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# Power, Privilege, And Peril: Governing In A Suburban Majority Black And Middle Class County - A Regional Perspective

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# Power, Privilege, And Peril: Governing In A Suburban Majority Black And Middle Class County - A Regional Perspective

## **Abstract**

Blacks' incorporation into United States (U.S.) society with life chances commensurate with Whites is a centuries-old social challenge. Black-White inequality research from the 1970s forward focused on skills gaps—Blacks' inability to access educational and employment opportunities—and spatial mismatches—Blacks' concentration in cities isolating them from opportunity-rich suburbs. The contemporary suburban Black middle class has, in theory, overcome these challenges. To investigate the extent to which this is the case, I asked: Do decisionmakers and residents in a majority Black suburban county have the same experiences as those in majority-White suburban counties? I answer this question through an ethnography of the U.S. local jurisdiction with the largest concentration of middle class African Americans, Prince George's County (PGC), Maryland, a suburb of Washington, D.C. Based on direct observation of policy and budget development processes and 58 interviews with county leaders and residents, I find that while nearly all U.S. locales experience certain constraints, largely stemming from federal and state funding retrenchment and pro-economic-growth imperatives, PGC contends with additional barriers due to its racial composition and because it is the most affordable county contiguous with D.C. PGC's "affordability" is tied to its role as the D.C. area's "sink" for negative regional economic development effects. Most consequentially for PGC's fiscal health, it absorbs a disproportionate share of low-income populations. In addition, Whites stigmatize Blacks, as demonstrated through persistent racial residential segregation and developers' reluctance to invest in high-end amenities in middle class Black areas—both of which dampen tax base growth. As a result, PGC faces budget "structural precarity and peril" because county services demand exceeds budget expansion. PGC officials make hard tradeoffs between vital public services nearby jurisdictions do not. I conclude the suburban Black middle class encounters unique barriers, and thus identify how regional market and government processes contribute to Blacks' "cumulative disadvantage."

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Chenoa Flippen

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POWER, PRIVILEGE, AND PERIL: GOVERNING IN A SUBURBAN MAJORITY BLACK AND  
MIDDLE CLASS COUNTY – A REGIONAL PERSPECTIVE

Angela M. Simms

A DISSERTATION

in

Sociology

Presented to the Faculties of the University of Pennsylvania

in

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Supervisor of Dissertation

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Daniel Gillion, Associate Professor of Political Science

Karyn Lacy, Associate Professor of Sociology

I dedicate this dissertation to my mother, Joan Simms; my father, Everitt Simms; and my brother, Joshua Simms in sincerest gratitude for their unyielding love, support, and good humor throughout my life, and especially during my dissertation research and writing processes. I also lift up my work to African descendant peoples—ancestors, those present today, and those yet to be born—as we continue the Black Liberation Struggle. May my research allow deeper understanding of social conditions now, and in so knowing, embolden humanity as we envision and cultivate just social systems allowing all in the human community to thrive.

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# ABSTRACT

## POWER, PRIVILEGE, AND PERIL: GOVERNING IN A SUBURBAN MAJORITY BLACK AND MIDDLE CLASS COUNTY – A REGIONAL PERSPECTIVE

Angela M. Simms

Chenoa A. Flippen

Blacks' incorporation into United States (U.S.) society with life chances commensurate with Whites is a centuries-old social challenge. Black-White inequality research from the 1970s forward focused on skills gaps—Blacks' inability to access educational and employment opportunities—and spatial mismatches—Blacks' concentration in cities isolating them from opportunity-rich suburbs. The contemporary suburban Black middle class, in theory, overcomes these challenges. I examine the extent to which this is the case through a two-year ethnography of the U.S. local jurisdiction with the largest concentration of middle class African Americans—Prince George's County (PGC), Maryland, a suburb of Washington, D.C. Based on direct observation of policy and budget development processes and 58 interviews with county leaders and residents, I find that while nearly all U.S. locales endure certain constraints, largely stemming from federal and state funding retrenchment and pro-economic-growth imperatives, PGC contends with additional barriers due to its racial composition and its economic position among D.C. area jurisdictions. PGC, as the most affordable county in the region, is the “sink” for negative regional economic development effects, such as those related to gentrification. Most consequential for PGC's fiscal health, it absorbs a disproportionate share of low-income households who place significant demand on county services, including its public schools. Racial residential segregation, which reflects Whites' stigmatization of Black people and the spaces they occupy, drives the relative balance of economic development costs and benefits PGC experiences. PGC officials manage budget “structural precarity and peril” by making hard tradeoffs between vital public services that Whiter, wealthier D.C. jurisdictions do not. PGC leaders also have more constrained development options. I show how racialized regional market and government processes shape local government capacity to support a high quality of life and conclude the suburban Black middle class receives fewer returns to its class status, relative to Whites, because of such processes.

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## CHAPTER 1: Foundations of Black-White Inequities—the United States Opportunity Structure in Historical Perspective

Ain't gonna let nobody turn me 'roun'  
Turn me 'roun'  
Ain't gonna let nobody turn me 'roun'  
I'm gonna wait until my change comes  
— **Negro Spiritual**, “Ain't Gonna Let Nobody Turn Me 'Roun”

If there is no struggle, there is no progress. Those who profess to favor freedom, and yet depreciate agitation, are men who want crops without plowing up the ground. They want rain without thunder and lightning. They want the ocean without the awful roar of its many waters. This struggle may be a moral one; or it may be a physical one; or it may be both moral and physical; but it must be a struggle. Power concedes nothing without a demand. It never did and it never will.

— **Frederick Douglass**, “West India Emancipation Speech” at Canandaigua, New York, 1857

One thing alone I charge you. Believe in life! Always human beings will live and progress to greater, broader and fuller life. The only possible death is to lose belief in this truth simply because the great end comes slowly, because time is long.

— **W.E.B. Du Bois**, “Last Message to the World,” 1957

How do we imagine and struggle for a democracy that does not spawn forms of terror, that does not spawn war, that does not need enemies for its sustenance?

