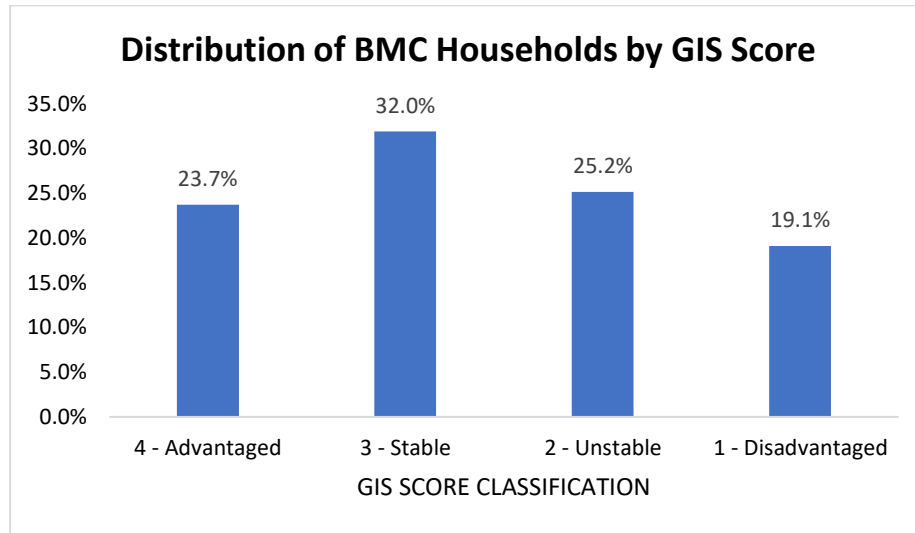
SOURCE: US Census, 2012-2016 5-year Estimates American Community Survey

There is an increase in the number of BMC households in the advantaged neighborhood category compared to the original classification and a decrease in the number of BMC households in the disadvantaged category (see Figure 23 on the next page). Additionally, there are more BMC households in the unstable category compared to the original distribution and less households in the stable category.

Figure 23. Comparison of BMC Household Distributions (GIS Scorecard and Original Poverty Rate Classification)

Distribution of BMC Households Comparison

Category	GIS Scorecard	Poverty Rate
4 - Advantaged	23.7%	21.7%
3 - Stable	32.0%	32.9%
2 - Unstable	25.2%	20.7%
1 - Disadvantaged	19.1%	24.7%
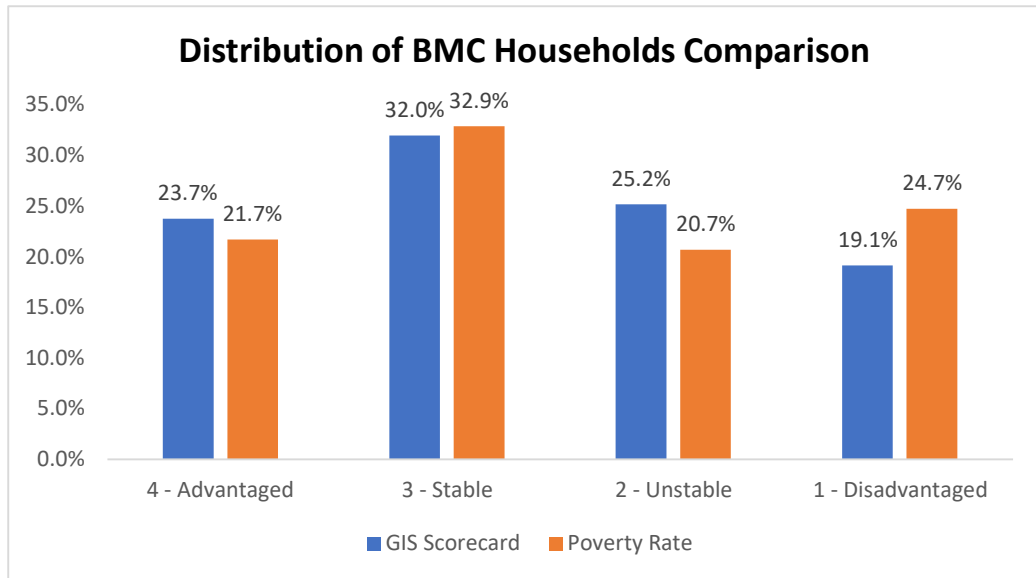
SOURCE: US Census, 2012-2016 5-year Estimates American Community Survey

Historical Analysis of Top-5 Census Tracts

The findings presented so far have demonstrated that Black middle-class households lived in a diverse array of neighborhood types across the Louisville UA, including neighborhoods that are considered poor, given the number of households that live below the poverty rate. In addition, the findings have shown that the inclusion of additional measures related to the socioeconomic characteristics of neighborhoods provides a more textured view of BMC census tracts. However, this robust data is admittedly limited to 2016, and therefore, represents a snapshot of neighborhood dynamics that have been shaped by the past.

In acknowledgement of this reality, I have spotlighted the time period ranging from the year 2000 to 2016 and focused attention on the top-five most representative

census tracts for three neighborhood categories: disadvantaged neighborhoods,

marginally middle-class neighborhoods, and identifiably middle-class neighborhoods.

For data availability purposes, I have limited this analysis to census tracts delineated by

the US Census Bureau in the year 2000 or earlier. The 15 census tracts subsequently

identified represent 60.2 percent of the BMC households sampled (see Figure 24 below).

Of the three neighborhood categories, the highest percentage of BMC households lived in

marginally middle-class neighborhoods.

Figure 24. Percentage of BMC Households in Top-5 Tracts by Neighborhood Type

BMC Households by Top-5 Neighborhood Type

Neighborhood Type	Percentage
ID-MC	19.4%
Marg-MC	23.8%
BMC-Disadv	17.0%
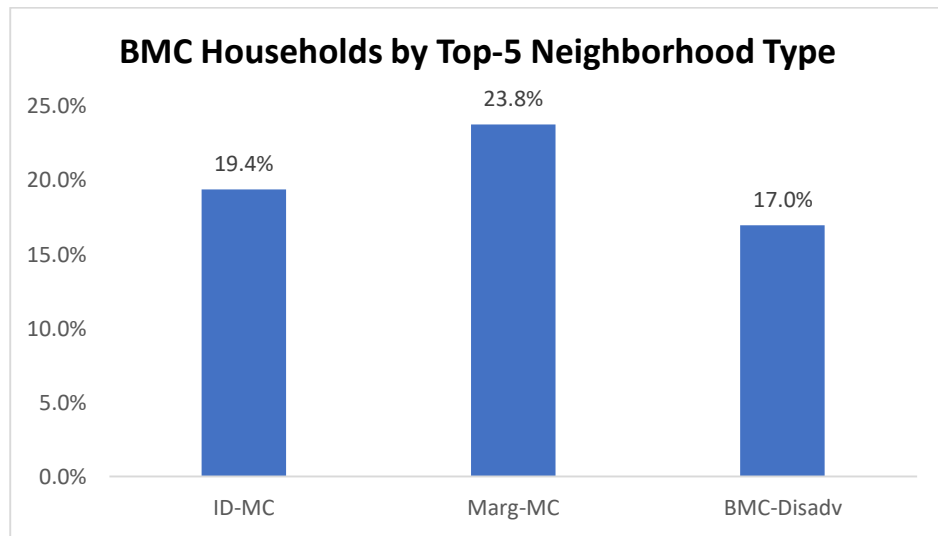
SOURCE: US Census, 2012-2016 5-year Estimates American Community Survey

There is also a noticeable geographic component to the clustering of Black

middle-class households by neighborhood type. As I discussed in the previous section,

the central and northwest regions of Louisville Metro are where the disadvantaged Black

middle-class neighborhoods are located (see Table 10 on next page). In the case of

marginally middle-class neighborhoods, outside of the southern Indiana census tract,

these neighborhoods cluster in the southwest and west-central parts of the city. Lastly, the

identifiably middle-class neighborhoods are all clustered in the east. Even in a scenario

where census tracts formed since 2010 are included, this geographical pattern still holds. Four of the top-five census tracts in the marginally middle-class category would remain concentrated in the west-southwest area of the city and the top-five identifiably middle-class census tracts would all remain in the east.

Table 10. Geography of Top-Five Census Tracts by Neighborhood Type

	DISADVANTAGED		MARGINALLY MIDDLE-CLASS		IDENTIFIABLY MIDDLE-CLASS	
RANK	CENSUS TRACT	GEOGRAPHY	CENSUS TRACT	GEOGRAPHY	CENSUS TRACT	GEOGRAPHY
1	CT 113.02	Central	CT 126.01	West-Central	CT 103.11	Northeast
2	CT 112.00	Central	CT 126.04	West-Central	CT 115.05	Southeast
3	CT 4.00	Northwest	CT 127.03	Southwest	CT 116.01	East
4	CT 114.05	Central	CT 507.01	So. Indiana	CT 107.05	East
5	CT 11.00	Northwest	CT 124.07	Southwest	CT 104.02	East

The historical analysis of these top-five census tracts includes data from the 2000 Census and ACS data for years 2010, 2013, and 2016. When it comes to racial makeup, there have been noticeable changes in the percentages of Black and White households residing in top-five census tracts since the year 2000, and these changes vary by neighborhood type. The percentage point differences in Black and White households for 2016 when compared to 2000 is determined by subtracting the percentage of households living in the neighborhood in 2016 from the 2000 percentage. In Table 11 (see next page), I display the race-based changes in the percentage of households among the census tracts once they are summed and averaged in accordance with neighborhood type.

Table 11. Changes in Black and White Percentage by Neighborhood Type (2000 – 2016)

Neighborhood	Average White			Average Black		
	2000	2016	Change (%)	2000	2016	Change (%)
Disadvantaged	30.6%	26.0%	-4.5%	67.6%	67.2%	-0.4%
Marginally-MC	85.8%	67.2%	-18.6%	13.2%	30.8%	+17.6%
Identifiably-MC	87.3%	79.2%	-8.1%	9.6%	12.9%	+3.3%

SOURCE: US Census, Census 2000 Summary File 3; 2012-2016 5-year Estimates American Community Survey

In the disadvantaged neighborhoods, the percentage change numbers reflect a 4.5 percent decrease in the percentage of White households living there and a 0.4 percent decrease in Black households. The most substantial changes in the number of Black and White households occurred in marginally middle-class neighborhoods, with an 18.6 percent decrease in the percentage of White households and a 17.6 percent increase in Black households. Lastly, in identifiably middle-class households, there has been an 8.1 percent decrease in White households and a 3.3 percent increase in Black households. The absolute values of these racial percentage changes are displayed in Figure 25 below.

Figure 25. Black-White Households Percentage Change by Neighborhood Type
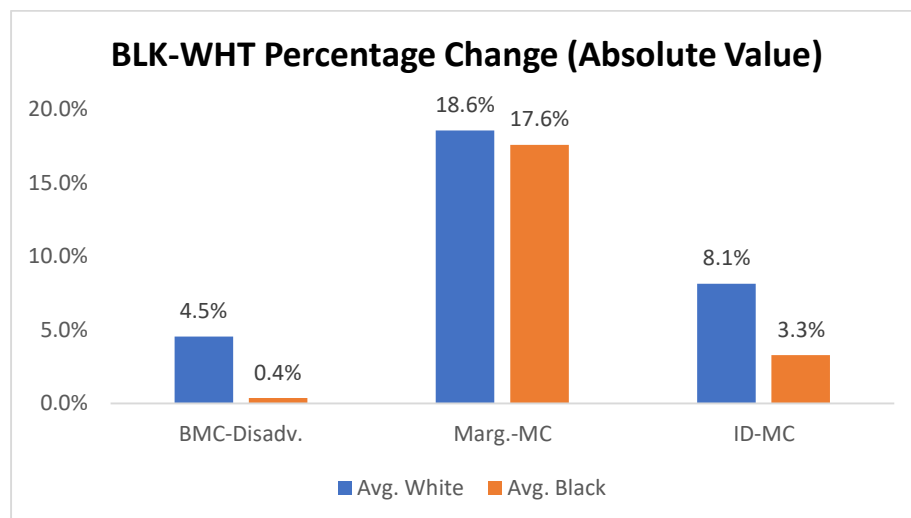
SOURCE: US Census, Census 2000 Summary File 3; 2012-2016 5-year Estimates American Community Survey

The first socioeconomic characteristic that I reviewed through a historical lens was the poverty rate and how it developed over time across neighborhood types. For comparability and standardization purposes, I used the poverty rate of the Louisville UA to anchor the poverty rate values, each value treated as a ratio of the UA poverty rate. Regardless of the neighborhood type, the poverty rates increased across the board (see Figure 26 on the next page). The largest average increase in the poverty rate relative to the UA occurred in identifiably middle-class neighborhoods. The poverty rate increases for disadvantaged and marginally middle-class neighborhoods are about the same, with the increase in marginally middle-class neighborhoods being slightly greater. One aspect of Figure 26 that stands out is the wide gap between the poverty rates in disadvantaged neighborhoods compared to both marginally middle-class and identifiably middle-class neighborhoods.

The average poverty rate in these disadvantaged neighborhoods (29.4) were found to be double the UA's poverty rate in 2016 (14.7), while the average poverty rate for marginally middle-class neighborhoods was slightly below the UA's poverty rate (12.3). In addition, while identifiably middle-class neighborhoods experienced the largest increase in neighborhood poverty, the actual poverty rate was still much below that of the UA's (7.4). This pattern suggests that the largest gap in neighborhood experiences, categorically, may be between disadvantaged and marginally middle-class neighborhoods, rather than between marginally middle-class and identifiably middle-class neighborhoods.

Figure 26. Poverty Rate Ratios by Neighborhood Type
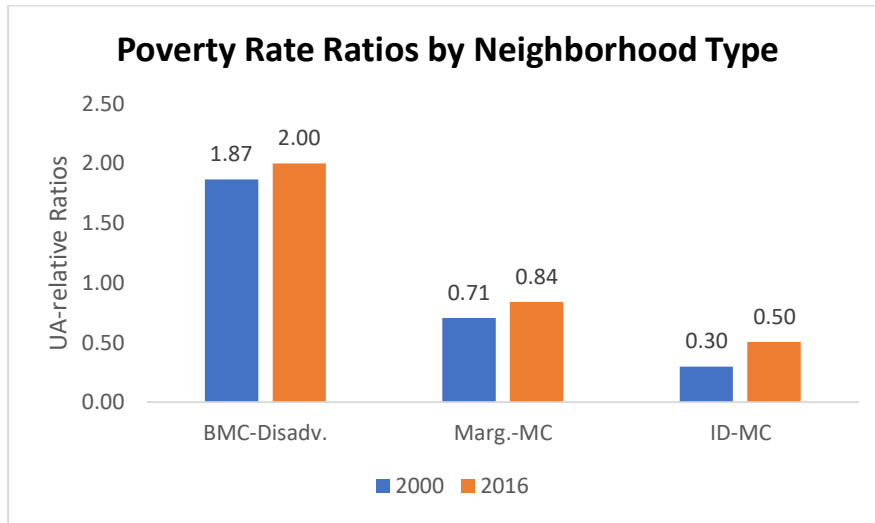
Poverty Rate Ratios by Neighborhood Type

SOURCE: US Census, Census 2000 Summary File 3; 2012-2016 5-year Estimates American Community Survey

The median household incomes and median home values for each of the top-five census tracts are aligned with the same figures for the Louisville UA and presented as ratios. Additionally, I used an inflation calculator to ensure a tight comparability of dollar figures for each year featured in this analysis. The 2000 and 2016 figures for each census tract were averaged in accordance with neighborhood type and the differences between these years were calculated. The results of these calculations are shown below in Table 12.

Table 12. Socioeconomic Decline Ratios by Neighborhood Type

Type	Median HH Income			Median Home Value		
	2000	2016	*diff.*	2000	2016	*diff.*
Disadvantaged	0.70	0.68	0.02	0.70	0.59	0.11
Marginally-MC	1.07	1.03	0.04	0.94	0.81	0.13
Identifiably-MC	1.50	1.50	0.01	1.41	1.40	0.01

SOURCE: US Census, Census 2000 Summary File 3; 2012-2016 5-year Estimates American Community Survey

Across neighborhood types, it is apparent that median household income has been stable, with the most stability found in identifiably middle-class neighborhoods. However, when it comes to median home values, there is a substantial drop-off in both disadvantaged and marginally middle-class neighborhoods. The very minimal decrease in median home value found for identifiably middle-class neighborhoods suggests that there is something specific occurring in disadvantaged and marginally middle-class neighborhoods (see Figure 27 below). Similar to the racial demography dynamics, it is clear that the most substantial socioeconomic change occurred in marginally middle-class neighborhoods.

Figure 27. Socioeconomic Change by Neighborhood Type
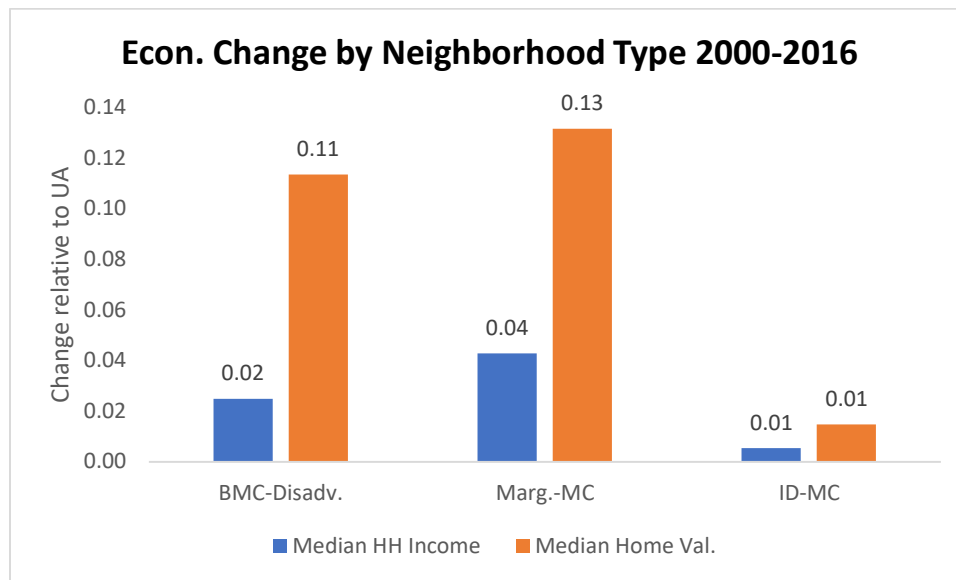
SOURCE: US Census, Census 2000 Summary File 3; 2012-2016 5-year Estimates American Community Survey

A neighborhood attribute that is often linked with the quality and middle-class character of a neighborhood is the level of homeownership. When I applied this lens to the top-five census tracts, I found that on average there was a decrease in homeownership across neighborhood types. In alignment with previous findings, the largest decrease in

homeownership was found in marginally middle-class neighborhoods (see Figure 28 below). Even when the decrease in homeownership found for the UA is considered, this citywide decrease is still surpassed by each of the decreases found for the neighborhood types.