— **Angela Davis**, *The Meaning of Freedom and Other Difficult Dialogues*, 2012

From Negro Spirituals to the words of abolitionist Frederick Douglass, to those of sociologist and Pan Africanist W.E.B. Du Bois, and activist philosopher Angela Davis, Black people have for centuries demonstrated—and continue to show—unrelenting commitment to realizing their freedom. The Black Liberation Struggle in the United States is one corner of a larger fight African peoples in the Americas and Caribbean have been engaged in as they pursue full human consideration after centuries of government and market processes “commodifying” their bodies and their labor—and after slavery was abolished, incorporated them into racialized regimes severely restricting their access to resources and their equitable participation in society, particularly with regard to education, employment, and housing (Kendi 2016, Taylor 2016).

Africans' struggle then as now is rooted in the terms under which most entered the Atlantic World: The Trans Atlantic Slave Trade. Inaugurated in the fifteenth century, over 10 million African people were forcibly removed from Africa. Upon arriving on North and South American and Caribbean shores, most were forced by European descendant people to labor without compensation, creating the foundation for the disproportionate material wealth and political power European descendant peoples have today in the United States and globally.

### **In Pursuit of Justice: African Peoples in the United States Opportunity Structure**

At the heart of Africans' freedom pursuit are two ideas only understood in their fullest sense if interpreted in tension with one another, as evinced by the Black thinkers quoted in the epigraph. One is the unrelenting effort humans must exert individually and collectively to attain, maintain, and reimagine ever more expansive understandings of freedom, of forms of human organization enabling all people's flourishing. The other is a life force beyond intellectual comprehension willing humans forward, a persistence fueling the effort to try yet again after unspeakable acts of human depravity. As a dialectic, we desecrate a third meaning: achieving just social outcomes is not inevitable—multiple other interests drive human behavior; and yet justice even after being denied time and time again resurfaces to receive its due.

Suffering in the course of human history has not been evenly distributed across groups. Indeed, groups and individuals with greater access to material and symbolic resources establish the terms for their distribution. I use sociological epistemology—the examination of how power is manifest in relationships and exchanges between people

and how such dynamics affect people's life chances—to investigate the United States opportunity structure through the lens of African descendant people's experiences.

### **The Sociological Imagination and Interrogating Race and Class Hierarchies**

Sociological inquiry is inherently multi-dimensional, encompassing macro, meso, and micro level social process interaction. Theorizing how groups and individuals shape and are shaped by United States (U.S.) opportunity structure institutions is an essential aspect of how social scientists measure the degree of material and symbolic resource equity. But the opportunity structure is vast—including many inter-related social processes—and is context and time dependent. How do researchers investigate (1) mechanisms differentiating people into groups and (2) how group-level hierarchies lead to relative access to material and symbolic resources?

I examine the U.S. opportunity structure by selecting a group at the intersection of two social hierarchies—one where they are relatively privileged and another dis-privileged—and where the majority of the population has moved from one context to another within the past 20 years, about the span of a generational cohort. This group is the Black middle class. Their middle-class status—defined as earnings at or above the U.S. median household income and holding a white collar job—indicates their socio-economic advantage (Landry and Marsh 2011).<sup>1</sup> At the same time, they are “Black”—a group of people subject to sustained historic and contemporary discrimination from White-controlled institutions central to determining their life chances over the life course and inter-generationally (Bobo, Charles, Krysan, and Simmons 2012; Kendi 2016, Pager

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<sup>1</sup> I define “middle-class” as holding a “white collar” non-manual labor profession, with the “upper-middle class” consisting of executives, managers, and professionals, and the “lower middle-class” of technical, clerical, and sales positions (Landry and Marsh 2011:379-380).

and Shephard 2008). And while millions of African Americans left the South for northern and western cities throughout much of the twentieth century in what become known as the Great Migration (Wilkerson 2010), during the last decade of the twentieth century and continuing into the twenty first, the African American population shifted to suburbs.

Understanding the Black middle class' opportunities and constraints requires accounting for legacy and ongoing social processes shaping all Americans' life chances, but those of affluent Blacks in unique ways due to their divergent social statuses. Among the most consequential social processes is racial residential segregation (Charles 2006)—which generally has resulted in majority-White communities throughout the U.S. receiving vastly more resources than majority Black communities. Racial residential segregation, one of several core aspects of how Jim Crow America functioned, involved and continues to involve governments and markets working in concert.

### **The Sociological Imagination and the Geography of Opportunity**

Most of the U.S. population lives within metropolitan areas consisting of cities and suburbs with interconnected economies leading to flows of resources and people in one jurisdiction affecting that of neighboring locales. People experience daily life at the local level. In addition, within locales, cumulative effects of government decisions at all three levels—federal, state, and local—as well as market forces, converge.

Notably, Black-White inequality research from the 1970s forward focused on skills gaps—Blacks' inability to access educational and employment opportunities—and spatial mismatches—Blacks' concentration in cities isolating them from opportunity-rich suburbs (Wilson 2012). In theory, the suburban Black middle class overcomes these challenges.

Though people may work in one metropolitan area jurisdiction and live in another, it is where their home is located that largely determines their access to public goods and services and market-based amenities, and thus heavily influences their quality of life. Local government capacity to provide high quality public goods and services is inextricably tied to tax revenue stability and growth—both funds generated through local jurisdictions’ own tax authority and revenue transfers from state and federal government. The extent to which local decisionmakers’ can use tax revenue to provide quality public goods and services to residents demonstrates how macro, meso, and micro-level interdependencies interact to create neighborhoods’ opportunity structures. Understanding local government efficacy in this regard is an especially acute issue for African Americans because they bear significant legacy divestment constraints, as well as ongoing forms of discrimination.