Figure 28. Change in Homeownership for Neighborhood Types and the UA
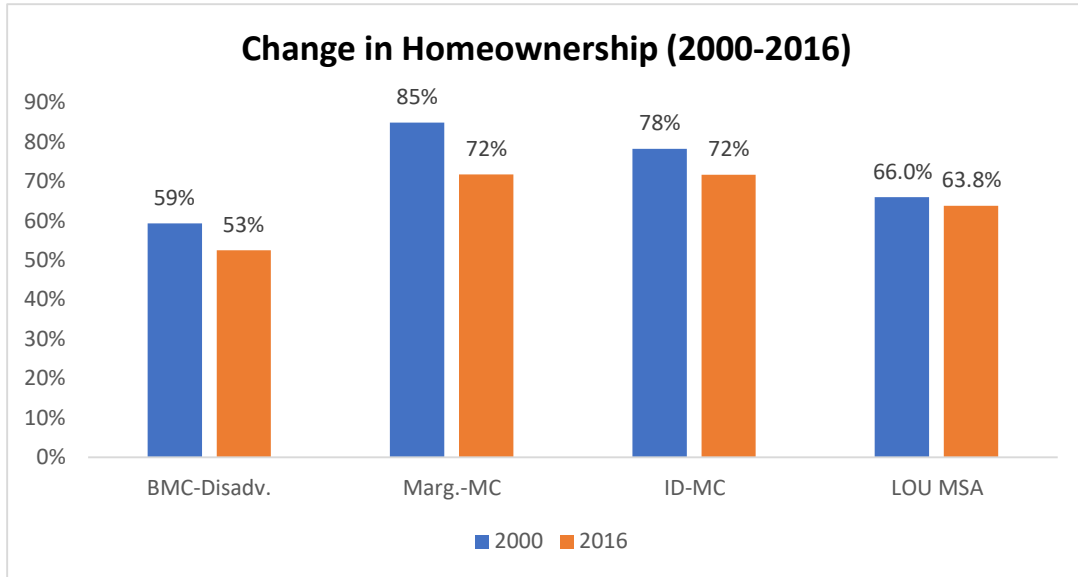
SOURCE: US Census, Census 2000 Summary File 3; 2012-2016 5-year Estimates American Community Survey

I decided to treat the decrease in homeownership for the Louisville UA as a constant to ensure that the figures for each neighborhood type represented homeownership decline in the least spurious way, which meant subtracting the UA-level decline rate from the other figures. I found that there was a 10.9 percent decline in marginally middle-class neighborhoods, while the homeownership decline found for disadvantaged and identifiably middle-class neighborhoods were very similar (see Figure 29 on next page).

Figure 29. Decline in Homeownership by Neighborhood Type
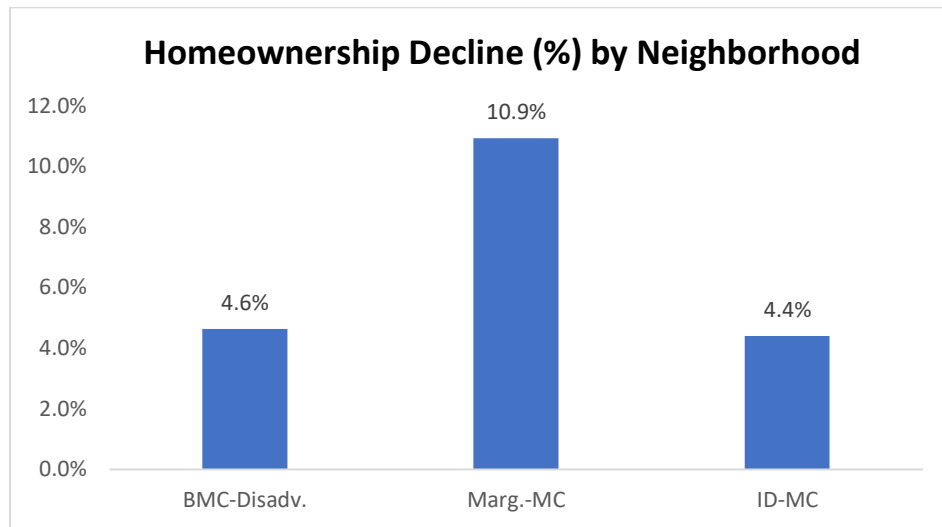
Homeownership Decline (%) by Neighborhood

BMC-Disadv.	4.6%
Marg.-MC	10.9%
ID-MC	4.4%

SOURCE: US Census, Census 2000 Summary File 3; 2012-2016 5-year Estimates American Community Survey

Discussion

The proximity of middle-class Black households to neighborhood poverty in Louisville is a complicated story. Compared to similarly sized UAs that share its Black population characteristics, the situation in Louisville is below average when we focus specifically on the number of households residing in neighborhoods considered poor. However, when we take a more textured look at the neighborhood realities where the majority of Black middle-class households within the scope of this study live, the situation improves.

From a geographical standpoint, there are some clear, enduring patterns when it comes to where areas of disadvantage, advantage, and those areas in the middle, are located. While much of the analytical findings I presented focused on 2016, when exploring the same contours historically, a lot has remained the same, especially with respect to advantaged and disadvantaged neighborhoods. Through the multiple lenses I employed, I clearly determined that the most disadvantaged BMC neighborhoods are located in the northwest of Louisville Metro and in a concentrated part of its central region. I also identified BMC neighborhoods in the eastern portion of the city as the most advantaged. Anyone familiar with Louisville's geography will see nothing compelling in these results, but what is compelling are those neighborhoods in between, those generally located in the southwestern area of the city.

I refer to these neighborhoods as marginally middle-class, due to their positionality between neighborhoods considered poor and neighborhoods considered aesthetically middle-class due to their socioeconomic and demographic characteristics. It is within these neighborhoods that we see the most volatility in terms of racial

demographic changes, median home values, and the contradictions between socioeconomic standing and subsidized housing concentration. These neighborhoods tend to have a significant percentage of Black households, a moderate poverty level, and low-to-moderate median home values. However, when considering the historical development of these neighborhoods since 2000, it becomes apparent that there has been substantial racial turnover in these neighborhoods. Additionally, the data suggests that the racial turnover in these neighborhoods does not equate to substantial change in a neighborhood's median household income, but, despite this, median home values have declined substantially in these marginally middle-class neighborhoods.

Overall, this analysis shows that the relationship between Black middle-class households and spatial poverty is linked to their geographical location within the UA and the trajectory of its racial demographic changes. Neighborhoods in the northwest already marked by poverty have remained Black and poor, with this poverty deepening in many cases. Neighborhoods in the east have remained stable in both their socioeconomic and majority-White racial characteristics. The neighborhoods in the southwest especially, have experienced a great deal of racial change relative to disadvantaged and advantaged neighborhoods, and my findings suggest that these changes have adversely affected these neighborhoods economically. Unless an intervention of some kind prevails, it seems that marginally middle-class neighborhoods will continue to decline, while more prosperous neighborhoods will continue to benefit from being a mirror image of the conventional logic that majority-White spaces in certain areas of the city are to be prized in a hoarding manner, leaving other areas to deteriorate over time.

Conclusion

The findings from this study are another indication of the heterogeneity that defines Black middle-class neighborhood life. Some of the common elements of Black middle-class neighborhood life that are reflected in this study include socioeconomic decline over time, racial turnover, and the socioeconomic and geographic stability of neighborhoods on opposite ends of the disadvantaged—advantaged spectrum. While assessing the degree that middle-class Blacks choose to live in particular neighborhoods is beyond the scope of this study, my analysis makes clear that wherever they end up will matter a great deal, due to both the social conditions they will immediately experience upon arrival and what the recent past of the neighborhood suggests for its trajectory.

My analysis of the data was multilayered, looking at patterns that define Black middle-class neighborhoods as a whole and the historical patterns pertinent to neighborhoods with the highest proportion of Black middle-class households. Both analyses, combined and reconciled, showed that there is a strong triangulation between urban geography, racial demography, and economic valuation. Out of the three neighborhood types I identified, this triangulation was disrupted the most in marginally middle-class neighborhoods due to a significant influx of Black households during the 2000 – 2016 period. The socioeconomic consequences of the in-migration of Blacks and the outmigration of Whites was a decline in median home value. The extent of this decline was misaligned with the trajectory of median household income, lending further credence to past studies that link the economic valuation of neighborhoods to its racial characteristics, specifically the presence or absence of Blacks (Howell and Korver-Glenn 2018, Rothstein 2017).

Overall, my findings speak to the multifaceted interplay between race, class, and place. The stability seen in the spatial location of disadvantaged and advantaged neighborhoods highlight the ways in which race, class, and place are conflated to mean something specific that hardly needs to be articulated. Simply referring in a colloquial way to a geographical location by using terms such as "West End" or "East End" speak volumes about the racial makeup of the neighborhood, its socioeconomic character, the recreational amenities to be anticipated, the class standing of the people who live there, and how the area should be socially navigated.

Racially transitioning neighborhoods, like racially ambiguous people we encounter in everyday life, create a sense of turmoil, primarily because they call into question our commonsense mappings of race, class, and place. The pace of racial transition operating in such neighborhoods is also a keen reminder of how material deeds betray the colorblind values that the society purports to hold dear. The manner in which social institutions at the local level solve the puzzle of racially transitioning neighborhoods also speaks volumes with respect to which element of the race/class/place mapping of neighborhoods holds the most sway. Like past studies, my findings indicate that it is race that holds the most sway, and this leads to the devaluation of neighborhoods where the Black population is increasing and the White population decreasing (Anacker 2010, Bonam, Yantis and Taylor 2020, Howell and Korver-Glenn 2018, Rothstein 2017). A place that was at one time designated a solid middle-class community, could over the course of a decade or two take on the devaluing stigma of being a "Black neighborhood." This designation in the majority of contexts ignores class diversity and adheres to a

stereotypical form of blackness that is perilous to a neighborhood's economic trajectory in a White-dominant social world.

Another troubling aspect of my findings is the seeming lack of a bottom with respect to disadvantaged neighborhoods. Relative to the Louisville UA, disadvantaged neighborhoods with high concentrations of Black middle-class households have continued to decline. Similar to the dynamic found for marginally middle-class neighborhoods, declines in median home value have outpaced declines in median household incomes to a substantial degree. Out of the three neighborhood types, this was found to be only one in which there was a net outmigration of Black households, which in 2016 signaled both a sense of hopelessness on the part of many Blacks that neighborhoods conditions will improve and a weakening of the spatial ties between disadvantaged neighborhoods and Black middle-class households.

There are a few lingering questions that may prove illuminative, but are outside of this study's scope. First, how many of the neighborhoods classified as marginally middle-class as a result of 2016 statistics could have been classified as identifiably middle-class neighborhoods in the year 2000? If even a few neighborhoods could be classified in such a way, it would say a great deal about how quickly a racial transition could trigger a collective response that is devaluing in character. Secondly, if a study operating on a similar time period could trace a racial transition based on the in-migration of Whites and the outmigration of Blacks, what impact would this form of racial transition have on a neighborhood's median home value? How would this disruption of the race/class/place triangulation be resolved?

In the next and final article, I share findings from a series of semi-structured interviews that were designed to elicit how middle-class Blacks living in BMC neighborhoods think about and identify with their neighborhoods. My definition of Black middle-class neighborhoods remains the same as well as my definition of the three neighborhood types. Additionally, the same criteria that I used to select identifiably middle-class neighborhoods are employed to select Black middle-class respondents.

Compared to the first two articles, the third article is distinctive. This is due to not only its qualitative methodology, but to the thrust of its findings as well, which indicate that Black middle-class respondents view themselves as agents of their own decision-making with respect to the neighborhoods in which they live and in how they choose to navigate within them. While the first two articles describe the socioeconomic contexts of BMC neighborhoods from a more detached viewpoint, the next article highlights how these differing contexts are experienced, interpreted, and reflexively navigated. There is undoubtedly a tension between the thrust of the findings in the first two articles and the thrust of the third, but in the larger context of the racialized social structure, this tension is to be somewhat expected given the inherent tension between structure and agency in the wider society (Giddens 1990). The facts of racial residential segregation and the interplay of race, class, and place and the limits they impose upon middle-class Blacks does not negate the reflexive and vigilant agency that these individuals may use to find neighborhoods of choice, and vice versa. This subject will be revisited in greater detail in the discussion and conclusion sections of this dissertation.

ARTICLE III:

BLACK MIDDLE-CLASS PERCEPTIONS OF NEIGHBORHOOD ATTAINMENT IN

LOUISVILLE

Research shows that Black middle-class neighborhoods—neighborhoods with

high proportions of Black middle-class households—are uniquely disadvantaged in

comparison to other middle-class neighborhoods (Adelman 2004, Alba, Logan and Stults

2000, Iceland and Wilkes 2006, Pattillo 1999, Sharkey 2014, Timberlake and Iceland

2007). A lingering question regarding this dynamic is to what extent middle-class Blacks

actively choose to live in the neighborhoods they call home and how these choices

interweave with perceptions of their intergenerational succession prospects. I sought to

address these questions by speaking directly to members of Louisville's Black middle

class. Using semi-structured interviews, the core research question I address is '*How do

members of Louisville's Black middle class perceive, assess, and interact with their

neighborhoods and connect their neighborhood perceptions and experiences to how they

envision intergenerational succession?*' The interviews were animated by a focus on the

beliefs and worldviews of the participants, especially when it comes to interconnections

between their sense of identity, neighborhood perceptions, and their visions of

intergenerational wealth (Young 2004).

This article highlights the voices of Black middle-class respondents, but also

features a quantitative analysis of respondent attributes and the socioeconomic

characteristics of their neighborhoods. In terms of respondent attributes, familial class

backgrounds, annual household incomes, and age are featured, and neighborhood-level

socioeconomic characteristics such as poverty rates, median household income, and

median home value over a historical period ranging from 2010 – 2016 are also analyzed.

Lastly, a quick comparison is made between census tract-level data and block group-level

data as it pertains to the respondents. While analyzing census tract data is a standard

practice within the research community studying neighborhoods, evidence suggests that

respondents themselves perceive their neighborhoods in ways more consistent with the

block-group level of geography.

From a theoretical standpoint, this article contextualizes the micro-level

perspectives and experiences of respondents within the racialized social structure

framework. In essence, I assert that place stratification is interwoven with the racialized

social hierarchy and it is this structure that frames much of what is said, implied, or even

unsaid by the respondents featured in this study. Whether conversations focused on

neighborhood choices or intergenerational succession, middle-class Blacks are inhibited

by the common ways that race, class, and place are geographically mapped.

Literature Review

Neighborhood life for middle-class Blacks is heterogeneous, varying both across and within UAs. Across UAs there are differences in the degree that middle-class Blacks reside in economically advantaged neighborhoods, and within UAs there are numerical differences in how many middle-class Blacks live in three general neighborhood types: advantaged neighborhoods that are synonymous with the conventional aesthetic of middle-class neighborhoods, neighborhoods dealing with moderate poverty that are aesthetically distinct from prototypical middle-class neighborhoods, and high poverty, disadvantaged neighborhoods. Most often, middle-class Blacks live in areas with moderate poverty, but are more likely to live in impoverished environments than economically-advantaged environments (Alba, Logan and Stults 2000, Sharkey 2014).

These larger dynamics help to frame individual neighborhood perceptions, but are inadequate in explaining why these tendencies are so durable. I contend that the durability of these neighborhood patterns is largely the result of push-and pull-related factors. The white flight that occurs in neighborhoods with growing Black middle-class populations is contradictory to how middle-class Blacks see themselves. Yet with a sense of irony, white flight helps to create the conditions that allow for a greater influx of Black residents who are like themselves. Black middle class desires for neighbors who are similar to them were a hallmark of the interviews that were conducted and brought to life previous research findings related to Black middle-class identities and common neighborhood perceptions (Adelman 2005, Byrnes and Henricks 2014, Lacy 2007, Lewis, Emerson and Klineberg 2011, Moore 2008, Pattillo 1999).

Black Middle-Class Identities

Black middle-class identities are fluid in nature, but there are common attributes regarding what is valued in terms of seeking community and how intergenerational futures are envisioned (Lacy 2007, Pattillo 1999). At the same time, the fluidity of Black middle-class identities is demonstrated in the differing strategies involved in drawing social boundaries and in the various ways that Blacks become middle class (Moore 2008). While the vast majority either inherit middle-class status from their parents or become middle class through upward mobility, a few fall into the Black middle class as a result of downward mobility (Chetty et al. 2018).

Middle-class Blacks demonstrate a sense of affinity for Black social spaces, whether such spaces are neighborhoods or recreational in character (Lacy 2007). In the context of majority-Black neighborhoods, members of the Black middle class enjoy a sense of freedom of movement that is unconstrained by the *white gaze* or social pressures related to being a model representation of Black people in neighborhoods with low Black populations (Bartky 1990, Jackson, Thoits and Taylor 1995, Lacy 2007). In majority-White neighborhoods, middle-class Blacks place greater emphasis on socializing with other Blacks in recreational social settings, while claiming that living in majority-White neighborhoods is a more proper way of socializing their children, since their neighborhoods are a better reflection of America as it is. Conversely, middle-class Blacks living in majority-Black settings view their neighborhoods as a more nurturing environment for their children, because they provide a barrier against anti-black racism (Lacy 2007).

Another key aspect of Black middle-class identity is the feeling of responsibility to build on the legacy of previous generations and to provide a solid foundation for the generations that will come after them (Lacy 2007). This drive is animated by both economic considerations and the transmission of social values and can be summarized by the term *Black middle-class succession*. The term succession signifies the transmission of wealth and social values to the next generation and the expectation that the next generation will, at least, maintain the social standing that they inherited from their parents. Related to the drive among the Black middle class to transmit social values is the sense that they represent the aspirational standard among Blacks as a collective, which means Blacks lower on the socioeconomic ladder are judged according to their ability to "fall in line" with the social values and prerogatives of the Black middle class (Byrnes and Henricks 2014, Du Bois 1940, Hyra 2006, Khare, Joseph and Chaskin 2015, Moore 2008, Pattillo 2007).

The sense of distinctiveness among middle-class Blacks in juxtaposition to the Black majority can be viewed as a spectrum that ranges from the erection of hardened boundaries between themselves and Blacks lower on the class rungs, and on the low-end, a mode of interaction that reflects class fluidity, or an inclusive and collaborative posture toward Blacks of all class backgrounds (Lamont and Molnar 2002, Moore 2008). These intragroup differences with respect to erecting social boundaries are most likely related to the class background of their familial households, and this connection will be explored further in my analysis of interview data (Lacy 2007, Lamont and Molnar 2002).

<u>Black Middle-Class Perception of Neighborhood Decline</u>

There are definitive patterns that emerge when it comes to how Black middle-class households navigate neighborhood life and how they perceive large-scale social dynamics that impact their neighborhood contexts. For tenured Black middle-class families who have witnessed their neighborhoods transition from majority-White to majority-Black over time, neighborhood decline is unfortunately a common theme (Bartlett 2017, Pattillo 1999). In their explanations, middle-class Blacks use a both/and approach, blaming both structural racism and the individual failings of lower-class Blacks as the primary reasons for the decline (Bartlett 2017, Byrnes and Henricks 2014).

While white flight is seen as unfortunate, what seems to draw most of the ire is the corollary retreat of services to their communities and the sense that local officials and business elites direct and redirect resources in racialized ways (Bartlett 2017, Byrnes and Henricks 2014, Logan and Molotch 1987, Pattillo 2005). A common complaint is paying property and other taxes with little to show for it in services. Whether it is publicly funded downtown revitalization efforts, relatively declining property values, or rentiers buying single-family homes to rent them out, middle-class Blacks in formerly stable neighborhoods feel that structural forces are shifting the ground beneath their feet (Bartlett 2017, Lacy 2007, Logan and Molotch 1987, Pattillo 1999). Of course, declining neighborhoods open the doors to those who in former times could not afford to live there. Such neighborhoods are especially attractive to working class Blacks seeking to separate themselves from the Black poor. From the perspective of the Black middle class, these new entrants have failed to pay the entry fee to these neighborhoods and are judged as such, while also being judged for their inability to keep up their properties or abide by

standards of Black respectability (Bartlett 2017, Byrnes and Henricks 2014, Pattillo 1999).

The Black middle class situated in declining neighborhoods show the capacity to frame their neighborhood attainment both structurally when it comes to racialized dynamics seemingly facilitated by the state, and at the micro-level with respect to lower-class Blacks not living up to middle-class standards. This raises questions related to the extent middle-class Blacks embrace *linked fate* as an element of social life to be championed. Research suggests that the 'linked fate' phenomenon is embraced by the Black middle class with respect to political mobilization, but is shunned to some extent in more private spaces. While the embrace of 'linked fate' is readily seen in Black voting patterns and championed by middle-class Blacks gentrifying Bronzeville and Harlem, the active shunning of linked fate can be seen in the reluctance of middle-class Blacks in gentrifying areas to fight the involuntary displacement of low-income Blacks in these areas or to allow them a voice in neighborhood development conversations (Dawson 1994, Hyra 2006, Khare, Joseph and Chaskin 2015, Pattillo 2007).

Related to the 'linked fate' conversation and Black middle-class perceptions of neighborhood decline is the specter of 'Section 8.' A common name for HUD's housing choice voucher program that grants subsidization for market-rate rents, several studies have highlighted Black middle-class fears that their neighborhoods or those surrounding them are being infiltrated by individuals and families that utilize this program (Bartlett 2017, Byrnes and Henricks 2014, Pattillo 1999). Some of these same studies point out that such fears may be overblown, with those being labeled as 'Section 8' recipients often being members of the Black working class (Byrnes and Henricks 2014, Pattillo 1999). If

linked fate is found to be more of a strategic play that is employed politically, rather than a cultural imperative, it would be expected that middle-class Blacks will seek community with similarly positioned Blacks and draw neighborhood boundaries between themselves and Blacks lower on the class hierarchy.

Through the semi-structured interviews, I will seek to uncover how social boundaries are erected, perceptions regarding the influence of structural racism, neighborhood standing in the context of the surrounding metropolitan area, the economic trajectory of neighborhoods, and racial makeup dynamics. My interview approach was influenced by Alford Young's (2004) method of focusing on beliefs and worldviews. Similarly, the semi-structured approach I employed made room for novel conversations animated by personal beliefs that can be traced back to my primary research question, while also ensuring that core questions were addressed in each interview. Facilitating interviews in this manner allowed for a rich exploration of neighborhood perceptions and worldviews that yields similarities among respondents as well as differences between respondents that could be partially traced to familial class backgrounds and the types of neighborhoods they call home.

The questions I asked during the interviews allowed respondents to openly explore their beliefs and worldviews concerning their sense of race/class identity, their neighborhoods, and their visions of intergenerational succession. This focus on beliefs and worldviews is critical in connecting how one's perception of their place in the social world affects how they interpret their experiences within it and the strategies that individuals employ in light of their experiences and outlooks (Young 2004).

The way that one views their race/class identity is an indication of how they see their place in the world. Later, I will explore the difference between seeing oneself as a Black person who is now middle class and seeing oneself as a member of the Black middle class and how and why this matters. There is also a relationship between identity and one's social environment. Specific to this study, the series of questions concerning neighborhood perceptions, assessments, and interactions, highlight how respondents interpret their neighborhood environments and how their interpretations are reflected in their routine actions within these contexts. Lastly, the combination of how one perceives their place in the world and how they interpret, assess, and interact within a specific social environment informs their future visions of how their lives will transpire (Young 2004). For the purposes of this study, this translates to the sense of coherence between Black middle-class identities, neighborhood perceptions and experiences, and visions of intergenerational succession.

Methods and Analysis

While the content of my interview questions were strongly influenced by Young's (2004) approach to interviewing, which emphasized the interrelations between social environments and worldviews, my methodological approach aligns with grounded theory. Grounded theory places emphasis on building theory from the data itself and making sense of the data that is collected through *coding* (Charmaz 2006). In the context of the dissertation as a unified body of work, a grounded theoretical approach seems incompatible, but with respect to the research questions animating this article and the dearth of research on the subject of Black middle-class attainment and how it connects to

visions of intergenerational succession, it is logical to build sociological insights that address the questions at the core of this article from the grassroots perceptions of study participants.

For example, the reasoning behind middle-class Blacks living in disadvantaged neighborhoods has been an ongoing puzzle in studies on the Black middle class that has been theorized, but never truly grounded in emic perceptions (Adelman 2004, Bartlett 2017, Massey and Denton 1993, Rothstein 2017). These studies tend to see the Black middle class as victims, leaving little room for their choice or agency. So, despite what the first two articles revealed about Black middle-class neighborhood attainment across Like-UAs and the spatial proximity between poor and Black middle-class households, eliciting feedback from Black middle class members themselves was a critical gap I needed to fill to holistically represent the state of Black middle-class neighborhood attainment in Louisville. This was an approach that also required fresh eyes, and this imperative is a cornerstone of grounded theory.

Ultimately, the methodological approach animating this article aligns with my belief that exploring the interconnections and sense of coherence between Black middle-class identities, neighborhood experiences and perceptions, and visions of intergenerational succession explores new territory; especially when it comes to research on Black middle-class neighborhoods. With respect to this dissertation as a body of work, this approach serves my dissertation more than it distracts, because the added layer of complexity and the tension created, provokes the need to reconcile three separate analyzes of data in a conversant and coherent manner. The ability to accomplish this feat

opens new avenues to interpreting and contextualizing elements of structure and agency in neighborhood contexts, which are social sites that are relatively narrow in scope.

The interview criteria that I utilized was purposefully aligned with the dissertation as a unified body of work with respect to the people I sought to recruit and the neighborhoods targeted, but it greatly hindered my ability to interview the number of people I originally sought to interview. In the beginning, respondents had to simultaneously have an annual household income between $75,000 and $149,999, have obtained at least a bachelor's degree, be a homeowner, and reside in just 36 of the Louisville metropolitan area's 262 census tracts with active populations in 2016. This neighborhood stipulation was based on the sample of census tracts that I classified as Black middle-class neighborhoods, due to their relatively high proportion of Black middle-class households.

I eventually relaxed the interview criteria, which allowed me to make significant progress in my recruiting efforts. Specifically, I changed the criteria from a three out of three to a two out of three criteria set regarding annual household income, college degree attainment, and homeownership. The neighborhood criteria stayed the same to ensure coherence across the three articles making up the dissertation. The aspects of the criteria that presented the greatest challenge were the neighborhood and income components. If the neighborhood criteria was more open, I am confident that my numerical goal would have been reached, but this would have caused issues with respect to the coherence of the dissertation.

I conducted thirteen interviews with respondents across Louisville Metro. Despite this relatively low number, there is significant diversity among the respondents with

respect to geographical location and neighborhood type, as determined by neighborhood poverty rates. Of the thirteen interviews, eleven were conducted with respondents that currently reside in Black middle-class neighborhoods, identified as such due to their relatively high proportion of Black households that earned an annual household income between $75,000 and $149,999. Of the remaining two interviews, both of the census tracts that did not qualify as Black middle-class tracts, share a border with a Black middle-class census tract.

I recruited respondents in an iterative manner by making use of my social network and through grassroots recruiting efforts that placed a premium value on face-to-face interactions, and I also put efforts into social media marketing. Based on my initial interviews, I relied a great deal on snowball sampling. Once interviews were confirmed, I sent each respondent an informed consent electronically to provide ample time for review and gave them the option to interview in person or over the phone. As a result, I conducted five interviews face-to-face and eight over the phone.

Each interview was conducted in a semi-structured manner, meaning an approach that combines a focused line of inquiry that is standard across interviews and a sense of openness that allows each interview to be unique and explore subject matters that are relevant, yet peripheral to the core research questions (Charmaz 2006, Gillham 2000). The interviews, at their core, sought insights on the following subjects: *the meaning of being Black and middle class*, *acquiring a home and neighborhood reception*, *the economic trajectory of neighborhoods*, *the racial makeup of neighborhoods*, *sense of comfort in the neighborhood*, *neighborhood ranking among other neighborhoods in the*

city, and *visions of intergenerational succession, based on homeownership within their neighborhoods*.

The coding technique I utilized was *focused coding*, which I used to identify themes that emerged from the interviews (Charmaz 2006:57). In some cases, focused coding wasn't necessary due to the theoretical saturation of the statements from respondents. In these rare cases main themes were noted, but not coded in the sense of reading through text to decipher meaning, because the meaning was clear. That said, in most cases interview transcripts were closely analyzed from the perspective of identifying a variety of themes and coding these themes in a stratified fashion that reflected the types of neighborhoods in which they lived and their class backgrounds. When main themes were obvious, the process of coding was reserved for themes that were either supplementary to the main theme (subthemes) or those that were divergent in some way.

I used the routine functionality of MS Word to code the themes that emerged. These themes were identified using the highlighting function and differentiated by color. I identified neighborhood types by color-coding numerical fields, since each response was numbered, and the familial class backgrounds of respondents were identified by text color.

I also utilized census data to supplement and contextualize the interview data. First, data from the US Census Bureau's American Community Survey was downloaded and analyzed to capture the recent histories of the census tracts. The specific years analyzed were 2010, 2013, and 2016. This data was analyzed with socioeconomic trajectories in mind, specifically, poverty rates, median household income, median home

values, and the concentration of homeownership. Additionally, I also identified the block groups in which participants resided, based on my interactions with them. The median household incomes found for each individual block group were compared to the median household incomes of the census tracts in which they are embedded to reflect the perspectives of respondents and how they view their neighborhoods conceptually.

When it comes to more technical details, each interview was recorded using a digital audio recorder, and the resulting audio files were transferred directly to an encrypted flash drive. The associated files were accessed and analyzed through the same encrypted flash drive in an abundance of caution to preserve the confidentiality of the respondents. Additionally, the audio files were named in ways that do not allow direct traceability to the respondents. With respect to transcribing, eight of the interviews were directly transcribed, while the other five were transcribed using a popular and vetted transcription service that contracts with service providers under non-disclosure agreements who can only access submitted audio files through the company's secure portal. Each transcription was reviewed and coded, and the transcriptions provided by the transcription company were reviewed for accuracy and corrected when necessary.

Researcher Positionality Statement

Before diving into the findings, I feel compelled to be transparent about some aspects of the interview process that trouble me as a researcher due to how they may impact the theory-building potential of the interview data. I believe that my inability to reach my numerical goal with the interviews was hampered by trust limitations and that the content of the interviews was affected by the impression management concerns of the respondents. My sense that the respondents more familiar with me shared more

transparently, echoes this study limitation. However, this last concern seems to reflect a sense of ownership and responsibility among my respondents. Even if their neighborhood experiences were not as positive as they made them out to be, the need to present them as such reflects a sense of accountability for the choices that led them to their neighborhoods.

I also feel compelled to briefly share biographical details of my own life that may be relevant to my standpoint perspective. My class background has some complexity to it. In terms of my material lived experience, I come from a working-class background. I was primarily raised by my mother who works as an insurance underwriter, but had regular and sustained contact with my father, who has lived the majority of his adult life on Social Security Disability, due to a chronic condition. That said, my mom and dad were raised in two-parent, middle-class households. Therefore, the best way I can describe my class positionality is to say that I am a tenured member of the Black middle class, who had a working-class experience growing up, while being raised with middle-class values.

Upon reflection, I believe that my class background is more of a strength than a hindrance with respect to making sense of the interview data. My familiarity with Black middle-class life allowed me to better relate to respondents, read between the lines of their sentiments, and to effectively probe during the interviews to generate additional insights. That said, I did feel a stronger connection to respondents who grew up in working-class households rather than middle-class households. This connection was most apparent when these respondents displayed a reluctance to distinguish themselves from Blacks lower on the class spectrum, whether this was due to their inability to do so, given

their own backgrounds, or more so to reflect a politicized stance. Still, I honestly do not believe that this sense of connection was significantly stronger, nor so impactful as to compromise my ability to properly conduct the interviews and make sense of what was said.

What may be more telling is my negative emotional reactions to sentiments such as "you know how we are" in the context of a respondent's comfort living in a neighborhood with a low Black percentage and the similar way I reacted to another respondent's not so subtle insistence that it is problematic for middle-class Blacks to live outside of majority-Black neighborhoods. In both instances, I believe I did an adequate job of maintaining a professional decorum, and these instances also reflect the opposite ends of my spectrum when it comes to intra-racial Black politics. If anything colored my analytical lens, it would be the politics of the respondents. Of course, noting this possibility allows me to guard against falling into the trap of unchecked subjectivity.

Findings

The findings that emerged from the interviews are presented in alignment with the order in which questions were asked. In addition to the core subject matters that were presented in the previous section, study participants raised topics such as neighborliness, police surveillance concerns, and the reimagining of neighborhoods. Interestingly, a couple of elder respondents discussed the neighborhood histories of areas that used to be Black middle-class enclaves that portend Black middle-class neighborhoods are ever ripe for change. Next, in the service of providing background on the respondents, I share how the study participants broke down in terms of their social characteristics.

The Social Characteristics of Study Participants

The respondents that I interviewed all considered themselves to be members of the Black middle class, although a few initially hesitated to identify themselves in that way. The summary table on the next page shows the breakdown of respondents' social characteristics. Despite my efforts to achieve more balance in this regard, the majority of my respondents were women. My interviews with men were comparatively shorter. In regard to age, there is a greater balance, except in the case of no interviews among people in the 25-34 age group. This is likely a result of my initial starting point with respect to recruiting, and the snowball sampling that led from that point. The way in which respondents are distributed along the remaining categories also reflects balance. The social characteristics that emerged as most significant in terms of eliciting different types of responses were familial class background, neighborhood type, and to a lesser extent, gender. Primarily, women were more likely to express concerns for their personal safety

and men were more likely to express concerns about police interactions and the safety of their teenage or adolescent sons.

Table 13. Summary Table of Respondent Distribution by Data Category

Data Category	RESPONDENT COUNTS				
Gender	Women	Men			
	10	3			
Age	35-44	45-54	55-64	65+	
	4	4	2	3	
Income	<$75K	$75-99.99K	$100-124.99K	$125-149.99K	$150K+
	2	3	4	1	3
Class Background	First-Gen	Not Sure	Second-Gen		
	6	1	6		
Length of Ownership	<5 yrs.	5 - 10 years	11 - 15 years	16-20 years	20 yrs.+
	2	3	1	3	3
Neighborhood Type	Disadvantaged	Marginally MC	Identifiably MC		
	4	4	3		

The ways in which neighborhood types and class backgrounds seemed to impact how respondents articulated their beliefs, worldviews, and experiences is a thread that runs throughout the forthcoming section. Additionally, to provide context for each statement, I will apply shorthand descriptors that align with some of the social characteristics outlined in Table 13 above. These descriptors will include gender, age, class background, and neighborhood type. When it comes to age, 'young adult' refers to 35-44 respondents, 'middle-aged' refers to 45-64 respondents, and the term 'elder' refers to those 65 and older. Regarding class background, 'first-gen' refers to a first-generation middle-class respondent and 'second-gen' refers to those who are second-generation middle-class. The one respondent who was not sure about their class background, is referred to as 'between-gen.' Lastly, with respect to neighborhood types, 'DISADV' refers to disadvantaged neighborhoods, MARG-MC to marginally middle-class neighborhoods, and ID-MC to identifiably middle-class neighborhoods. Throughout the

findings section, the social characteristics that were found to be the most relevant in driving responses will be highlighted.