### **Current U.S. Opportunities and Constraints and the *Longue Duree* of History<sup>2</sup>**

Prior to the Civil War in 1861, the vast majority of African-descendant people in the United States were enslaved by European descendants who justified enslaving Africans through combinations of pseudo-science regarding biologically-based racial difference, Biblical interpretations, and beliefs about a hierarchy of civilizations placing Europeans at the pinnacle (Kendi 2016, Roberts 2011). Thus, for over two centuries, from the Colonial period until the Civil War, African people and their uncompensated labor in agriculture and trades laid the cornerstones of American wealth, though they received a scant portion of the benefits (Du Bois [1935] 2007).

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<sup>2</sup> The term “longue duree” indicates my analysis entails explaining how contemporary social processes evince both social change and the retention of attributes originally developed in prior periods (Braudel and Wallerstein 2009).



After the Civil War, in which Blacks played a decisive role in the Union victory over the Confederates, Blacks made significant strides. Constitutional amendments underpinned Reconstruction period (1865 to 1877) gains: the Thirteenth abolished slavery; the Fourteenth recognized Blacks' status as that of citizens; and the Fifteenth conferred Black men the right to vote. Blacks leveraged new opportunity to increase the political and economic control they had over their lives. They reunited their families severed by slavery; established homesteads, towns, and businesses; and elected Black people to office at all levels of government. Of particular note, Black leaders in southern states established the first free public education systems (Du Bois [1935] 2007). But federal government commitment to enforcing Reconstruction era changes in Blacks' legal status and ensuring their broader social inclusion was short lived. A key feature of the post-Reconstruction period is Blacks' relegation by Whites to all-Black towns and cities or parts of them, the borders of which Whites violently policed. For nearly 100 years after Reconstruction, Blacks and their communities received a fraction of the resources Whites and White communities did—and to this day, notwithstanding an opportunity structure expanded by The Modern Civil Rights Movement, Blacks and Whites have not reached economic or political parity.

In my study of the Black middle class' opportunity structure, I take a *longue duree of history* approach—I show how contemporary social processes are intimately connected to centuries-old social arrangements. Bearing this history in mind offers social scientists three important perspectives that improve their ability to understand mechanisms shaping Americans' life chances: (1) it highlights how racial differentiation and racism are embedded in virtually all aspects of the American social fabric—and

therefore the importance of not assuming all racial groups experience social processes, such as capitalism, similarly; (2) it enhances sensitivity in determining the specific relationships and exchanges supporting racism and the extent to which changes in them alter racial groups' life chances; and (3) it identifies the sorts of policies and other interventions necessary to remedy racism at the root—the persistent belief that Black people warrant less human regard than White people.

Through my research, I connect the *longue duree* to extant social processes in U.S. metropolitan areas. In doing so, I show how local jurisdictions within these areas must adapt to regional flows of people and resources to maintain or improve residents' quality of life. Furthermore, I demonstrate jurisdictions' capacity to provide a high quality of life to residents is fundamentally fused with two inter-dependent social statuses—race and class. Race, class, and the geography of resource distribution in metropolitan areas shape what become routinized government and market practices and cycles ultimately determining people's life chances.

An implication of the *longue duree* of history is that centuries and decades long social differentiation processes make some social outcomes more likely than others, *unless there is significant intervention by core societal institutions*. Inequities and resulting vulnerabilities the suburban Black middle-class experience—as I show in my study—demonstrate that both the history of racism and its new forms are central organizing forces in American society, undermining Blacks' life chances, regardless of their education level, occupational attainment, income, or geographic location. The Black middle class experience shows the U.S. opportunity structure is weighted in favor of certain groups, and often at less advantaged groups' expense.

Below I discuss major historical trends in Blacks' access to the U.S. opportunity structure from the World War II period forward, with a particular focus on the Black middle class and how their experience marks the contours of the U.S. opportunity structure writ large. Next I turn to extant theory and gaps in knowledge concerning interconnections between racial inequality and the geography of opportunity and the research questions I ask in light of what we do not yet know. Then I explain how I seek to answer my questions through an ethnographic study of the local jurisdiction with the highest concentration of middle class Blacks—Prince George's County, Maryland.

### **U.S. Opportunity Structure: World War II to the Present—Barriers and Breakthroughs**

#### **Housing**

Today's U.S. middle class is a relatively recent phenomenon and one largely created through racially discriminatory federal government social policy. Ira Katznelson, in *When Affirmative Action Was White*, argues the biggest wealth transfer in U.S. history, and what effectively created the White middle-class in the United States, was the Servicemen's Readjustment Act, commonly known as the GI Bill, which invested \$95 billion in World War II veterans (Katznelson 2005:113). Most importantly with regard to wealth building, the federal government offered returning soldiers government-guaranteed and reduced-interest mortgages with low down-payment requirements, as well as free college educations and other post-secondary school training. Millions of White GIs bought homes in suburban communities, but Black GIs were generally barred from doing the same. That is, Black GIs could not activate the resources White GIs could because the Federal Housing Administration allowed the mortgage industry to use

investment guidelines that deemed non-all-White communities “high risk” investments and thus ineligible for government support, a practice called “redlining” because mortgage industry investment maps demarcated “risky” neighborhoods with red lines. And even if Black GIs managed to acquire mortgages, White realtors and homeowners often refused to sell them homes in all-White communities (Silverman 2005).<sup>3</sup>

When Blacks purchased properties in the immediate post World War II period, they usually paid exorbitant interest rates in alternative markets, reducing the wealth they could accumulate. Furthermore, because homes in mixed-race communities and majority-Black neighborhoods generally appreciate at a lower rate than homes in majority-White neighborhoods, it takes longer for Blacks, on average, to accrue equity in their homes in the first place (Flippen 2004).

### **Education and Employment**

With regard to post K-12 school access, prior to the 1954 U.S. Supreme Court decision in *Brown v. Board of Education*, historically Black colleges and universities (HBCUs) were usually the only institutions that would admit Black students. Therefore Black GIs for at least the first decade after their return from World War II were subject to this constraint. HBCUs, many of which are small private institutions, could not keep pace with post World War II demand (Herbold 1994). Local agency discretion regarding who qualified for benefits also inhibited Blacks’ access to GI Bill benefits (Katznelson 2005).