The 'Placing' of Identity: The Meaning of Being Black and Middle Class

The first question I asked in each interview was "Do you consider yourself to be a member of the Black middle class?", which was followed up with a 'why' question as a probe to account for the beliefs and sentiments tied to their conviction that they are middle class. The relevance of this question was tied to how the race/class identity of respondents would cohere to later statements and to gauge the relevance of these aspects of their identity to the respondents, themselves. Both angles combined help connect notions of race/class identity to neighborhood perceptions and assessments.

Once I posed the question asking whether participants considered themselves to be Black and middle class, they tended to answer in a manner seemingly influenced by the recruiting materials. The respondents most often cited their incomes, educational attainment, and the fact that they were homeowners. To go beyond the surface, I often asked what being Black and middle class meant to them personally. In two instances, respondents were hesitant to call themselves middle class; both grew up in households that were not middle class:

> **"…I guess just the image that I have of the Black middle class. I really don't feel like that matches my lifestyle, but when I give it deeper thought, then, I would change my answer to yes…In the time period in which I grew up, the image of the Black**

middle-class was much more sophisticated and fancy, than (how)[2] I live my everyday life.”

- *first-gen middle-aged woman from DISADV neighborhood*

“I don't consider myself to be a member of the Black middle class. I just don't feel that way. Yeah, so maybe the income says I am, but I don't feel like I'm above, or rich or anything…I just feel like I'm making it.

- *first-gen middle-aged woman from MARG-MC neighborhood*

Both sentiments reflect a sense of inner conflict between how they see themselves and their experiences and what they deem to be the dominant image of being a member of the Black and middle class. This sense is expressed more fully below:

“…So, I may be Black middle class, I just don't think I am, because I'm not thinking I'm above anybody or anything else. I don't feel that I have to make that distinction between, ‘Oh, I make more so I'm better.’ ‘I can't go to the same activities that you are,’ or ‘If I go to those activities, I got to look a little differently at you because I make a little more.’"

- *first-gen middle-aged woman from MARG-MC neighborhood*

When I relayed to the above respondent that I was assuming that she has encountered people who present themselves in that way, she said, “That is ***correct***. That is correct.” Along similar lines, there were instances where respondents didn't feel that they could articulate what it means to be Black and middle class:

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[2] Here and henceforward, words placed in parenthesis reflect additions I have made to the text for readability purposes

"I'm not sure what it means to me to be Black and middle-class. I know how I grew up, Black and working class… I'm not necessarily sure to be honest with you"

<div align="right">

- first-gen young adult man from MARG-MC neighborhood

</div>

Additionally, one respondent embraced being Black and middle class, but felt compelled to question its relevance. After stating that there were certain privileges that come with being Black and middle class, such as education and the ability to travel, she said the following:

"…But other than that, I don't see people in the Black middle class or upper class, or lower class...I don't view us differently. Because when it's all said and done, because we're Black, that is a uniting designation that can trump income, education, the ability to travel, and all that. So, I never really got caught up in it. It's not like a badge of honor, nor is lower class, or underclass, or working class, a lower designation to me. There is a commonality that we share regardless of income."

<div align="right">

- first-gen elder woman from DISADV neighborhood

</div>

Each of the quotes shared thus far come from respondents who grew up in either working-class or low-income households. Respondents who were either unsure about their class background or self-identified as at least second-generation middle class tended to articulate the meaning of being Black and middle class with more subtlety than their counterparts. From their perspectives, being Black and middle class implied a sense of forward movement, based on their family inheritance and a sense of responsibility to continue along a forward trajectory, whether economically or culturally:

"…I feel like being Black and middle class is, we finally have an engine and we can turn the key over and there's a spark. We're on our way somewhere, as far as

<div align="center">

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financially is concerned. I think that's one of the differences in…I hate to say lower

class, because I don't like that term, but you know what I mean—and being middle

class. Middle class means that we've kind of set a course and we have the means and

access to make our way, versus still trying to figure it out and find the pieces to put

together."

- *between-gen young adult woman from DISADV neighborhood*

"…We were able to vacation, and I was in girl scouts, and she was a PTA mom, so

we grew up like that. Now, as a wife and mother, I roll those same things over. The

difference is my kids now have even more exposure. We do more trips and they are

exposed to more programs. Outside of your traditional boy scouts and girl scouts,

my son goes to Western Kentucky for a gifted and talented program… Whatever

their interest is, we plug them into an activity that feeds that interest… So, for me,

being Black and middle class is being able to provide those opportunities for our

children, expose them to the arts, (so they'll be) just a well-rounded kid outside of

what they typically think of for African Americans, which is basketball and football.

My kids don't even play those sports."

- *second-gen young adult woman from DISADV neighborhood*

Again, a common thread running through each of the preceding quotes is the

sense of forward movement that is implied, which resonates with my assertion that *Black*

middle-class succession is a potent collective force among the Black middle class, which

animates the racial claims that ultimately seek the realization of freedom and opportunity

without racial impositions. The last element that emerged as significant to what it means

to be Black and middle class was giving back to Blacks lower on the class ladder. In a

substantive statement that reflects the sentiments of others as well, one respondent said:

"I believe, from what my dad has impressed upon me, he was from the country and him and my mom were the first ones to desegregate the schools, he believes that as you move up, you have to give back more. You have to lift as you climb, basically. So, that's a dynamic that the Black middle class needs to take on, and also, the Black upper class as well."

- *second-gen young adult man from MARG-MC neighborhood*

It is noteworthy that distinctions emerge when sentiments between first-generation Black middle-class members are compared to those who are at least second-generation middle class. Many of the first-generation respondents either expressed a sense of conflict with the image of being a member of the Black middle class, expressed ambivalence towards the meaning, or felt the need to challenge its social significance. On the other hand, second-generation respondents articulated the meaning of being Black and middle class with a greater deal of clarity and conviction. This dynamic suggests that the social contexts in which these Black middle-class respondents were raised directly impacted their ability to explain, make sense of, and find comfort in the social world they now inhabited (Lareau 2011).

The sentiments surrounding the meaning behind being Black and middle-class foreshadow some of the neighborhood-based sentiments that will be highlighted later, especially racial makeup preferences and visions of intergenerational succession. In light of how respondents view their race/class identities, it seems that neighborhoods are perceived as comfortable on the basis of how these dual identities are negotiated. My findings suggest that those who can find a sense of integration between being Black and middle class are better equipped to see and find a place for themselves in majority-White

neighborhood settings. On the other hand, first-generation members of the Black middle-class tend to find comfort among other Blacks. This dynamic calls to mind the significance of contact with mainstream, White society and how sustained contact in this form provides middle-class Blacks with a set of tools that allows them navigate White and Black social worlds (Lacy 2007, Lareau 2011, Young 2004).

Neighborhood Experiences and Interpretations

The core component of the interviews was learning how respondents think about and identify with their neighborhoods. In a sequential manner, I was interested in the process of purchasing the home, how participants were received by their neighbors, how they perceived their neighborhoods in terms of their sense of comfort, its racial makeup, and how it ranked in comparison to other neighborhoods, and finally, I wanted to know how they routinely interacted with their neighborhoods. In addition to generating insights on the topics outlined, I saw this portion of the interview as a bridge linking identity-related perceptions to visions of intergenerational succession.

Acquiring the home and neighborhood reception

One surprising aspect of this study, given the underlying assumptions of much of the research literature on Black middle-class neighborhoods and racial residential segregation, was the sense of ownership, the level of vigilance, and the extent of networking that respondents employed to land in the neighborhoods they desired. Although rarely stated outright, the respondents' actions as they described them reflect an energetic commitment to take control of the home buying process. This finding rebuts the implicit assumptions in much of the literature that tend to characterize Blacks as hapless

victims of residential segregation who are being duped by forces greater than them (Alba, Logan and Stults 2000, Massey and Denton 1993, Rothstein 2017). It also highlights the resilience and vigilance that these middle-class Blacks leverage to find home bases they can enjoy.

While taking ownership of the home buying process was the primary theme that emerged when respondents were asked to describe the process of acquiring their home, this imperative was animated by different goals depending on the respondent and facilitated in a variety of ways. One of the goals mentioned most often was finding a good school:

> **"So, my wife kind of took the lead on searching for homes, and things like that. Ultimately, what drove us was having young kids, we wanted to make sure we stayed in JCPS and put them in a good school. Because one thing about being middle class is that your kids would typically go to a public school, so we wanted to make sure we were in a good neighborhood or a good school system."**
>
> - *second-gen young adult man from MARG-MC neighborhood*

> **"My job necessitated my working in schools that were in the Dixie Highway area as well as schools in other parts of Louisville. Every time I would go to a particular school in the Dixie Highway area, if I went into the teacher's lounge at lunchtime, as soon as I walked in, the conversation would change to, 'You know a black person moved in such and such a neighborhood. A black person moved in such and such a neighborhood.' Every time it never failed. I did not want my son in a school here on Dixie Highway. I'm sure that the situation was pretty much the same in other schools, but it was so blatant there. (It was) then I said, 'We're going to move to a place where he can go into a school that it's in the neighborhood.'"**

Respondents also took ownership of the home buying process by leveraging their resources and social networks to gain a foothold in key links of the home buying process chain. The ability to take advantage of home loans provided by the Office of Veterans Affairs was mentioned as a key resource, one respondent shared how her husband receives generous remuneration as a result of taking two tours of duty during the Vietnam War. The ability to leverage social networks and how they directed real estate agents was a more prevalent subject. Some respondents discussed how they used friends and family to advance critical aspects of home buying. Study participants also talked about employing real estate agents as facilitators, rather than knowledgeable experts guiding them toward a home. In the case of leveraging their social networks, respondents shared:

> **"I had a cousin who worked for a bank, who was my loan officer. And so working with him made it unique, and interesting, but also comforting, because I didn't have to go through a lot of the rigmarole. I did attempt to work with my bank, but my bank would not approve me for the loan. Although I had been with them for about 15 years and had two car loans, and that's where my direct deposit goes… They said that I didn't have enough standing credit…. We were in constant communication, my cousin and I. And he just kind of laid out the steps and laid out the timeline on how long it would take and what it would look like."**

> - *between-gen young adult woman from DISADV neighborhood*

> **"…And that's another thing that helped, the real estate agent was one of our college friends. So, that kind of helped with that process. He basically was a younger Black male that was getting his feet wet in the industry, and he really helped a lot, because he was able to look at the dynamic of not just where we wanted to move, but is it**

conducive to our family structure, you know. Is it diversity, friendly? Would it cause

issues if we moved to certain areas?”

- *second-gen young adult man from ID-MC neighborhood*

When it came to leveraging real estate agents as facilitators for purchasing the homes

they liked in the neighborhoods desired, respondents said the following:

“The West End has a special place in our hearts, or had a special place in his heart,

too. And so, folks were really glad to know that when we were looking for a house,

we were looking west… We looked at several houses, and we were almost divorcing

because (it was like), ‘No, I don’t like this; No, I don’t like that.’ And then, we got to

that house on that street, which he found, and we both walked in and it was like

‘Yeah.’ No argument, no debate. No nothing. We agreed instantly, stepping in the

door, so that’s what happened…. On that particular purchase, she wasn’t

(influential). She didn’t have to be. That was the *easiest sell she made*. Once we got

to that house, that was the easiest sell…it spoke for itself.”

- *first-gen elder woman from DISADV neighborhood*

“And my whole thing with the realtor was, I don’t want you to tell me what I need

to buy, because I kind of know what I want. Your job is to help us (finalize) the

home we want to buy… And I’m like, here’s my list, this is what I want. These are

my expectations. And I made that very clear with my realtor. Because she was able

to be like ‘alright, cool,’ she was able to stay within the means, she wasn’t trying to

show me any crazy looking houses.”

- *second-gen young adult woman from DISADV neighborhood*

In addition to seeking feedback on the process of acquiring homes from the Black

middle-class perspective, I asked participants to describe their neighborhood reception

once they settled into their home. Most often, respondents shared experiencing either a cool reception upon moving in or no reception at all. Instances of anti-black resistance to their presence in the neighborhood were mentioned as well. In the case of the former, the following was shared:

"I don't think anybody really cared. There aren't many neighbors around… It was just like, 'Oh, OK. Let's go.' It wasn't anything like bringing over cakes and casseroles."

- first-gen middle-aged woman from DISADV neighborhood

"I'm going to tell you something so funny. I don't really know my neighbors, okay? You close your garage and you go in the house."

- second-gen middle-aged woman from ID-MC neighborhood

"There was no reception. One of the people that work for me, she said, 'Oh, when we moved in a home, somebody brought us some meals and some cake.' I said, 'I didn't get a thing.' I didn't get no sandwich, I didn't get nothing. No, there was no reception."

- first-gen middle-aged woman from MARG-MC neighborhood

The forms of anti-black resistance that characterized the experiences of some respondents ranged from tense interactions with White neighbors in their new neighborhoods to the enacted polices of the Federal Housing Administration (FHA). In this respect, respondents shared:

"That was hard because back then, it was mostly a White, predominantly White neighborhood. The kids would go out to play, and you'd say, 'Oh, just 25 years ago,' but it was horrible… Let's just say we went through some things when we moved in,

but luckily we had another neighbor who was a Black neighbor, and next to them was their mother, so it was three of us in a row. We looked out for each other. Now the neighborhood has changed.”

- *first-gen middle-aged woman from MARG-MC neighborhood*

“Well, when I first came out there, I was in regular civilian attire, and it seemed like it was resistance from the neighborhood, even including the seller of the property. But then when I came back with some friends, I was actually in military uniform... And the lady next door to me, we call her Miss Becca, she was one of the trustees for the American Legion. Her husband is a Korean War veteran. Once she saw that I was a veteran, the attitudes changed.”

- *first-gen middle-aged man from MARG-MC neighborhood*

“We were ready, I had packed up stuff and we were ready to move in say, July. The FHA did not clear us until like September. I had to open some of the boxes that we had packed because we were at the point where we needed some of the things that were in those boxes. That was 1977. I'm not sure that West End property has to go through FHA anymore, but at that point, particularly if you were Black and you were selling property, you could only go through FHA.”

- *second-gen elder woman from ID-MC neighborhood*

Overall, the feedback from Black middle-class respondents indicates that they see themselves as active participants in the home buying process, who intelligently leveraged the resources available to them and minimized the influence of real estate agents. For the most part, the reception that greeted respondents upon moving into their neighborhoods was unremarkable, regardless of neighborhood type or class background. The one instance where class background did seem to be influential was in the extent that seeking

good schools for their children was mentioned as a factor in choosing their neighborhoods. This was raised often by second-generation middle-class respondents despite the general nature of the question, but seeking good schools was not mentioned at all by first-generation respondents.

Neighborhood Trajectory and Racial Makeup

When asked about the current direction of their neighborhoods, respondents tended to say that their neighborhoods remained the same, while fewer described their neighborhood as rising or declining. I found it interesting that most respondents pretty much knew I had economic considerations in mind, despite the general nature of the question. Those who described their neighborhoods as remaining the same provided qualifying statements, some more clear than others when it comes to the internal coherence of the statements.

"I would say probably remaining about the same. To me, I guess, the reason I say it's staying the same is because the people that were here, who have come in within the last 10-15 years…their children…some families have left and they have been replaced. And then there's people who have been here and they're kids have grown up, and we're all still here and we've maintained our homes and our yards and all that. So, I guess that's what I mean by staying pretty much the same."

- *second-gen middle-aged woman from ID-MC neighborhood*

"I think it's remained the same, because there's generally been a tendency toward well-kept and it still is. There are some vacancies now that have been obtained. Whoever is buying the houses are moving real slow in their upgrade or redevelopment. And I could think of three, two across the street and one on my side

of the street (where) renovations have started and stopped...for whatever reason. That might reflect, rather than developers, people that are individuals who bought the house and as they get money, spruce it up. In two of the cases, you can just tell that it's just taking a long time to do different stuff and in one case of those, there's construction debris that's like, out front."

- *first-gen elder woman from DISADV neighborhood*

"I haven't been here too long, but I feel like it's status quo, not going up or down. So, to me it seems like it's staying the same. I noticed that a couple of families have moved in since we got here that seemed similar to how we are. They have several young kids, some have been Black, some White. It just seems that it's status quo. The same type of persons are moving into the neighborhood, I guess."

- *second-gen young adult man from MARG-MC neighborhood*

In comparing the last statement above to the previous two, I find that there is a more coherent logic for the conclusion made that the neighborhood has remained the same. This respondent's emphasis on the same types of people moving into the neighborhood strikes me as having a firmer basis than the other two statements, based on both the real-time tone of the conversations and the content of what was said.

The number of times that respondents described their neighborhoods as rising or declining was about equal. An interesting aspect of the neighborhoods that were described as rising is the fact that they were on opposite ends of the neighborhood spectrum with respect to their socioeconomic characteristics. Two of the neighborhoods are in the West End, a majority-Black and low-income area of Louisville, while the other neighborhood is in the East End, which is a majority-White, economically advantaged area of the city. This East End neighborhood ranked second in median home value among

the 36 census tracts identified as Black middle-class neighborhoods. The respondents who described their neighborhoods as rising said the following:

"I'm feeling hopeful…seeing the energy and the excitement! The community feels like somebody sees us. We're not invisible anymore. I think the neighborhood is rising, because of the development that (is) taking place… I'm excited about the YMCA. For a variety of reasons. It will be nice to go just right up the street. But I'm also excited that people will be able to ride past Broadway and look up and see people working out and exercising and living normal lives like they do in other neighborhoods. So, the idea that this will help dispel the stereotype that people in the West End don't care about health or being healthy. And that you don't always have to go to another neighborhood when you want to do something."