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<sup>3</sup> The White population’s shift to the suburbs was facilitated through federal investment in a national highway system, making it feasible for people with cars to commute from their suburban homes to their jobs in the city (Powell 2002). Highway system development, alongside Blacks’ lack of access to the federally-backed mainstream mortgage market (due to “redlining”), are two critical ways in which the U.S. government invested in its White, but not its Black, citizens in the mid twentieth century. Highway and credit expansion also indicate how capital was increasingly shifting during this period from cities to city peripheries—that is, suburbs—where Whites were the majority population.

Taken together, the GI Bill was a government-sponsored wealth transfer to White Americans that continues to pay dividends to this day.

For the first several decades of the twentieth century, most Black people worked in the agricultural and domestic service sectors, with increasing numbers finding work in semi-skilled manufacturing jobs as industry burgeoned before and during the two world wars. However, Blacks who moved to northern and western metropolises during the twentieth century—a process called The Great Migration, which involved more than six million of the 10 million Black people living in southern states leaving their homes (Wilkerson 2010)—did not attain the same opportunities as native-born Whites or European immigrants (Liebersohn 1980). For instance, at the turn of the twentieth century, sociologist W.E.B. Du Bois notes in *The Philadelphia Negro* (1899) Irish immigrants forcibly supplanted Black dock workers who were the workforce majority on Philadelphia wharfs. Native-born Whites and European immigrant groups formed unions and prevented Blacks from joining them, or Blacks were relegated to subordinate positions within them (Ignatiev 2009, Liebersohn 1980).<sup>4</sup> Therefore, even as Blacks were incorporated into the burgeoning industrial economy, they earned lower average wages than similarly skilled Whites.

By the early 1970s, due to enactment of federal anti-discrimination legislation in employment and education, tens of thousands of Black men and women pursued post-

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<sup>4</sup> The Congress of Industrial Organizations was the only mass labor organization that systematically sought to unionize Blacks (Glenn 2004). Other major unions, including the American Federal of Labor, usually did not allow Blacks to join their ranks. That employers often used Blacks to break strikes exacerbated Whites' animus toward Blacks because Whites felt Blacks were undermining their wages. Of course, if all racial and ethnic groups were unionized to the same extent, employers would not have had a racially segmented labor market to leverage to their advantage (Bonacich 1972).

secondary training and moved into skilled blue collar and white-collar professional work, resulting in significant wage growth among Blacks.<sup>5</sup> For instance, from 1950 to 2010, the ratio of African–American men to White men in the highest-paying occupational, managerial, and professional jobs, increased from 0.22 to 0.60; at the same time, the percentage ratio of African–American men to White men in the lowest-paying occupations—farming, forestry, and fishing, decreased from 1.67 to 0.67 (Dau-Schmidt and Sherman 2013).

Today, Blacks continue to hold a unique position in the ethno-racial landscape with regard to their ability to participate in the U.S. opportunity structure. Among the indicators of racial discrimination’s ongoing effects is that in 2017, Blacks’ household income was *less than* it was in 2017, accounting for inflation—African Americans were the only racial or ethnic group for which this was the case (Long 2017). Furthermore, the household income gap between Blacks and Whites nationally is \$26,000, with Whites taking in \$65,000 and Blacks \$39,000 in 2016 (Ibid.).

### **Black-White Wealth Gap and Life Chances Implications**

Wages or income are just one aspect of economic stability. Wealth, people’s assets and savings net of their debt, in many ways is a deeper measure of long-term financial wellbeing because wealth allows people to make strategic investments and to withstand economy-wide shocks with less risk of losing their class footing. African

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<sup>5</sup> The Civil Rights Act of 1964 outlawed discrimination in public accommodations and employment on the basis of race, color, religion, national origin, and sex (United States Justice Department 2016c). The Voting Rights Act of 1965 prohibited state and local laws disfranchising Black and other minority voters, such as through the use of literacy tests (United States Justice Department 2016b). The Fair Housing Act of 1968 extended Civil Rights Act protections to the rental and sale of property (United States Justice Department 2016a).

Americans have far less wealth than European Americans. This discrepancy is connected to the host of mechanisms through which White-controlled dominant institutions have excluded Blacks from accessing resources to same extent as Whites. And prior to the Civil War, which abolished the chattel slavery system, Blacks were *themselves the basis of others' wealth* (Kendi 2016). Continued discrimination and the fact that Black households and communities have not been compensated for Slave and Jim Crow Era harms means the wealth gap scarcely closes, if it narrows at all. As discussed below, the Great Recession of 2007 to 2009 widened the discrepancy between middle class Whites and Blacks—from 8:1 before the economic downturn to 10:1 after (Kochhar and Cilluffo 2017). In 2016, White households' median wealth was \$171,000, while it was \$17,100 for Blacks (Ibid.).

The wealth gap between European descendant and African descendant Americans reflects multiple dimensions of the “sedimentation of inequality” (Oliver and Shapiro 2006). Past discrimination's influence on Blacks today has significant consequences for racial inequity and the scale and means of intervention necessary to achieve racial parity. First, Blacks' lack of wealth stultifies their ability to build a cushion to mitigate hardship during their working years and to save for a comfortable retirement (Oliver and Shapiro 2006). Second, because Blacks tend to have less wealth, they have less ability to take advantage of wealth building opportunities, such as opening a business or investing in stocks and bonds (Ibid.).

In addition, wealth accrues over time and is passed between generations. Blacks were prevented from participating fully, if at all, in major wealth building programs the U.S. government sponsored, among them: The Social Security Act of 1935, which

provided pensions to most White, but not Black, workers for the first several decades after its enactment; Federal Housing Administration policies facilitating Whites' access to favorable mortgage terms, thus enabling them to purchase homes, while Blacks were largely excluded from the federally-backed mortgage market due to "redlining" practices; and The Servicemen's Readjustment Act of 1945 (the GI Bill), which conferred to White returning soldiers access to education, employment, and housing benefits, but which Blacks could not activate due to GI Bill programs relying on racist social structures in their implementation (Katznelson 2005).