- *first-gen middle-aged woman from DISADV neighborhood*

"I think the neighborhood is rising, because I know the house rates have gone up a lot. Property values are definitely going up. So, if I was to sell my house tomorrow, I will make a profit off of it… There's a lot of development out here, so there's a new neighborhood going up next to mine. They're just throwing up townhouses. I almost feel like they need to put (in) some businesses. They're just doing houses. They're making a quick buck."

- *second-gen middle-aged woman from ID-MC neighborhood*

Neighborhood diversity also characterized places that were described as declining. These areas ranged from the West End, to southwest and southeast areas of Louisville Metro. Respectively, study participants shared the following:

"Declining… Because I live in a food desert. I can't…. every time… where do I buy clothes?! I have to go out of my neighborhood for *everything*. I have to *leave* this

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neighborhood for everything. So, today, after I leave here, I have to go shopping for Thanksgiving dinner. To do anything that's fun, that's not like a park, I have to leave this neighborhood. In order to go to a decent sit-down restaurant, I have to leave this neighborhood. In order to go see a movie, I have to leave this neighborhood… And there's so many empty buildings in this neighborhood. We can have grocery stores, we can have 10 grocery stores in this neighborhood, and we don't."

- first-gen middle-aged woman from DISADV neighborhood

"There are aspects of Shively that I feel are declining. And it kind of bothers me that I feel like that. And then there are other aspects where I see families more like mine coming in. So, then I feel good, because I see more families like mine. But I think it's kind of one of those things, where it's hit-and-miss, you just don't know. I try not to judge and assume, but I'm very aware of the changes. Like, since that thing happened, I see young dudes moving in. And on the corner, there's a lot of traffic. But they're just young. I just try to chalk it up as they're just young and immature, and not try to feed into it. But I am aware of it, though… I would say (Shively is) changing and declining. Because all of my old people that were on my block, my neighbor had lost her husband. They were older when I moved in, but they are a lot older now. So, that foundation… is changing."

- second-gen young adult woman from DISADV neighborhood

"I think it's going down some. Well, people don't keep their property up like they used to. No. (The standard for property upkeep is) not (being met) anymore. When we were younger, (it was)."

- second-gen elder woman from MARG-MC neighborhood

Something that stands out about the last statement from the resident living in a more economically advantaged area of the city is its qualitative difference in comparison to the other statements. This respondent links neighborhood decline to property upkeep, while the other two statements center on pivotal characteristics of their neighborhoods such as the lack of amenities and the social characteristics of the people who have recently come into the neighborhood compared to the neighbors they came to know after their initial arrival. Prior to describing her neighborhood as declining, a second-generation middle-class respondent living in a neighborhood that has only recently been classified as disadvantaged, described an incident that occurred, which further demonstrates how social experiences bring greater clarity to how the trajectories of neighborhoods are perceived on the ground:

> **"Around November-ish, my neighbor who is an Army guy, he got a divorce from his wife and his wife had already had prior kids, two of them are big kids. They are at a high school level, and they would do a lot of arguing and stuff… So, he left. January the 2nd, my husband and I are sitting in the living room… And I tell Sean, let me go in here and go to bed. He said, I'll be in there in 30 minutes. So, I start cutting off lights. I hear this pop noise, and I'm like what is that?! But I'm thinking it's just some random, because New Years was the day before. Then I hear, pop-pop-pop-pop! I instantly hit the ground and I'm screaming, 'Are you OK, are you OK?!' He says, 'Yeah! Yeah.' So, I go crawling in there and I see this light coming through my bay window. A bullet had come through my bay window… So, needless to say, I lost my everlasting mind. I called my realtor and was like, "We're moving today."**

Eventually, this respondent was able to calm down and find comfort in her neighborhood once again, but she explained that there was no way her feelings would go

back to what they were. So, while impressions differ regarding the meaning of 'rising,' 'declining,' and 'remaining the same' when it comes to neighborhood trajectories, the responses in their totality suggest that Black middle-class neighborhoods in Louisville are in a constant state of change, the only question is how noticeable these changes are and how these changes are assessed from the perspective of residents. Even neighborhoods characterized as remaining the same undergo change, but these changes from the perspective of residents may not look like a neighborhood is declining or ascending. It may be seen as more of a changing-same.

Given the historical connectedness between the socioeconomic characteristics of neighborhoods and their racial characteristics, understanding how respondents think about the racial makeup of their neighborhoods are likely to reveal deeper insights into the overall direction of neighborhoods. Additionally, questions regarding the racial makeup of neighborhoods can reveal to what extent respondents value closeness to other Blacks, which Blacks may be favored over others, and what conflicts may result from valuing both the sense of racial security of living among significant numbers of Blacks and maximizing the financial rewards that are supposed to come with homeownership.

When respondents were asked how they feel about the racial makeup of their neighborhoods, the majority indicated being fine with it, but as the conversation deepened it became clear that neighborhood diversity was valued the most by respondents, which aligns with previous research on Black neighborhood preferences (Adelman 2005, Lewis, Emerson and Klineberg 2011). That said, preferences for racial diversity are parsed down into two versions of diversity: *50/50 diversity* and *American diversity*. Respondents who valued 50/50 racial diversity said the following:

"I think it's diverse. We're still diverse. I think we're good. I think we've got a good mixture on my block. And it's been like that. And I like that. I think it's important for my kids to see that. That's one of the things that I wanted my kids to see. (I never) wanted them to see all-White or all-Black. I definitely didn't want to be the only one. That's a turn off for me. I don't want to be the only one. You never want to be (just) a sprinkle somewhere, that ain't good. I would say 50/50 would be ideal. I think it's good for everybody to see a good mixture in everything."

- second-gen young adult woman from DISADV neighborhood

"I think my ideal would be about 50/50. 50% blacks to 50% of other races. It is nowhere near that. I don't know how I would classify the mixed families that are here. I mean we have several families where one of the adults is Black and that adult partner is of a different race primarily White, there are not many families that fall into that category. But there are some, to my knowledge, we've only had one Black family move away from the area. There are more Black families here than I realize, okay, and I know this when I'm going through the neighborhood, "Hey, I didn't know that a Black family lived *there*.""

- second-gen elder woman from ID-MC neighborhood

Respondents who preferred a form of racial diversity that was reflective of the racial demography of the nation as a whole or the state of Kentucky, said the following:

"I think honestly, by me growing up military, I think you have to be exposed to every nationality you can. You can't say you understand how somebody feels about something if you've never talked to them, or dealt with them, or spoken to them… I don't think it would be bad or beneficial to live in an all-Black neighborhood, or an all-White neighborhood, I just think you're missing out if you are."

"We don't have a lot of Blacks… Maybe about 4 or 5 families. It's always been like that. We've never had a whole lot… I've lived around us. We do cars all in the yard and trash, they don't pick up the trash. Cars don't work. I just can't understand. Nowadays, why would you keep, unless you're going to rebuild a car ... a car in the 50s and 60s that have pistons and cylinders and all that stuff and now, why would you keep a car. You can't use the parts for a 2020 car. Why would you keep a car and keep it raggedy and rusty, I just don't get it and on four concrete blocks. All that kind of stuff. No. I don't miss all that. I'm sorry, but that's how some of us are. Yeah, the racial makeup, it doesn't bother me at all."

- *second-gen elder woman from MARG-MC neighborhood*

In the minority were respondents who stated that they prefer to live in majority-Black neighborhoods and each of them lived in neighborhoods that reflected this preference. They said the following:

"(My neighborhood is) still primarily Black. And I'm comfortable with that. I just wish that I was seeing more success in the next generation. Again, I'm actually OK with the racial makeup. I don't have problem with, I know some people do…but I'll take it a step further, not only do I not have a problem, I welcome White couples who are looking to contribute to the neighborhood. You know, to live in some of these houses, particularly if they fix them up. If they take some of these vacant and abandoned houses and remodel them…I look forward to that. I'd be OK with other ethnicities, Hispanic/Latinos…you know, Asians. So, I embrace diversity. (My ideal racial makeup would be) 60% Black, 40% other."

- *first-gen middle-aged woman from DISADV neighborhood*

"If I had my choice, it would be Black, because we don't own enough real estate and our real estate is slipping away from us. It would be Black, for *that* reason. Not that, I got a White neighbor who is cool, that's alright with me, but just because I know how real estate is slipping away from us, you know…to a devastating and depressing degree. I would like to see Black folks look at *being* in an all-Black neighborhood and that being OK, because a lot of people are afraid of that, but I'm not afraid of that. If it turns all-Black, I'm cool. As long as you're a good neighbor and you don't bring the neighborhood down. I'm good with that. And hopefully, you're owning as opposed to renting, because that can sometimes bring another mentality, not all the time, but if you are used to someone else taking care of problems or property for you…some folks have pride in that situation, but some folks don't. Yeah…majority-Black is OK with me, if you're homeowners, primarily."

- *first-gen elder woman from DISADV neighborhood*

"I feel good about the number of Black people most certainly, but I'm also comfortable with the sprinkle of diversity from the different races throughout the neighborhood. As it is right now, (matches my ideal)."

- *between-gen young adult woman from DISADV neighborhood*

The way that the preceding statements situate their preferences for majority-Black neighborhoods is noteworthy. Two responses hedge their racial preferences a bit by stating that they would welcome some diversity to their neighborhoods, as long as it doesn't cross a threshold that threatened its majority-Black character. In the other response, a majority-Black neighborhood preference was buttressed by concerns that

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homeownership is slipping away from Blacks and their racial preference was specified as Black homeowners, rather than renters.

Another subject that was raised in the context of eliciting perceptions of neighborhood trajectory and racial preferences was *racial gentrification*, which is a term that I use to clarify that I am specifically referring to higher-income Whites moving into predominantly Black, low-income neighborhoods. The following was stated on this subject:

> **"I'm concerned about gentrification, because I don't want the opportunity to be in the kind of neighborhood that I've enjoyed to slip from the hands of Black people. Because the neighborhoods we can readily go into are so limited, and sometimes it's so contentious; it's not that way in my neighborhood and you get some beauty for your value, in terms of the houses, and the architecture, as well as the surrounding areas. And just based on how real estate gets away from us, that's more of my concern, than let's say an attitude about White folks coming in. It's more us holding onto and passing down, the opportunity to live on a street that's maintained its beauty."**
>
> - *first-gen elder woman from DISADV neighborhood*

> **"…In the past couple of years, there's definitely been a migration of White people to the West End. Some are welcome and some are not. Some of them are people who contribute to the crime and drug use that's already here. So, we don't need more of that. But some of them are young White couples who recognize that the land is beautiful, the people are beautiful, the older homes are beautiful, and they can get them for a steal."**
>
> - *first-gen middle-aged woman from DISADV neighborhood*

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"(The older families) are the stability. I do see some young people moving in, but most of the young people and the small families moving to my block are White."

- *first-gen young adult woman from DISADV neighborhood*

"As I said, we were always waiting for gentrification. We are going to get gentrification soon, because there's just not enough continued space for people to keep going east. They'll run out of space soon enough. And then, they'll have to come this way."

- *first-gen middle-aged woman from DISADV neighborhood*

The preceding statements demonstrate that respondents from the West End are witnessing noticeable changes in the racial makeup of their neighborhoods as more Whites settle there. The statements as they are arranged represent the spectrum of reactions to racial gentrification, which range from being concerned about these changes to welcoming them, while the middle statements could be said to reflect a sense of ambivalence towards this trend.

The manner in which respondents are assessing their neighborhoods in terms of their economic trajectories and their racial makeup seems to be linked primarily to the neighborhood type, rather than individualized diversity of sentiments. The fact that preferences for majority-Black neighborhoods cluster in the West End and preferences for neighborhoods that are more diverse cluster in areas that are either predominantly White or racially mixed—is indicative of middle-class Blacks landing in the neighborhoods they desire, with respect to racial makeup.

Interestingly, from the perspective of respondents, these trends regarding racial makeup say little about the economic trajectory of neighborhoods. Neighborhoods in the

West End are described as rising and declining by respondents and the same can be said about neighborhoods throughout Louisville Metro. By design, the next phase of the interviews was intended to go a bit deeper by asking respondents how comfortable they felt in their neighborhoods, how they interact with them, and how they would rank them in comparison to other neighborhoods around the city.

Neighborhood Comfort, Neighborhood Interactions, and Rankings

When respondents were asked how comfortable they are in their neighborhood, it was clear that the vast majority were either comfortable or very comfortable. As they continued to explore the question on the table, respondents would often begin speaking about crime or safety, for the most part, reinforcing that it was the lack of crime or their feeling of safety that was one of the key reasons they felt comfortable. However, there did seem to be a place-based gender dynamic at play. For example, the following was said:

> **"There are times when I'm not comfortable being a woman in my neighborhood, just because…I'm a woman alone with two small-ish kids. And so, that makes me more uncomfortable than the racial makeup of my neighborhood."**
>
> - *first-gen middle-aged woman from DISADV neighborhood*

> **"I'm cautiously comfortable. I don't feel as afraid as I once did, but I'm also cautious of my surroundings. I'm in the house when I get home after dark. I still hear the occasional gunshot, (but) not as many as I used to."**
>
> - *first-gen middle-aged woman from DISADV neighborhood*

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Each of the preceding responses were from women living in the West End, but the following was said by another woman who lived in the most advantaged Black middle-class neighborhood among the respondent group in terms of median home value:

> **"I've walked with my cousin and his wife before, because the way their house is like, they live close to me… So, I've walked with them and I've walked at night. I've never walked at night by myself, because I'm scared anyway, it's just me. I wouldn't do it in anybody's neighborhood, no matter how safe it is, but that's just me."**
>
> *- second-gen middle-aged woman from ID-MC neighborhood*

Similar to dynamics previously discussed, it seems although each of these respondents expressed concerns tied to a gendered exposure to harm, there are different levels of concern and these differences are linked to both real-life experiences and how neighborhood conditions are viewed by residents.

Occurring less frequently were responses that mentioned neighborhood bonds as one of the reasons they felt comfortable in the neighborhood. The mentioning of neighborhood bonds also spilled over into how respondents discussed interacting with their neighborhoods. The following was said in this respect:

> **"I'm very comfortable. I can say it's probably the most comfortable I've been. Compared to where I spent most of my time, Old Louisville, renting apartments. I think I feel super safe. I feel like I have neighbors who are going to pay attention and look out for me how I look out for them. I don't feel like I have the 'Black tax,' like I don't feel like I have to be the model minority, because most of us are Black people… My stepfather died this year, and so, my entire neighborhood was thoughtful and patient, and checked on me every time I walked outside to my car.**

We share meals with each other. Over the fence, we'll pass food back and forth, if I bake a cake or if they have cookies, or whatever it is. It's just a lot of communication versus Old Louisville, where I had neighbors who didn't know me and didn't want to know me."

- *between-gen young adult woman from DISADV neighborhood*

"I'm comfortable. I know where everything is in my neighborhood. Outside of that isolated incident, I'm still close with my neighbors. I don't feel like my kids are not safe."

- *second-gen young adult woman from DISADV neighborhood*

When the conversation shifted to how respondents interacted with their neighborhoods, for the most part, it was said that not a lot of interaction takes place. However, numerous respondents seemed to have no problem with this arrangement, although age seemed to play a role in the likelihood of lamenting the extent of interactions. Along these lines, respondents said:

"I guess, technically, there's not really any (interactions). You get up, go to work, come home. When it's the summer, you see people cutting their grass. You see people walking around when it's warm. On occasion, we'll do that… I don't think it feels as family-oriented, or as neighborly as it did when I first moved in. It seems like everyone now is homeowners, instead of neighbors."

- *second-gen middle-aged woman from ID-MC neighborhood*

"(We interact) very rarely. We take a couple of walks. The kids play. They don't play outside alone…we're always there with them. We talk to our neighbors and we're engaged…when I say we're engaged in local politics, we kind of know whose running for local stuff that's in the Highview area."

"They may acknowledge you when you're out and wave and stuff, but nobody's bothering anybody. No drama… It's just peaceful. It's very peaceful. Very peaceful."

During this stage of the interview, probes were employed to uncover experiences and perceptions related to the conduct of weekly activities in the neighborhood and how they felt about the quality of property upkeep in the neighborhood. The respondents often recalled mundane elements of everyday life, such as the occasional walk through the neighborhood. Also, regardless of the type and location of their neighborhood, there was general consensus that their neighbors do a good job of taking care of their properties, whether this meant landscaping or simply maintaining a clean appearance. One theme that emerged in these conversations was neighborhood enforcement and how this was enacted by either the local municipality or a homeowner's association. The following was shared:

"And I think that's an expectation of Shively, if I'm not mistaken. That you have to make sure everything's cut. I can't think of seeing houses boarded up, you just don't see that. As a matter of fact, if you're having a family event, they will straight give you a ticket, if you're not parked inside the lines. So, I think my neighbors…when the leaves fell, my neighbors even came over and rolled over the leaves in his riding mower."

"I think everyone in the neighborhood kind of knows that you have to keep up with what the HOA says, at the bare minimum. And when I walk around and look at people's homes, that's what people are doing… they're not trying to have the perfect lawn, or with the Christmas decorations, it's not like a decoration contest… There's no pressure, because everyone basically knows you have to do the minimum of what the HOA says, which is good stuff."

- *second-gen young adult man from MARG-MC neighborhood*

The culmination of the series of questions focusing on neighborhood perceptions was how participants would rank their neighborhoods in relation to other neighborhoods around the metropolitan area. The role played by neighborhood type was especially noteworthy with respect to the gap between how respondents themselves would rank their neighborhood and how they believed the average Louisvillian would rank them. Respondents living in neighborhoods outside of the West End did not report significant gaps between their own assessment and how average people would rank their neighborhoods. The following statements reflect sentiments voiced by those living in the West End:

"I would rank it a 7 if it weren't for the train. In the middle of the freaking night! I'm trying to listen to a book, and the *DAMN TRAIN*!... And it's not like it's a short whistle, it is a laying on of that damn whistle. (So, a) 6… I think an average person would rate it about a 4 or 5… I'm probably being optimistic."