Consequently, today far fewer Blacks inherit wealth than do Whites (Oliver and Shapiro 2006). Black Millennials, those in their 20s and 30s, are far less likely than White Millennials to receive assets from their parents, people in their 50s and 60s, who themselves had parents (i.e., Millennials' grandparents) who built wealth through the aforementioned government programs. Furthermore, current members of the Black middle class are far less likely than Whites to "socially reproduce" their parents' class status or to be inter-generationally upwardly mobile—that is, to attain or surpass their parents' class status (PEW 2012: 20).

*Black Middle Class Emergence and Resilience Despite Persistent Barriers.* In spite of the obstacles discussed, the Black middle class has expanded demonstrably in recent decades. Yet despite evidence of upward mobility for many African Americans, particularly in light of Modern Civil Rights era gains, Blacks' and Whites' class experiences have not converged, including for Blacks who attain middle class status. Sociologist Mary Pattillo, in her book *Black Picket Fences* (2013), argues middle-class African Americans have relative "privilege" when compared to Blacks who are poor, but



relative “peril” when compared to their middle-class White peers.<sup>6</sup> Blacks’ disadvantage is heavily influenced by racial residential segregation (Charles 2006). This phenomenon persists even as metropolitan areas become more racially and ethnically diverse, increasingly including significant Latino and Asian populations (Charles 2006, Alba and Nee 2009). Blacks and Whites largely live in neighborhoods where a majority of their neighbors share their racial categorization (Pint-Coelho and Zuberi 2015, Charles 2006).

Until the last few decades, many of the negative effects of racial residential segregation on African Americans’ status attainment were connected to Blacks’ concentration in central city neighborhoods. But as of 2010, Blacks became a majority suburban population (Frey 2011). Lacy argues the “chocolate city/vanilla suburb model [is] a relic of the past in every American city, except Detroit..., Cleveland, and Milwaukee...” and that there is now also considerable class variation within suburbs (Lacy 2016:371). She states further that “...the spatial assimilation model does not hold for native-born blacks, who are too often denied access to white middle-class suburbs through racist practices” (Ibid.). In addition, many Blacks report not feeling welcome in majority-White communities. Rather than risk alienation, some Blacks who could move to majority-White areas choose majority African-American communities (Lacy 2007).

Moreover, middle class Blacks, particularly those who are upper middle class, highly value socialization and cultural opportunities unique to spaces with concentrations of Black upper middle class professionals—doctors, lawyers, engineers, et cetera (Ibid.). Still, Blacks’ appreciation of each other and their cultural idioms is not the primary driver

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<sup>6</sup> My dissertation title—“Power, Privilege, and Peril”—highlights my work is in conversation with Pattillo’s.

for racial residential segregation. In fact, most Blacks prefer racially integrated spaces (Charles 2006). While Whites express openness to ethno-racially diverse neighborhoods, Blacks seek more African Americans and other minorities in their communities than most Whites feel comfortable with—this incongruence means Whites often move out of or avoid spaces Blacks prefer. How do race and class differences map to race and class groups' access to public goods and resources in a metropolitan area? In the next section, I connect racial and class differentiation to the geography of opportunity.

### **Race, Class, and the Geography of Opportunity**

In addition to racism, another significant social process is the inter-relationship between migration—how people decide to where to live, when to move, and the opportunities and constraints shaping people's decisions—and the geography of opportunity—the extent to which neighborhoods have resources enabling people to meet their daily needs effectively, efficiently, and safely. Where Blacks live within metropolitan areas has changed significantly in the past 50 years. Among the achievements of The Modern Civil Rights Movement, was enactment of federal legislation prohibiting discrimination against Blacks in education, employment, and housing, opening new pathways for Blacks to ascend the socio-economic ladder and attain returns to their newly realized upward mobility.

For many Black families, as with most Americans, buying a home in a suburban community was and continues to be the *sin qua non* goal of leveraging middle class opportunities. Whites have been flocking to suburbs since the end of World War II. Many were seeking to escape city neighborhoods with increasing Black populations, a process commonly called “White flight.” But during the 1970s and 1980s, both Blacks and

Whites who could afford to do so sought suburban residence (Wilson 2012). Another important demographic shift since the 1990s is that Whites, particularly those who are middle and upper middle class, have been moving back to cities (Ehrenhalt 2012).

Mary Pattillo finds, unlike middle class Whites, even when the Black middle class moves out of cities they are concentrated in city outskirts or in inner ring suburbs, often adjacent to high poverty areas and contending with significant poverty within their own neighborhoods. In addition, the quality of public goods and services and amenities in middle class Black neighborhoods usually lag those of White middle class communities. The dynamic social processes at work in metropolitan areas give rise to a central paradox with regard to Blacks' life chances: metropolitan area class and race diversity has increased significantly in both cities and suburbs, and in many cases overall metropolitan area prosperity has grown; at the same time, African Americans, even those who are middle class and who live in suburban communities, reap and retain *fewer* of the benefits than any other racial group.

Nationwide, the geography of opportunity in metropolitan areas reflects both long-standing racial residential segregation patterns and more recent movements of people and capital. Prior research has shown spatial inequality in access to resources in metropolitan areas (Ehrenhalt 2012) and the relative disadvantage of the Black middle class compared to the White middle class (Pattillo 2013). But extant research has not accounted for Blacks becoming a majority suburban population, nor the extent to which and how Black people with middle class resources in suburban contexts with significant Black governing authority leverage market and government resources necessary for the

Black middle class to sustain its status, *while also supporting less socio-economically advantaged Blacks* due to continued racial residential segregation. That affluent Blacks' social outcomes are inextricably tied to less socio-economically advantaged Blacks is a primary driver of Black middle class disadvantage, relative to their White peers. Unlike the White middle class, the Black middle class is not insulated geographically or financially from the negative social consequences of Black poverty (Pattillo 2013).

Black middle class growth and Blacks' majority suburban residence are embedded within social processes transforming all racial and ethnic groups' access to resources and opportunities in metropolitan areas, including: deepening retrenchment in government investment in public goods and services (Harvey 2007, Logan and Molotch 2007); wealthy White residents returning to cities, increasing gentrification pressures in minority and low-income urban communities (Ibid.); greater socio-economic and ethno-racial diversity in suburbs, including significant poverty growth (Frey 2011, Kneebone 2010); expansion of immigrant populations throughout the United States beyond traditional gateway cities (Alba and Nee 2003); the racialized impact of the Great Recession (Kochar and Fry 2014); and income and wealth inequality growth (Picketty 2015).

Earlier studies of the Black middle class, largely conducted in the late twentieth century and in urban settings, suggest Blacks' inherited and ongoing disadvantages will likely lead to affluent Blacks' continuing to yield less from their class status than their White peers. There is also potential for class tension among Blacks. Valerie Johnson, in *Black Power in the Suburbs* (2002), studying the same county as I do for my research, shows while African Americans' interests are met to a significant degree in a suburban

county where Blacks have local governing authority, there are fundamental fissures among middle class and less economically advantaged Blacks. Mary Pattillo in *Black on the Block* notes middle class Blacks are “middle men” between poor Blacks, the “little man,” and White power brokers, “the man,” whereby middlemen Blacks are caretakers of the Black poor and often frame affluent Blacks’ interests as serving all Blacks, particularly during negotiations with developers and other private investors poised to transform the type and quality of amenities in Black neighborhoods, notwithstanding low-income Blacks’ susceptibility to displacement when such development occurs (2008:Chapter 3).

In *Red Lines, Black Spaces*, Bruce Haynes finds affluent Blacks’ priorities are conditioned by “how residents assess the impact of a particular local or national issue on their community” and how that issue affects their capacity to maintain and advance their class interests (2001:xxvii). Johnson’s, Pattillo’s, and Hayne’s work illustrates the vulnerabilities all Blacks face, even as some increasingly have more resources to navigate racialized barriers. They also point to class tension within the Black community.

Political scientists have theorized the implications of Blacks’ group solidarity, an ethos reflecting a common experience of racial discrimination and a political strategy for responding to race-based exclusion. Grounded in her study of African American-led institutions in New York City during the AIDS Crisis in the 1990s, Cathy Cohen posits African Americans experience “advanced marginalization” (1999:26-27). She argues that while more African Americans than ever wield power within dominant institutions and enjoy these institutions’ resources, affluent Blacks’ access to them is conditional upon their acquiescence to these institutions’ interests, thereby incentivizing affluent Blacks to

enact “secondary marginalization” on poor Black people in effort to protect Black middle class advantages (1999:27).

Michael Dawson in *Behind the Mule* (1994) examines the degree to which Black political cohesion endures in the wake of post-Modern Civil Rights Era growth in the Black middle class. He shows that historically as class heterogeneity expanded within most ethno-racial groups, so did their political interests and party affiliations. Dawson argues that because Blacks still face significant socio-economic barriers particular to Blacks as a group, their political outlook reflects a “black utility heuristic” or “linked fate” perspective—that individual Blacks’ believe their personal life chances are virtually one and the same with Blacks as a whole (1994:10).

Adolph Reed, in *Stirrings in the Jug*, maintains the “black urban regimes” ascendant in major U.S. cities in the late twentieth century, though seemingly articulating a common voice among African Americans across the class spectrum, largely promoted Black elites’ interests (1999:48-49). Cohen’s, Dawson’s, and Reed’s work suggests Blacks’ increased political power has the potential to transform Blacks’ access to resources because they are decisionmakers with regard to resource distribution. They also point to within-group and external constraints Blacks will likely encounter as they make these decisions and pursue their political and economic goals.

Finally, the primacy of private capital in driving metropolitan area resource distribution has increased markedly since the 1970s, coterminous with retrenchment in government-provided public goods and services. John Logan and Harvey Molotch, in *Urban Fortunes* (2007), show how “growth machines” and “growth coalitions” merge political and business leader interests. Consequently, local political leaders increasingly

depend on private investment to respond to constituents' needs. Yet a fundamental tension remains—one requiring political action to resolve it: private investors seek to increase “exchange value,” or monetary returns, of places they select for capital infusions; at the same time, these injections of capital frequently undermine “use value,” or utility, residents attach to where they live, work, worship, and recreate (viii).

Ostensibly development stimulates the local economy, resulting in positive returns to residents, governments, and private interests alike, in the form of new jobs and amenities for residents, additional tax revenue for governments, and profit for private investors.

But, in general, the neoliberal turn has resulted in inequitable resource distribution among these groups: private investors usually receive the lion's share of benefits (Harvey 2007).

Governments' inadequate revenue and their increased reliance on private entities are downstream effects of political decisions made several decades ago, including: (1) federal tax cuts and austerity measures enacted in response to 1970s “stagflation”; (2) the 1981 to 1982 recession; and (3) anti-tax sentiment among an influential segment of voters in the 1980s that led to tax cuts and restraints on government taxing authority (Ibid.).<sup>7</sup>

More recently, the Great Recession of 2007 to 2009, was the worst economic downturn in the post-World War II period, leading to even deeper cuts in government-provided services and infrastructure investment as governments took in less revenue (Danzinger 2013). While the federal stimulus, or American Recovery and Reinvestment

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<sup>7</sup> In the 1980s, during the Reagan Administration, federal taxes were cut substantially, and many states followed suit. The federal government also deregulated industries, leading to a developer/private-industry-driven economy, where states and locales compete to bring investment to their areas (Harvey 2007, Logan and Molotch 2007). Today, federal, state, and local governments, in general, have less revenue to spend on physical infrastructure, social services, and the protection of public goods, and thus they increasingly rely on “public/private partnerships” to meet the human service needs of residents.

of Act 2009, attenuated some of these harms, the law's positive effects, and recovery from the Great Recession generally, may be eroded by The Tax Cuts and Jobs Act of 2017. Many analysts expect the measure, which sharply decreases corporate and individual tax obligations, to undercut government capacity (Gale, Khitatrakun, and Krupkin 2017; Long 2017). The majority Black and middle class county on which my study is based experienced the constraints and opportunities discussed above. Some of their experiences are common to most counties, while others are aspects of the "structural precarity and peril" unique to majority-Black jurisdictions.