- *first-gen middle-aged woman from DISADV neighborhood*

"I would (rank my neighborhood) a 7 and that's only because there's just not access to resources, there's just not enough places to eat. Or decent places to walk up and buy a cup of coffee. So, I feel like that is limiting… (I think others would rank my

neighborhood) a '1.' I think a '1' just because of the lack of information. I think the lack of information and the few pieces that come out are either ill-informed or the one tragedy that you have no other point of reference for. So, that's all that you see and you don't witness, what I was saying about the opportunities for socializing."

- *between-gen young adult woman from DISADV neighborhood*

The primary reason given for the gap between their experience and assessments of their neighborhoods located in the West End and how outsiders would assess them was the influence of the news media. The first two statements shared below are sequentially aligned with the preceding statements:

"If you just hear about it on the news. Because you're hearing about it on the news, so everybody thinks the West End is full of crime and you're going to get shot, and on and on and on, and so forth."

"…Because of the media and the information that it displays, there's nothing to interrupt that, there's no intentional narrative change to interrupt that. Other than seeing negative things about the West End in the media, the only other thing you see is where you see some charity is doing a charitable event, or even if there's investment in West Louisville, they call it revitalization as if it wasn't already vital."

As I stated, the discussion of neighborhood perceptions was the core component of this study. Maybe the most important finding from this aspect of the study is the degree that respondents took ownership of their home buying processes and the sense of coherence between the neighborhood choices that they made and their sense of comfort in the neighborhoods they call home. Tensions between the neighborhood choices that were made and the sense of comfort with those choices arose most pronouncedly with

respondents living in West End neighborhoods. Although they prized living in majority-Black neighborhoods, they recognized that their neighborhoods were undervalued, and they connected the devaluing of their neighborhoods to elements of the social structure beyond their control.

Real-life experiences also brought about the tension between choice and comfort, as a "bullet through the window" demonstrated. On the other side of the coin were more affluent neighborhoods where Blacks were a clear minority. In some of these areas, respondents seemed to indicate a degree of isolation and hoped that more Blacks would move into their neighborhoods. When various statements are aligned sequentially, this dynamic comes into greater focus.

> **"I believe that socially, it's getting better because, again, now we have more Blacks in the neighborhood which has given everybody more incentive to converse and enjoy each other. My wife's birthday here, I usually have a pool party for my wife. I reach out to all the neighbors. I let them know, "Hey, it might get a little loud." I always get permission... Well, not so much permission. I just let everybody know that I'm having this party. The Black neighbors will come over, not a problem, and then a few White neighbors will come over. Some will come over for (only) a second."**
>
> - *first-gen middle-aged man from MARG-MC neighborhood*

> **"Right now, I think it's kind of reflective of the state as a whole, maybe. It's maybe 15% Black, the majority is White. There are a couple of Asian families, so it's kind of a reflection of that. Which is really interesting, because one of the Black families that lives here is a police officer, so there are about 5 police officers that live here. One is Black and the other four are White, which I guess is good in a way, because it**

gets the White ones in particular to interact with more Black people, because I think a lot of the issues come up because they're not being around Black people at all… It's actually one of those neighborhoods I tell my friends about, whenever I see a house for sale, I tell them you should come look at this house… So, I feel like there has to be some racial diversity, at a minimum. That's why I haven't even wanted to look at certain neighborhoods, because I wouldn't want to be the only Black family there."

- *second-gen young adult man from MARG-MC neighborhood*

"I'm going to tell you something so funny. I don't really know my neighbors, okay? You close your garage and you go in the house… I would like to see more Black people out here, I would. I feel like a lot of times Black people don't come out here. It's not that they can't afford it. I think it's just, they always say, "Girl, you live way out." It's that situation. I think they think it's in Egypt… I wouldn't mind a 50% Black percentage, right now it's 10, 15%... Around the city, I would say a seven or eight (out of ten). I feel like I live in a nice neighborhood. I'm content here… People who come visit me, (say), "Yeah, this is really nice house and everything." (When it comes to how others would rank my neighborhood,) I wouldn't say a 10, but I would say a 9."

- *second-gen middle-aged woman from ID-MC neighborhood*

"There was no reception. One of the people that work for me, she said, "Oh, when we moved in a home, somebody brought us some meals and some cake." I said, "I didn't get a thing." I didn't get no sandwich, I didn't get nothing… I'm fine. I'm very comfortable there. Like I told you, I come in, drive into my garage... As I drive through my subdivision, it seems like it's getting more of an even kind of thing. I see more Black families there now than I did when I first moved in a long time ago.

(When I say even, I'm) thinking about more (the level) of representation (in) the city.

- *first-gen middle-aged woman from MARG-MC neighborhood*

These statements are placed in descending order to demonstrate the social value that respondents placed on the presence of Blacks in their neighborhoods. The first statement links the number of Blacks in a neighborhood to opportunities to socialize, while the second statement demonstrates how the respondent feels somewhat content with the number of Blacks in his neighborhood, but is actively recruiting his Black friends to move into the neighborhood. The third and fourth statements combine responses to different questions that these participants had over the course of their interviews. I believe the common thread in these statements is a sense of racial isolation in neighborhoods with low Black representation.

Overall, the connections between how respondents perceive their neighborhood environments and how they see their place in the social world reveals a sense of coherence between identity, neighborhood comfort, and neighborhood assessment. While there are exceptions, there are clear connections between familial class background and neighborhood type, and both of these elements combined seem to frame the sense of comfort one feels in their neighborhood and how they assess them.

Respondents who demonstrated a clear understanding of what it means to be Black and middle class as a result of their upbringing, found comfort in neighborhoods in which they were a minority, but offered benefits and amenities that help to buttress property values such as homeowner's associations and access to recreational amenities such as shopping malls and casual-dining restaurants. Those who were either unclear on

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the meaning of being Black and middle class or rejected its significance, tended to find comfort in blackness. This translated to either prizing majority-Black neighborhoods or actively wishing for more Blacks to enter their neighborhoods.

Neighborhood assessments followed a similar pattern. Second-generation middle-class respondents, most of them living in neighborhoods classified as either marginally or identifiably middle-class neighborhoods, assessed their neighborhoods in a manner that they found consistent with how others outside of their neighborhoods would grade them. First generation respondents, on the other hand, were much more likely to find tension between how they would assess their neighborhoods and how others would, primarily due to their attachment to West End neighborhoods, which runs counter to the collective conscience of the city. In a sense, it could be said that they are rebelling against the city and it is this tension that compels these respondents to call out larger institutional actors such as the news media as playing a deleterious role in how their neighborhoods are regarded and valuated.

Along with assessments centering on the economic character of neighborhoods were race-based assessments in which the number of Black households was seen as a positive element. Along these lines, it seems that first-generation middle-class respondents had the upper hand. They were less likely to openly lament the lack of Black neighbors. Additionally, an element of racial assessment that proved critical across the board was the 'no-go' characterization that respondents placed on neighborhood with no or very little Black representation. While preferred neighborhood models appear to differ on the basis of class background, what is compelling in both cases is a sense of balance

between racial comfort and the opportunity to build intergenerational wealth through homeownership.

<u>Neighborhood Attainment and Intergenerational Succession</u>

One of my primary interests in interviewing members of the Black middle class about their neighborhoods was to gain insights into how they think about their intergenerational mobility through the lens of their neighborhood attainment. My lead-off question for this part of the interview was 'How do you connect owning a home in this neighborhood to your family's future economic prospects?' A lot of the time, respondents began discussing their plans for the house in the event of their passing. Conversations with middle-aged and elder respondents took on a more definitive tone, comparatively. Most respondents indicated that their homes would be passed down to their children, and within this group of respondents, the majority said that they would let their children decide whether they would stay in the house or sell it.

> **"When I'm gone this is property that will go to them. …I'm excited and hopeful about the developments that are scheduled to take place in the neighborhood, because hopefully that will improve property value or at least, stop it from falling. This can be a place where people can live if they have to or use as income if they need to."**
>
> - *first-gen middle-aged woman from DISADV neighborhood*

> **"My children automatically know they have a residence. Again, mine is paid for, so I own my house. So, only way my children could ever lose our house if something happens to me and my wife is that they don't pay any taxes, but the house is theirs. So, it gives them a little bit more security because the property's already done. I**

think the ownership and the security also gives them a little economic advantage if

they need it to do so. So, if something happens and my son, my daughter... And they

come together and say, "We're going to sell the house and take the money," that

gives them some leverage to move forward."

-   *first-gen middle-aged man from MARG-MC neighborhood*

A couple of respondents preferred that their children keep the house within the family.
Both of these respondents were elders, one living in the East End and one living in the
West End, respectively.

"It would be good to keep (the house) within family. That would be my preference.

But it's not really my decision what happens after I die. I can go on the will and say

this and this and this and this. But that doesn't mean it's going to happen."

-   *second-gen woman from ID-MC neighborhood*

"Well, I'm bound and determined to pass my house on, keep it in good shape for

whoever inherits it, hoping they also have the mindset to pass it on to their children.

It never occurs to me to sell my house."

-   *first-gen woman from DISADV neighborhood*

A few respondents said that they plan to sell the house at some point in the future, which
they saw as ultimately contributing to what their children would eventually inherit from
them.

"We've talked about selling it and moving into something smaller, with just my

husband and I. And having less of a house to take care of, and then of course going

into a smaller home whatever the sell of a house would be."

-   *second-gen middle-aged woman from ID-MC neighborhood*

"Well, at this point, probably selling the house will be more beneficial because there's times I think about how long am I going to live here, because my kids are... My son's 20, my daughter's 24, so I don't have any little babies anymore. I'll go with selling instead of keeping in the family… Like I said, my neighborhood has shot up, the value of the houses shot up. And I kind of keep up with that, because I just like to know, but I noticed, I think I could profit anywhere between $60-$80,000. Yeah. Some of it may be exaggeration, but somewhere in there, in that little range."

        - *second-gen middle-aged woman from ID-MC neighborhood*

In anticipation that the conversation could go in a number of directions based on the opening question, I asked respondents about the financial rewards they anticipated from homeownership and about the importance of owning a home in their current neighborhoods to leaving a financial legacy for their families. Surprisingly, a number of respondents went beyond financial considerations and discussed the importance they saw in being an example for their children. They shared the following:

"I think it's important to lead. I think it's important to start generational wealth in order to teach, in order to give them a good foundation… A lot of people don't start off with generational wealth, but…I'm not going to be Bill Gates when I pass on. If these children get like $100,000 from me to split, they will be extremely fortunate, and the house. But I think it's important for them. It gives them a good start in life. It gives them a way to put a down payment on a home, pay off their student loans. It gives them a start."

        - *first-gen middle-aged woman from DISADV neighborhood*

"So, leaving something, they have to have some kind of legacy, something for them. And not have a generation of nothing. But to teach them generational wealth and

how to invest. Just because you have it, doesn't mean that you spend it. So, you should really try to save. Teaching forward-thinking like that to my kids. But we have to be good stewards of our money, too. So, I think that's huge. We have those conversations amongst ourselves and try to make sure our kids see that."

> *- second-gen young adult woman from DISADV neighborhood*

"(Leaving a financial legacy for your family is) very important. Mainly from the standpoint of setting a minimum level of expectation for your kids. By them living in a certain house, I think it will motivate them to take school seriously and for them to try to achieve certain things and even exceed in areas that me and Kimberly couldn't."

> *- second-gen young adult man from MARG-MC neighborhood*

Another element of leaving a financial legacy to their families through homeownership was the benefit of passing down a home that is owned 'free and clear.' Those who emphasized this aspect of intergenerational succession expressed the following:

"I do live down the street from a major golf course and close to the water. And again, the homes are historic. If ever Shawnee was able to be labeled as a historic neighborhood, I think a lot of things would change. So, I feel like I picked a prime location. But as far as legacy, my children wouldn't have to be in debt, because they would inherit a home."

> *- between-gen young adult woman from MARG-MC neighborhood*

"…Like me, they will enjoy not having a mortgage payment. Which is huge! And I am trying my best to keep it where their investments in the house won't kill them, based on my upkeep. So, just to have a house that is sound and in a good neighborhood."

The question that I asked to close out the interview was how important homeownership was compared to other ways of building wealth. Overwhelmingly, respondents felt that either homeownership was superior to other ways of building wealth or was foundational to other wealth-building paths such as stock ownership or owning a business. Again, something that was a bit surprising about this part of the conversations was how often respondents emphasized the importance of having something that they could call their own. My surprise was primarily due to the combination of how unprompted these statements were and their emotional weightiness.

"And I think that's good for people financially and emotionally. I think we all get a sense of satisfaction knowing that something is ours. When you're renting, you're just building someone else's wealth. So, I just think it's important, particularly for people of color, to recognize that they can own something. So, that's why I say emotionally. I think it impacts your confidence, your outlook, your sense of responsibility."

-   *first-gen middle-aged woman from DISADV neighborhood*

"Owning a home is huge, because that is something that's yours. When you sign all those papers you need to sign, "This is mine." At the end of the day, even if I lose my job, I have a home. I still get excited to push that button for my garage every day. This is mine. It has my name on it. I'm not renting it. Nobody is trying to snatch it. You know, people may lose their jobs or whatever, but you have a grace time before they tell you you have to go. But this is mine, I own this."

-   *second-gen young adult woman from DISADV neighborhood*

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"…But that's key for us to have something we know. We got, we paid it off, it's ours, and it's increasing in value. That's what my parents always had. They always said, "Look, at least we got our house. We've got somewhere, something we can call our own." My mother and my father, they didn't make a lot of money, but when you put that money in a pot, and you've got your property... My father was the proudest man, he said, "This is mine and nobody can take that away from me."

> - *first-gen middle-aged woman from MARG-MC neighborhood*

Even when I challenged study participants by asking them to compare homeownership to stock ownership and owning a business, the overwhelming opinion was that both paths were too risky compared to homeownership.

"Stocks, just like now, the stocks are going to go down probably. We're probably going to go into a recession because with this coronavirus, I think it's already... It went down 1,000 points yesterday. I don't hold too much in stock and bonds. I used to have a lot of stock. I sold most of my AT&T stock because it's not worth much anymore. You got a lot of competition out there now. And it's not what it used to be."

> - *second-gen elder woman from MARG-MC neighborhood*

"I think purchasing a home is a good way to build wealth. Because even if you go to sell it after living somewhere for 5 years, you might end up making $30,000 or $40,000 off of that sell. You couldn't really find that return anywhere else, like the stock market, definitely not in bonds. And you can't save your way to that amount, so I think homeownership is a very strong portion of a person's plan to get wealthy. And everyone should implement it, if possible."

> - *second-gen young adult man from MARG-MC neighborhood*

"I think (other ways of building wealth) are nice, but I think the foundation of your home, that safe haven, that place you go where you lay your head at night, is important. You can always invest and build your wealth, but if you don't have that foundation, that's not going to come. Because it doesn't make sense for me to be investing all of this money and (at the same time) just throwing money away. I want to make sure it's going somewhere."

- *second-gen young adult woman from DISADV neighborhood*

Overall, when looking at the responses in their totality, there is a general consensus that homeownership is a key pillar in respondents' plans to perpetuate intergenerational succession by passing down wealth to their descendants. Though the methods may differ, each respondent casts an optimistic glance on what the future holds for their family's financial future. I found it interesting that there was a greater propensity to sell houses in economically advantaged areas in the city, and a greater emphasis on passing down the house in disadvantaged neighborhoods.

Earlier, a sense of coherence was mentioned with respect to neighborhood choices and the sense of comfort that respondents felt living in their particular neighborhoods. When visions of intergenerational succession are added to this mix, this same coherence appears to emerge. Although not explicitly stated, respondents seem to be content and calm about their particular approaches to navigating neighborhood life and preparing the way for future family prosperity. While some elements may not be perfectly in sync, generally speaking, there is a substantial alignment between neighborhood racial preferences and the neighborhoods in which respondents reside. If these preferences actualized in the real world, come with certain disadvantages such as economic

devaluation or racial isolation, these residents deal with them resiliently and seem to have a corollary plan in mind. If properties are devalued at the moment, keeping the house within the family makes sense in anticipation for a better tomorrow when speculators see their neighborhoods differently. If the housing market is heating up in your particular neighborhood, preparing to sell the property and pass the proceeds forward to the next generation is logical. If your neighborhood is somewhere in the middle, you make peace with that as well, and find pleasure in living among a greater number of people who look like you.

Looking through the Lens of Quantitative Data

As a means of supplementing the interview data, I use ACS estimates to shed light on the socioeconomic conditions of respondent neighborhoods and how they lend further coherence to what respondents expressed. After analyzing census tract data from the standpoint of the recent histories of these census tracts, the most noteworthy patterns were associated with disadvantaged neighborhoods. Additionally, using the data I collected from respondents, I offer further perspective on the role played by familial class background.

When considering the disadvantaged category as a whole, one contradictory element that was worthy of attention was how respondents characterized their neighborhoods and the common usage of census tracts to stand-in for neighborhoods in the research literature. In order to account for this dynamic without sacrificing the need for coherence and brevity, I gathered block group data tied to each respondent and compared the median household income found for each block group to the average

median household income of the other block groups within the census tract. I treat the difference between the median household incomes of block groups and census tracts as ratios, with the average for the larger geographical unit serving as the divisor.