Social science literature in the past 20 years has increasingly captured the range of Blacks' experiences across the class spectrum, mirroring their increased class heterogeneity and residential mobility. But the bulk of research on suburban middle-class Blacks is quantitative or demographic, shedding light on trends in social outcomes for this group of Blacks. There is considerably less research on the *social processes shaping and shaped by them*. Just as importantly, the literature does not connect *how race and place interact in a regional context*. That is, there is insufficient understanding of how groups' relative positions among each other and the proportion of each group in a given jurisdiction simultaneously influence individuals' and groups' life chances, as well as jurisdictions' economic trajectories.

### **Research Questions**

Given the knowledge gaps discussed above, I pose the following two overarching research questions: To what extent does the Black middle class in a majority Black suburban county realize the same returns to its class status as the White middle class? What unique policy or budget constraints, if any, do decisionmakers in a majority Black



and middle class county face? In addition, how do legacy and ongoing effects of racial residential segregation shape middle class Blacks' opportunity structure? How do racial residential segregation patterns within a region affect a majority-Black county's capacity to thrive, in light of the increasing shift to market-based solutions for the provision of public goods and services?

As I discuss in the Methods section below, Prince George's County (PGC), Maryland, the county with the largest concentration of middle class Blacks in a local jurisdiction in the United States, is an apt site for investigating opportunities and constraints suburban Black middle class decisionmakers and residents navigate as they seek to maintain, if not improve, their quality of life—as measured by their capacity to provide high-quality public goods and services. PGC, given its embeddedness in an economically thriving area, also enables me to investigate the extent to which the benefits and costs of development are equitably shared across the region and the mechanisms through which such distribution occurs.

## **Methods**

### **Why an Ethnographic Study?**

An ethnographic study—a combination of direct observation and interviews in a particular fieldsite—is an apt method for answering my research questions. I strategically chose the site because it is an ideal case of substantial Black political and economic empowerment for over two decades. This type of study allowed me to observe nearly two annual cycles of decision making and adaptation to demographic, fiscal, and market changes. I created real-time data of how decisionmakers and residents responded to an evolving context, enabling me to record through fieldnotes rich nuances of how they

shaped and were shaped by their political and economic environment beyond what I could glean through retrospective accounts or publicly available data alone. Furthermore, my observations informed my interview questions, making them more likely to yield thorough responses.

In addition, as a Black middle class woman, I experienced first-hand many of the constraints and opportunities I observed and asked about in interviews and informal conversations. I moved to Prince George’s County in July 2016 and left in July 2018. I rented a room in a single-family home in the northern half of the county. Upon arriving, I quickly immersed myself in PGC life, including by introducing myself to local leaders, such as the councilwoman for my district; shopping for needs in neighborhood stores; joining a church and a gym; frequenting local cultural establishments, such as the Prince George’s African American Museum and Cultural Center; and by becoming a “regular” at nearby coffee and barbershops.

Thus, I have three sources of information—(1) direct observation of political processes, (2) interviews, and (3) personal experience. I also use county, state, and federal data and reports to understand the broad contours of demographic changes and resource flows in the D.C. region. My familiarity with the place on which statistics are based enhanced my ability to understand those numbers in the context of other factors shaping county wellbeing, as well as the extent to which statistics influence decisionmaker and resident perspectives on county priorities.

### **Fieldsite Selection: Prince George’s County (PGC), Maryland**

Prince George’s County (PGC), Maryland offers an exceptional window into the extent to which a relatively affluent and politically empowered majority Black county can

provide a high quality of life to residents and how its capacity to do so reflects constraints, some which are shared with majority White counties, but many not. The factors making PGC particularly apt for yielding important insights about race, class, and regional political economy include that it: (1) has the largest concentration of middle class Blacks of any local jurisdiction in the U.S. (United States Census Bureau 2018e); (2) has had majority Black political leadership for over 20 years; (3) is embedded in an economically thriving region, creating development and demographic dynamics similar to many economically robust U.S. metropolitan areas; and (4) has neighborhoods inside a beltway—close to the D.C. border—and outside, enabling a regional perspective on development that includes both inner and outer ring suburbs.

As shown in Figure 1 below, PGC is home to 909,308 people. The county is 64.6 percent Black and majority middle class, making it the local jurisdiction with the largest concentration of middle class Blacks in the United States (see Figure 1 below). The Black share in PGC is more than double the state average and more than four times that of the United States as a whole. After African Americans, the next largest ethno-racial group is Latinos at about 19 percent of the population, most of whom are foreign born (Stepler and Lopez 2016). Between 2000 and 2010, the Latino population grew by 126 percent (Maryland National Capital Park and Planning Commission 2014:58). Within its 500 square miles, PGC has a wide range of neighborhoods in terms of residents' socioeconomic status.

In Figure 1 below, I contextualize PGC demographics alongside those of Maryland and the United States. The chart indicates PGC's median is about \$20,000 above the national median and virtually identical to that of Maryland. With regard to

education, PGC has one percent more college graduates than the U.S. percentage and about seven percent fewer graduates than the Maryland percentage. As for median home value, PGC’s median is about \$79,000 above the U.S. median and about \$24,000 below Maryland’s. Overall, these statistics indicate PGC is a solidly majority middle class county, relative to the U.S. overall, yet slightly below the socio-economic status of many Maryland locales, thus indicating disadvantage at the state level. Maryland is among the wealthiest states in the country (U.S. News and World Report 2018).