Table 14. Median Household Incomes of Block Groups Compared to Census Tracts

	DISADVANTAGED				
	BG 10.0003	BG 4.0004	BG 4.0003	BG 24.0002	BG 126.0302
BG med.hh.inc	$28,696	$45,966	$43,194	$17,447	$42,161
CT med.hh.inc	$23,779	$29,569	$30,123	$22,669	$22,545
BG-CT ratio	1.21	1.55	1.43	0.77	1.87

SOURCE: US Census, 2012-2016 5-year Estimates American Community Survey

Table 14 above displays the median household income estimates from the 2016 ACS for disadvantaged neighborhoods, comparing block groups and census tracts, and the block group-census tract ratios. On average, the block group-census tract ratio across these disadvantaged neighborhoods is 1.37, which is equivalent to a $9,756 difference in median household income. The largest gap in median household income occurs in CT 126.03, a census tract consisting of only two block groups. This census tract is one that only recently fell into the disadvantaged category, which suggests that the categorical fate of a census tract could be driven primarily by a segment of its household population, obscuring the inherent socioeconomic heterogeneity of the population.

When we revisit the sentiments and experiences that respondents living in disadvantaged neighborhoods shared, several things become a bit clearer. One thing that especially stands out was the tendency of these respondents to set boundaries between themselves and others living within the neighborhood at large. While setting boundaries

was not unique to this group, this particular method of doing so was unique compared to the situational contexts of other respondents.

"Even though the strip that I occupy is a beautiful one, a couple of blocks over, when I look at the crime alerts on my phone, it's not far, it's like a block or two over, and even that neighborhood is not run down or anything, but there's a lot of action over there. And I don't know what that's about over there, if it's rental or what."

- *first-gen elder woman from DISADV neighborhood*

"I have almost daily interactions. On my block, absolutely. You can go two blocks over and see something different. That's not true, maybe five blocks over you'll see something different. I can say that the younger the group, the poorer the property. Let's say for instance… two blocks down the houses start to have a bit of a decline, but that's because you can have an older woman with all of her grandchildren living with her."

- *between-gen young adult woman from DISADV neighborhood*

Overall, when we combine what was shared by respondents with census data, the holistic realities of Black middle-class life can be viewed with more acuity. Respondents living in these neighborhoods may not be able to grasp the full picture with respect to the economic trajectory of their neighborhoods, but they know and see enough to draw boundaries between themselves and others in their neighborhoods. When these residents expressed concerns about renters or new in-movers, the socioeconomic indicators back up their claims given the declines in homeownership in their neighborhoods and the growing poverty rates.

When it comes to the other neighborhood types, the only thing that emerged as substantial was a wide gap between median household incomes for the block group and census tract in a Shively neighborhood (BG 126.0102 and CT 126.01). In terms of ratios, there was a 0.75 gap in median household income, which translates to a $28,062 in real dollars. This suggests that residents living within this block group are living an island-like existence relative to their neighbors living in other parts of the census tract. The closest alignment between block group and census tract median household incomes was found in identifiably middle-class neighborhoods.

Overall, in terms of block group-census tract median household income alignment, there is a clear pattern of disadvantaged neighborhoods showing the widest gap, marginally middle-class neighborhoods showing the next widest gap, and identifiably middle-class neighborhoods showing a much narrower gap where the median household incomes for block groups was actually lower than that of the remaining census tract. In light of the responses from study participants, this pattern likely explains the lack of drawing boundaries in marginally middle-class and identifiably middle-class neighborhoods.

As this dissertation as a whole has demonstrated, there is an interconnectedness between the socioeconomic characteristics of neighborhoods and their racial demography. When the development of census tracts are viewed from a historical perspective, this sense of mutuality comes into even sharper relief. One of the primary findings of this particular article is that respondents took an active role in choosing the neighborhoods they call home, and the combination of the sentiments expressed in the

interviews and the neighborhoods that respondents chose suggest that the class

background of respondents is tied to their neighborhood racial preferences.

Beginning with respondents who either self-reported being first-generation middle

class or were not sure how to classify their class backgrounds, their sentiments and

perceptions often reflected a strong attachment to Black people and a preference to

among them. A few examples of such sentiments are shared below:

> **"This is going to sound really arrogant, Jamar. And I don't want to come across like**
>
> **that… I graduated from IU, came back here, went to law school, and got a Master's**
>
> **degree. I feel like, if I am a girl who grew up (in the West End) and I went to four**
>
> **universities, and thinking about going back to get another degree at this point in my**
>
> **life, and I'm old enough to be your much older sister. I feel like, anybody can do**
>
> **that! And I want other people to see that! I want to be able to share that example**
>
> **with other people, but not in that most obvious, preachy, "If I can do it, then you**
>
> **can do it, pull yourself up by your bootstraps." No. It's here I am, and I'm just**
>
> **living the best life I can live, and guess what, you can do it, too. And I came from the**
>
> **same place you came from. And I'm *here*."**

> - *first-gen middle-aged woman from DISADV neighborhood*

> **"If I had my choice, it would be Black, because we don't own enough real estate and**
>
> **our real estate is slipping away from us. It would be Black, for *that* reason. Not**
>
> **that… I got a White neighbor who is cool, that's alright with me, but just because I**
>
> **know how real estate is slipping away from us, you know…to a devastating and**
>
> **depressing degree. I would like to see Black folks look at being in an all-Black**
>
> **neighborhood and that being OK, because a lot of people are afraid of that, but I'm**
>
> **not afraid of that. If it turns all-Black, I'm cool."**

It would be unfair to say that second-generation middle-class respondents did not express a sense of connection to Black people, but it can be said that there was a tendency to embrace neighborhood models that were more racially mixed in nature, rather than majority-Black. Some of the statements reflecting this tendency are shared below:

> **"…By me growing up military, I think you have to be exposed to every nationality you can. You can't say you understand how somebody feels about something if you've never talked to them, or dealt with them, or spoken to them. And when I say that I don't see as many White families, they could be there, I just don't see them drive past, and there's no interaction. I would just hope that there is a good racial mix. I don't think it would be bad or beneficial to live in an all-Black neighborhood, or an all-White neighborhood, I just think you're missing out if you are… I was the only Black in my high school for four years in my particular class, so I've just always been exposed to that and those kind of things don't really bother me."**

> -   *second-gen middle-aged woman from ID-MC neighborhood*

> **"For me, I never really thought about the ideal. I think the biggest thing is not the racial makeup, but the safety of the neighborhood and my kids being included in things… I can go to 100%, it just really (depends on) if those core things are still the same. So, if those core things were secure, I would be OK with the neighborhood being 100% Black, I'd be OK… For me, I was more concerned about the flipside of that. Being in a neighborhood where there is zero diversity…because I really believe it's something for your kids to see other kids that look like them, being able to play with kids like them. So, I feel like there has to be some racial diversity, at a minimum."**

The key difference in the sentiments expressed by some of these first- and second-generation middle-class respondents is the unabashed way that these first-generation respondents expressed their preferences for majority-Black neighborhoods and the more ambiguous nature of the second-generation respondents who, for all intents and purposes, find comfort in neighborhoods with more racial diversity. I found the last quote above to be especially interesting, due to its ambiguous nature. This respondent indicates that he would be comfortable with a neighborhood being 100% Black, but qualifies it by saying that it needs to be low crime and embracing toward his kids. With much less ambiguity, he voices his strong reluctance to live in neighborhoods where his family are the only Blacks. Again, there is no ambiguity among the first-generation respondents who desire and live in majority-Black neighborhoods.

Analyzing the interview data alongside census data tied to the neighborhoods of respondents revealed that the personal observations of those at the grassroots are complementary to socioeconomic estimates made from a more detached, quantitative perspective. Admittedly, this complementarity was seen most clearly in disadvantaged neighborhood contexts, but in a sense, the stability that defines these marginally middle-class and identifiably middle-class neighborhoods seemed to be reflected in the more sanguine responses from the people living in those neighborhoods.

The tendency of respondents to draw boundaries between themselves and others living among them in disadvantaged neighborhoods, whether based on proximity or if they were a renter instead of a homeowner, is particularly noteworthy and aligns well with the substantial gaps that were found between median household income figures for

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block groups and those for census tracts. Lastly, a brief look at differences in class background indicated that there is a sense of coherence between neighborhood choice, racial preferences, and the household in which one was raised. This dynamic suggests that the social contexts in which we grow up affects how we envision ideal neighborhoods. If growing up middle-class accustoms middle-class Blacks to embrace racial diversity and the neighborhoods that embody that, it seems the opposite may be true for those who reach middle-class status over the course of their lifetime. That said, the following statement from a first-generation middle-class respondent is a humble reminder that accounting for exceptions is always necessary:

> **"(We have about a 20% Black percentage). I guess I would want it to mirror what that looks like…if I were to have my way, I would want it to meet what our national numbers look like. If White Americans are somewhere around between 65 and 70-ish percent and Black families are between 13 and 15 percent. And then Latino families might be around that mark as well and Asian families (might be) in the 10 percent range. I would like it to look something like that."**

Discussion and Conclusion

The findings from this study disrupt some of the implicit assumptions in the social scientific literature on racial residential segregation and much of the Black middle-class literature that focuses on the unique neighborhood disadvantages that middle-class Blacks tend to suffer (Adelman 2004, Alba, Logan and Stults 2000, Massey and Denton 1993, Rothstein 2017, Sharkey 2014). The stock of knowledge emerging from both areas of scholarship tend to overemphasize the desire of Blacks to live in majority-White neighborhoods and underemphasize the ability of Blacks to secure housing in neighborhoods of their own choosing. Admittedly, I was a bit surprised at the overall strength of this pattern in the responses.

Awakened from my slumber, several things began to make sense to me the more I engaged with the interview data and sought to make sense of what I was hearing from respondents and what I was seeing in the quantitative data. If one only considers the economic components of homeownership, it is hard to make sense of the choices made by many of the middle-class Blacks with which I had the pleasure to speak. If personal comfort is treated as a factor, then things start to cohere. On a few occasions, the middle-class Blacks I spoke with expressed a stark reluctance to live in neighborhoods where they were the only Blacks. These statements were made unrehearsed, since I do not recall asking any question directly pertinent to that scenario. Simply stated, in the same manner that these respondents felt compelled to seize the reins of their home searches, except in cases where they had familiarity with the real estate agent, they had a keen eye on the racial composition of neighborhoods, trying to figure out if they could be racially comfortable there.

The themes of personal comfort and seizing ownership of the home buying process were accentuated by the sense of coherence that characterized how respondents answered the questions I put forth and by the patterns found in the class backgrounds of respondents. First-generation respondents were found to struggle more in articulating the meaning of being Black and middle-class and identifying with that "image." In addition, they were more likely to express a desire to live in majority-Black neighborhoods and identify more strongly with Blacks in terms of serving Black communities and being an example. Second-generation middle-class respondents tended to articulate more clearly what it means to be Black and middle-class and the corollary expectations of cultivating a certain standard among their children with intergenerational succession in mind (Lacy 2007, Lareau 2011). They also tended to live in more prosperous and more diverse neighborhoods, often in areas in the eastern part of Louisville Metro. These sentiments, attachments, and tendencies were ultimately matched by the neighborhoods both groups chose.

Neighborhood types also appeared to play a significant role in how respondents conceptualized leaving a financial legacy to their families. Respondents living in disadvantaged neighborhoods tended to take a longer view of intergenerational succession, preferring to pass the house down to the next generation, instead of selling the house and passing on the proceeds. Seemingly aware of how their properties were devalued, they contented themselves with being able to own their homes without a mortgage payment, and envisioned a day when their descendants could have more flexibility with the property they inherited, a day when external economic valuations better align with the value that respondents see in their homes and neighborhoods. Those

from marginally middle-class and identifiably middle-class neighborhoods, on the other hand, seemed to already perceive a sense of flexibility with respect to passing the home down to the next generation or selling the home and passing down the proceeds. On occasions, respondents from these neighborhoods discussed how property values have risen significantly over time and expressed having no worries when it comes to the financial rewards they anticipated.

By design, the interviews were segmented into three parts, the first one speaking to Black middle-class identities, the second one focusing on neighborhood perceptions and interpretations, and the third dealing with visions of intergenerational succession. Among the respondents, the most significant divergence in the sequential flow of sentiments and experiences was caused by identity, which as I stated, seemed to be influenced primarily by familial class background.

By choice, the majority of second-generation respondents lived in diverse, economically stable neighborhoods and the majority of first-generation respondents lived in majority-Black, economically disadvantaged neighborhoods. Even when first-generation respondents lived in more diverse and economically stable neighborhoods, they expressed sentiments that embraced blackness over class-based identities. The one second-generation middle class respondent living in a neighborhood that was classified as disadvantaged, expressed a sense of conflict between her level of comfort when she first moved into her neighborhood to her recent comfort level, despite seeing more Black families move into her neighborhood. While exceptions exist, the sense of coherence between how respondents viewed their race/class identities and how they experienced

and interpreted their neighborhoods, indicates that familial class background is a potent factor in Black middle-class identities and how neighborhoods are perceived.

These elements of identity and neighborhood experiences combine to inform visions of intergenerational succession. Given the weightiness of the racialized social structure and how it combines with elements of place stratification, those living in majority-Black neighborhoods are economically disadvantaged with respect to wealth-building capacity, but instead of despairing, they envision passing down homes that will appreciate in better days while offering a debt-free form of homeownership in the present day or soon-to-be future. Middle-class Blacks living in more economically advantaged, but less Black neighborhoods trade any sense of isolation they may feel for forms of wealth-building homeownership that are more mainstream, offering the flexibility of selling homes that will yield sizeable returns or maintaining family ownership. The primary neighborhood model that is missing is the majority-Black and economically advantaged model offered in other urbanized areas such as the Washington DC-area (Lacy 2007, Sharkey 2014).

One troubling finding that must be noted, especially in the context of this dissertation as a unified body of work, are the instances of steep decline found in two neighborhoods in particular. Over the course of a six-year period, ACS estimates depict CT 4.00 as experiencing a sharp increase in its poverty rate and substantial declines in median household income and median home value, while CT 126.03 is shown to be suffering the same fate, plus a sharp decline in its homeownership rate. The question that lingers in this respect is what happens when you find a neighborhood of choice, but watch it decline over time? More generally, what does it mean to realize your dream of

moving into a neighborhood that fits your preferences, when over time, the neighborhood

drifts away from the way it was when you made that commitment to it? What happens

when you place your feet on solid ground and claim a spot as yours, but the ground shifts

below your feet?

DISCUSSION:

BLACK MIDDLE-CLASS NEIGHBORHOODS THROUGH MULTIPLE LENSES

This dissertation from the first article to the third, has taken an analytical journey that originated from the general level of comparing similar urbanized areas to the ground level of individual perceptions. A multi-layered, puzzling, and rich portrait of Black middle-class neighborhood attainment in Louisville has resulted from this novel way of conducting Black middle-class research. Most fundamentally, this study has shown that Black middle-class neighborhoods in Louisville, and those in the other urbanized areas featured in this research project, are heterogeneous in nature, but skew towards economically disadvantaged when factoring in the socioeconomic profiles of the households involved.

In the first article, I found that the level of middle-class residential segregation faced by Blacks impacted their likelihood of living in prototypical middle-class neighborhoods that are identifiable due to the socioeconomic profile of those living there and the concentration of homeownership. Although the fact that these identifiably middle-class neighborhoods are majority-White received relatively little attention, it certainly operated in the background given what the data showed in terms of the low percentage of Blacks and other non-Whites that live in these neighborhoods. While segregation levels had an adverse impact on the number of Black middle-class households living in identifiably middle-class neighborhoods, the curious case of the

Nashville highlighted that something more localized in character must also be impacting the socioeconomic character of Black middle-class neighborhoods. The contrasts between Louisville and Nashville with respect to Black middle-class neighborhoods that do not qualify as identifiably middle-class revealed that middle-class Blacks in Louisville have less to lose in terms of the socioeconomic characteristics of their neighborhoods.

Continuing the theme of Black middle-class neighborhoods that are not middle-class prototypes, I found that the Black middle class in Raleigh experienced the most equitable circumstances among the Like-UAs in this regard, since these neighborhoods did not have to take on the burden of absorbing an inordinate amount of poverty. Conversely, my analysis revealed that Kansas City appears to engage in a form of opportunity hoarding that is the polar opposite of Raleigh, with elements of spatial poverty nearly absent from its identifiably middle-class neighborhoods, yet visible in other types of neighborhoods.

From a more Louisville-centric perspective, the second article focused on the relationship between Black middle-class neighborhoods and spatial poverty, revealing that both elements of spatial poverty, neighborhood poverty rates and the concentration of federally-subsidized housing, had a clear geographical component that highlights the durable interconnectedness of race, class, and space. As those local to Louisville already know, disadvantage is concentrated in the northwest of Louisville Metro and advantage is concentrated in the east. Therefore, the most illuminative aspect of the spatial poverty and Black middle-class household relationship was the volatility seen in the southwestern area of Louisville Metro, primarily areas close to or within Shively, a municipality within the county border. The evidence strongly suggests that this volatility, which has adversely

affected property values in these neighborhoods, is tied to the White – Black racial transitions that have recently taken place. Whether from a home value or median household income perspective, it is pretty clear that middle-class Blacks are not getting their money's worth (Woldoff and Ovadia 2009).

The interviews I conducted for the third article added a key confounder to the subject of Black middle-class neighborhood attainment, the fact that the overwhelming sentiment I heard from respondents was one of ownership of the home buying process. This sense of ownership on the part of respondents was imbued with coherence that interwove personal comfort, the neighborhood chosen, and the willingness to navigate the social consequences that result from their choices. Those attracted to majority-Black neighborhoods demonstrated a willingness to deal with the disadvantages that come with these types of neighborhoods due to the non-existence of majority-Black, economically advantaged neighborhoods. Those attracted to economically advantaged neighborhoods wished for more Blacks in their neighborhoods, but largely dealt with feelings of racial isolation to maintain an ownership stake in these neighborhoods.

The interviews also uncovered some interesting dynamics related to the influence of neighborhood types and familial class backgrounds. Although there were three neighborhood types highlighted in this particular article, the differences in type that emerged as most significant upon analyzing the interview data were those between disadvantaged neighborhoods and those that were not disadvantaged. Respondents in disadvantaged neighborhoods were much more likely to feel compelled to pass down their homes to the next generation as an intergenerational succession strategy and to voice concerns about crime and safety. Those living in both marginally middle-class and

identifiably middle-class neighborhoods were more apt to express a sense of flexibility with respect to either selling the home or passing it down and much less likely to mention crime or any safety related concerns. This pattern contrasts with the first two articles, in which I found substantial differences between each of the three neighborhood types. Lastly, differences rooted in class backgrounds were apparent in the neighborhoods they chose and with respect to both the ability to articulate what it means to be Black and middle-class and the urgency tied to passing down the concomitant values and identities to the next generation.

The three articles in combination speak to the interconnectedness of race, class, and place. While each of these elements of social stratification are analytically identifiable in their own right, their societal impacts in everyday life combine with other social axes to enable access to resources and opportunities for some, and to constrain access in the face of others (Collins 2000). When it comes to neighborhood attainment, race/class/place as a multifaceted social force produces neighborhood typologies that middle-class Blacks are forced to navigate, confront, or advance. I have identified these neighborhood types as disadvantaged, marginally middle-class, and identifiably middle-class.

<u>Disadvantaged Neighborhoods</u>

Nearly one-in-four of the Black middle-class households sampled lived in disadvantaged neighborhoods. Geographically, these neighborhoods are concentrated in the northwest of Louisville Metro and in a smaller footprint area in its center. With respect to the race/class/place nexus, there is historical sense of stability among these neighborhoods. These neighborhoods have a social reputation for being majority-Black,

low-income, and as having issues with crime. While a sense of stability can be seen in its social reputation and its socioeconomic character, there are signs that some of its most respected neighborhoods are undergoing steep declines. The Shawnee area, for example, experienced a substantial rise in poverty, and substantial declines in median household income and median home values from 2010 – 2016.

For members of the Black middle class, neighborhoods like Shawnee are still seen as desirable, due to what they feel is a great combination between the racial makeup of these types of neighborhoods and their physical beauty, given its tree canopy and its close proximity to a large Olmstead designed park and a golf course. The sense of connection that these Black middle-class residents have with Black people and Black culture drives their visions for the neighborhood and their intergenerational succession strategies. They envision the triangulation of race/class/place being disrupted sometime in the future, which would allow their families to intergenerationally prosper free of debt obligations. The sentiments expressed in the interviews suggest that these residents' connection to blackness was forged during their childhood and adolescence in either working-class or low-income familial contexts.

The structural components of the race/class/place nexus align concentrations of Black people with low social status and align Black people with low social status to neighborhoods that are deemed unworthy of economic investment. This nexus, spanning cities across the US, is historically rooted in the relational dynamics of the redlining and disinvestment of Black neighborhoods and perpetuated by those involved in the local governance of housing, whether in local government or involved in the real estate industry (Logan and Molotch 1987, Rothstein 2017).

At the same time, Black middle-class individuals, especially those who are first-generation middle class, are a part of this race/class/place nexus as well. They seek comfort in the neighborhoods with which they feel a sense of familiarity and view blackness as a strength to be embraced, not shunned. They seek to leverage their knowledge, experiences, and resources to affect the home-grown improvement of their neighborhoods. Acknowledging that the stability of these disadvantaged *places* is rooted in the ways that their populations are raced and classed, they seek the transformation of their places, both physically and reputationally. Also acknowledging that this is something that cannot be done alone, they seek the in-migration of other Black middle-class households to move the process of transformation forward.

Identifiably Middle-Class Neighborhoods

Over one-third of the Black middle-class households sampled lived in identifiably middle-class neighborhoods. On average, middle-class Blacks residing in these neighborhoods that simultaneously qualified as being both Black middle class and identifiably middle class, experienced median home values that were close to 90 percent of the average median home values found for the identifiably middle-class category, as a whole. Identifiably middle-class neighborhoods compared to disadvantaged neighborhoods, lie at the opposite end of stability. Their poverty rates have remained low relative to the UA over time, and median household income and median home values have remained relatively high compared to UA figures.

Members of the Black middle class residing in identifiably middle-class neighborhoods feel a sense of comfort in these neighborhoods, while recognizing the paucity of Black households in their vicinity. Respondents living in these neighborhoods

recognized that there were other neighborhoods more highly regarded than their own, but felt that the average Louisvillian would still give their neighborhoods high marks. When it came to their intergenerational succession strategy, each of these second-generation middle-class respondents recognized the likelihood that their homes would be sold, although one respondent in particular wanted the house to be intergenerationally passed down.

The race/class/place nexus associated with identifiably middle-class neighborhoods is one that could be described as concentrated advantage. Geographically centered in the eastern part of Louisville Metro, these neighborhoods are known to be majority-White and middle-class, at minimum. Compared to other areas of Louisville Metro, especially those in the west and southwest, identifiably middle-class neighborhoods are rich in amenities. At the micro-level, Black middle-class individuals navigate the race/class/place nexus of identifiably middle-class neighborhoods by expressing an appreciation for diversity and by finding comfort in neighborhoods that are aesthetically compatible with their class identity. However, two out of three respondents expressed a sense of longing for more Black households in their neighborhoods to seemingly better complement their race/class identities.

Marginally Middle-Class Neighborhoods

The largest share of Black middle-class households lived in marginally middle-class neighborhoods, neighborhoods that are neither disadvantaged with respect to poverty levels, nor qualify as identifiably middle-class. Among the three neighborhood types, marginally middle-class neighborhoods experienced the most volatility in terms of both racial change and socioeconomic decline. The socioeconomic declines within this

neighborhood type were largely shaped by hyperlocal dynamics taking place in the Shively area. Accompanying the in-migration of Black households and the outmigration of White households have been substantial drops in median home values and in the concentration of homeownership. Other neighborhoods within this typology exhibit more stability and in rare cases, show signs of ascension.

One of the lingering questions with respect to these neighborhood types was whether marginally middle-class neighborhoods have more in common with identifiably middle-class neighborhoods or disadvantaged neighborhoods with significant Black middle-class representation. While the first article doesn't really address this particular question, the second and third articles suggest that while marginally middle-class neighborhoods, as a neighborhood type, have more in common with identifiably middle-class neighborhoods, some of the neighborhoods classified as marginally middle-class are trending toward disadvantaged.

From the perspective of respondents living in these neighborhoods, the impression is that all is well. Still, an interesting dynamic that emerged when conversations are compared across this neighborhood type are the somewhat divergent attitudes toward living among Blacks. Interestingly, those who expressed a preference for American-style diversity basically lived in neighborhoods that mirrored that, while those who preferred a larger share of Black households expressed that their neighborhoods hadn't quite met their expectations in that regard. Differences in both intra-racial sentiments and in the actual racial makeup of these neighborhoods make this a unique neighborhood type. Still, similar to their identifiably middle-class counterparts, the respondents living in these neighborhoods express a sense of contentment with their

neighborhoods. However, comparatively, the sense of contentment expressed by those living in marginally middle-class neighborhoods is less troubled by the paucity of Black neighbors.

The race/class/place nexus shaping marginally middle-class neighborhoods appears to be variant in nature, meaning that unlike majority-Black, disadvantaged neighborhoods and majority-White prototypical neighborhoods, there is a diffuseness that defines the geography of marginally middle-class neighborhoods. Regardless of how concentrated they may be in the southwestern and southeastern sections of Louisville Metro, their geographical and racial makeup differences seem to call forth a case-by-case style of governance by those institutions that shape the landscape of place stratification.

Given the relative proximity of southwestern neighborhoods to disadvantaged northwestern neighborhoods (West End), marginally middle-class neighborhoods appear to have their fates linked to the West End (Dawson 1994, Pattillo 1999). Conversely, marginally middle-class neighborhoods in the southeast may have their fates linked with more prosperous East End neighborhoods. Stated differently, it appears that the strategy among local governing institutions seeking race/class/place coherence in neighborhoods experiencing race/class-based changes is to link these places to other neighborhoods with a more stable race/class/place triangulation.

For middle-class Blacks, the geographical divergence of marginally middle-class neighborhoods appears to shape their level of neighborhood comfort. A respondent from a marginally middle-class neighborhood in the southwest indicated a sense of excitement toward his neighborhood's growing Black population, but also shared that he felt that the local police were becoming more aggressive toward Black youth. Respondents from

marginally middle-class neighborhoods located in the southeast were less likely to tout

the number of Blacks in their neighborhoods, but did appreciate organized elements in

their neighborhoods such as homeowner's associations. While the southwest respondent

expressed less tension between his race/class identity and the place he called home, the

southeast respondents acknowledged not seeing many people who looked like them, but

saw enough Black folks to feel some sense of contentment in their neighborhood.

While some research on Black middle-class neighborhoods suggests that

structural forces from on high act in determinative ways to impose the types of

neighborhoods that middle-class Blacks can access, my research strongly suggests that

there is more to the story. The analytical lenses that I have employed suggest that there is

a sense of complementarity between how the triangulation of race/class/space is

structurally arranged and the ways in which middle-class Blacks from different class

backgrounds and with different intra-racial political orientations navigate the home

buying process and stake a claim in neighborhoods that they see as representing the best

balance between personal comfort and worthiness of investment.

CONCLUSION:

BLACK MIDDLE-CLASS SUCCESSION WITHIN A RACIALIZED SOCIAL

STRUCTURE

The rich heterogeneity found in Black middle-class neighborhoods is an outcome produced by structural forces that are combinative and mutually reinforcing on one side of the equation, while on the other, is found the agency of middle-class Blacks seeking homes in neighborhoods where they can feel comfortable and prosper. While it is important to recognize the agency of the Black middle class and take stock of what their beliefs, worldviews, and experiences tell us about their ownership of the home buying process and the ways in which they manage their neighborhood contexts, it is equally important to recognize that these expressions of agency take place in a larger context.

This larger context is shaped by a racialized social structure that is premised on maintaining the dominant position of Whites and the subordinate position of Blacks and other non-White groups (Bonilla-Silva 1997). In neighborhood contexts, this dynamic is seen in the ways that white proprietary claim operates as a dominant force that is structurally reciprocated. A primary example of this is how the outmigration of substantial numbers of White middle-class households interconnects with the flight of capital investment and the subsequent steady transformation of home-owned properties into rental properties. As neighborhoods undertake such changes, some Black middle-class households are comforted by the presence of more Blacks, but the race/class/place

triangulation portends that such boons to social comfort come with substantial costs with respect to intergenerational succession prospects.

Admittedly, the key findings emerging from this dissertation are a bit messy with respect to the inherent contradiction between structural impositions such as middle-class segregation and durable geographies that predominate the fate of neighborhoods and the individual agency that respondents voiced with respect to their neighborhood choices. I believe the best way to make sense of this messy picture is to be mindful of how neighborhoods can shift over time and to be cognizant of the fact that choices are often constrained.

For example, a Black middle-class family could move into a neighborhood that they find very attractive given the style of the houses, the significant number of Black families like them, and the sense that this neighborhood could be conducive to housing appreciation. This same family, over a 15-year period could witness significant shifts in the racial makeup of their neighborhood, notice that the upkeep of property is not the same as it was, and have an awareness that the big box department stores that used to be within a 10-minute drive just are not around anymore. This very brief example demonstrates that the wisest choices are constrained by contextual factors beyond the control of individual families. Of course, this family could move to another neighborhood if their financial circumstances allow, but the more significant point is that Black middle-class households must display asymmetric forms of vigilance to secure housing in neighborhoods that offer both social comfort and opportunities to harness prosperity through homeownership.

This dissertation has shown that the place-making aspects of the racialized social structure have produced forms of racial residential segregation that affect not only low-income Blacks, but middle-class Blacks as well. Segregation levels vary based on urbanized areas, but reflect the same outcome depending on the strength of segregation, which is Black middle-class households living in neighborhoods that are not prototypically middle-class. For example, the low segregation levels found in Raleigh translated to a sizeable majority of its Black middle class living in prototypically middle-class neighborhood, while the relatively high segregation levels in Kansas City meant that less than 1-in-4 Black middle-class households lived in such neighborhoods.

Theoretically speaking, the racialized social structure enables neighborhood choices rooted in *whiteness* to predominate the economic fate of neighborhoods, which constrains the effectiveness of *Black middle-class succession* as a competing cultural imperative. The efforts of middle-class Blacks to realize neighborhoods that combine a sense of comfort with wealth-building prosperity are imperiled by the routinized ways that the racialized social structure disadvantages Blacks. In disadvantaged neighborhood circumstances, the Black middle class faces uphill battles to transform their neighborhoods into more desirable places while maintaining their neighborhoods' majority-Black character. In advantaged circumstances, they must grin-and-bear a sense of racial isolation in neighborhoods that remain majority-White or deal with the socioeconomic consequences of more Blacks moving into their neighborhoods.

The racialized social structure encompasses various levels of society ranging from individuals with racial identities to social institutions that embed racialized logics into laws, public policy, the economic life of society, and the administration of justice. The

logic animating the racialized social structure is the placement of social actors into racial

categories that are hierarchically arranged (Bonilla-Silva 1997). This means that

neighborhoods with a significant number of Black middle-class households must contend

with the ways that the racialized social structure produces race/class/place nexuses that

treat race as a master category that can be wielded to designate places considered to be

Black as undesirable and to regard class identities that rebut stereotypical blackness as

unimportant (Omi and Winant 2015).

Black middle-class neighborhoods in Louisville ranged from economically

disadvantaged to identifiably middle-class. Neighborhoods in the middle of these two

classifications were identified as marginally middle-class neighborhoods. These three

neighborhood types embodied the dynamic interplay between structure and agency,

between how the localized version of the racialized social structure shaped the choices

available to middle-class Blacks and how they, in turn, made sense of their choices. The

neighborhood type that demonstrated the most stability across the three articles were

identifiably middle-class neighborhoods, these neighborhoods are racially defined by

having majority-White populations with the representation of Blacks ranging from

tokenized to significant. Evidence suggests that the socioeconomic stability of these

neighborhoods is tied to maintaining their sizeable White majorities.

In marginally middle-class and disadvantaged neighborhoods, there were

competing indications of stability and decline. While stability in disadvantage

characterized the majority of neighborhoods in the disadvantaged category, marginally

middle-class neighborhoods were more variant, with the majority showing economic

stability and some showing substantial volatility. The one neighborhood classified as

disadvantaged that showed substantial volatility would have qualified as marginally middle-class in 2010, and I found a geographically based bifurcation between southwestern marginally middle-class neighborhoods and their counterparts in the southeast. The southwestern neighborhoods experienced steep declines in median home value and the concentration of homeownership in some cases, which again, appeared to be indelibly connected to Black in-migration and White outmigration.

In their totality, the findings from this dissertation suggest that Black middle-class neighborhoods in Louisville are caught in the web of the racialized social structure's influence over the race/class/place nexus. Individual neighborhood choices are constrained by the weight of a racialized structure that is more receptive to white proprietary claim than to Black middle-class succession. Regardless of the neighborhood type, each scenario reflects some form of a trade-off between personal comfort and the wealth-building prospects of homeownership. The middle-class Blacks that are best served by the status quo of race/class/place nexuses are those who prefer American-style diversity over more significant representations of Black people in their neighborhoods. Simply stated, the nexus of race/class/place in Louisville does not enable the realization of neighborhoods that combine visibly Black populations with economic ascension and prosperity.

The most obvious limitations of this dissertation include the failure to conduct more interviews for the purposes of more forthrightly honoring the diversity of Black middle-class sentiments and garnering a greater degree of theoretical saturation. I sought to fill this gap by supplementing the feedback I did receive with an analysis of census

data pertinent to the respondents' neighborhoods. In hindsight, I would have taken a more liberal approach in designing and implementing my interview criteria.

Another limitation with which I struggled is striking a balance between deciding which census tracts qualified as Black middle-class census tracts and ensuring data compatibility with other aspects of the neighborhood data I used. At the root of this dilemma is the usage of census tract population weights to determine which census tracts had the highest concentrations of households earning income between $75,000 and $149,999, college-educated individuals, homeownership, *and* Black middle-class households. Based on my initial design of the study, I felt that using census tract population weights as an input that was key in deciding which neighborhoods qualified as Black middle-class adversely impacted the selection of low density census tracts with sizable Black middle-class populations, but in the end, I felt compelled to honor the approach that was most conducive to the internal coherence of my data.

Future research on Black middle-class neighborhoods may benefit from using my neighborhood typologies to ground city-by-city variability with respect to the neighborhood attainment of Black middle-class households and to further explore how segregation indices impact the distribution of Black middle-class households along the three neighborhood types. Additionally, future studies may seek to analyze the relationship between racial dynamics operating in particular urbanized areas and how Black middle-class respondents characterize preferential neighborhoods. My hypothesis is that desirable neighborhoods among middle-class Blacks is a sliding scale based on the racial particularities of their urbanized contexts. Conceptions of personal comfort and safety likely shift based on how the Black middle class judges White receptivity to their

presence. The example of Raleigh juxtaposed to the sentiments voiced in the interviews seems to indicate that this could be a fruitful line of inquiry.

Personally, the data itself presented great challenges in terms of how best to make sense of its contradictions and complexities. A part of me knows that when I go back to the data and read through my own words, more insights will emerge and things that are now latent based on my limited ability to articulate my findings and conclusions, will be manifest later. What haunts me most about these findings is the evidence of how the ground underneath our feet can shift despite our best efforts to secure nice homes in neighborhoods that fit our personal tastes. I am convinced that disrupting the ways in which the race/class/place nexuses penalize Black neighborhoods is a social imperative that requires politicized efforts on the part of Blacks and their allies.

The resilience of the racialized social structure portends that we must obtain a longer-term vision of race-based justice and racial integration. Similar to Mary Pattillo (1999), I believe that uplifting majority-Black neighborhoods is a critical component of realizing the larger goal of true racial integration. Black people as a collective, middle-class or not, must organize and do what we can to establish neighborhoods that combine personal comfort and intergenerational succession. The schools and services on which we depend and our sense of identity demands that Black people put more organized efforts into the economic transformation of neighborhoods that range from visibly Black to majority-Black. Success in this regard will require more than wise individual choices, it will mean, as one of the respondents indicated, intentionally disrupting the race/class/place nexuses that disadvantage Black neighborhoods as a matter of course.

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