**Figure 1**

<b>Demographic Comparison between the United States, Maryland, and Prince George's County in 2018</b>			
	<u>Prince George's County</u>	<u>Maryland</u>	<u>United States</u>
<b>Total Population</b>	909,308	6,042,718	327,167,434
<b>Race and Ethnicity (%)</b>			
Black	64.6	30.8	13.4
White	26.8	59.0	76.6
Latino (Black or White Race)	18.5	10.1	18.1
Asian/Pacific Islander	4.8	6.8	6.0
American Indian	1.1	0.6	1.3
Two or More Races	2.7	2.8	2.7
<b>Income and Wealth (\$)</b>			
Median Household Income	78,607	78,916	57,652
Median Home Value (Owner Occupied)	272,900	296,500	193,500
Median Rent	1,385	1,311	982
<b>Percent Below Poverty Line</b>	8.6	9.3	12.3
<b>Educational Attainment (%)</b>			
College Degree or Higher	31.9	39.0	30.9
High School Diploma or GED	86.1	89.8	87.3
<b>Source: United States Census Bureau, "QuickFacts," as follows:</b>			
Prince George's: <a href="https://www.census.gov/quickfacts/fact/table/princegeorgescountymaryland/IPE120217#IPE120217">https://www.census.gov/quickfacts/fact/table/princegeorgescountymaryland/IPE120217#IPE120217</a>			
Maryland: <a href="https://www.census.gov/quickfacts/md">https://www.census.gov/quickfacts/md</a>			
United States: <a href="https://www.census.gov/quickfacts/fact/table/US/INC110217">https://www.census.gov/quickfacts/fact/table/US/INC110217</a>			

Prince George’s County is a jurisdiction within the Washington, D.C.

Metropolitan Statistical Area, which is home to 5.6 million people distributed among three states (Maryland, Virginia, and West Virginia), the District of the Columbia (the United States capital), 23 counties and independent cities, and 90 municipalities (Lung-Amam 2017) (see Figure 2 below for a D.C. region map). Prince George’s is the third

most populous local jurisdiction. Fairfax County, Virginia, PGC's southern neighbor, is the most populous, followed by Montgomery County, Maryland, PGC's northern neighbor. In 2017, both Montgomery and Fairfax had just over one million residents (see Figure 3 below).

PGC's disadvantages relative to other counties in the D.C. metropolitan area are even greater than those between the county and Maryland. The D.C. region is majority-minority—Whites account for 47 percent of the population—but racial and ethnic groups are not evenly distributed across jurisdictions, nor are household, community, and locale-level poverty and wealth (Ibid.). Importantly, Montgomery and Fairfax Counties, PGC's neighbors, have more residents with college degrees and their residents have higher household incomes and more wealth, as indicated by these counties' median home values. Fairfax county's median home value is nearly double PGC's. Also significant is that both counties have much smaller Black populations than PGC. In subsequent chapters, I explain how Fairfax's and Montgomery's demographics shape PGC leaders' capacity to improve Prince Georgians' quality of life (see Figure 3 below for demographic comparison of Prince George's, Fairfax, and Montgomery Counties).

Figure 2

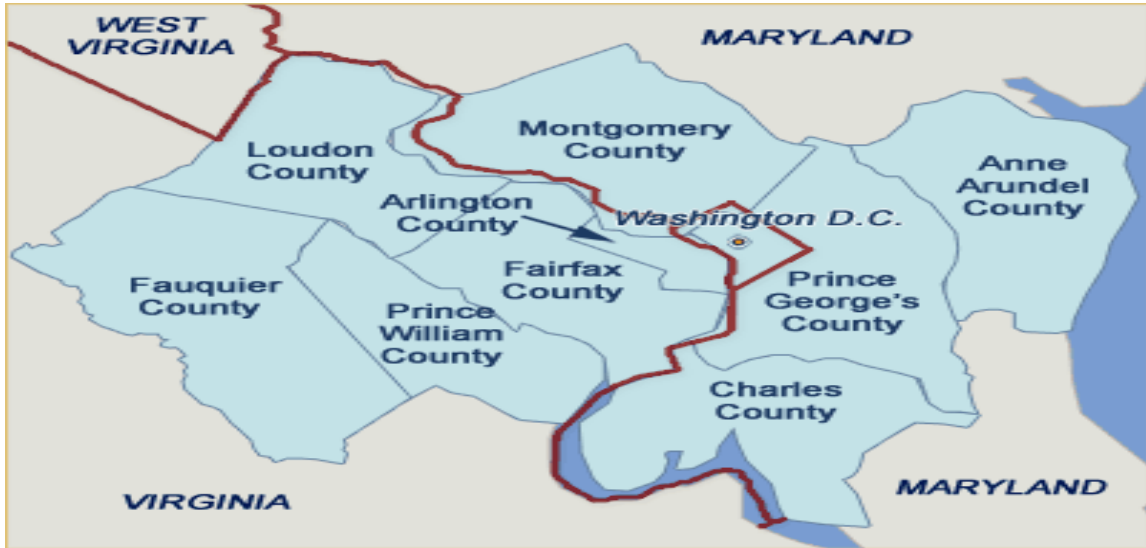


Figure 3

<b>Demographic Comparison between Prince George's, Montgomery, and Fairfax Counties in 2018</b>			
	<u>Prince George's</u>	<u>Montgomery</u>	<u>Fairfax</u>
<b>Total Population</b>	909,308	1,052,567	1,150,795
<b>Race and Ethnicity (%)</b>			
Black	64.6	19.7	10.4
White	26.8	60.4	65.2
Latino (Black or White Race)	18.5	19.6	16.2
Asian/Pacific Islander	4.8	15.7	20.1
American Indian	1.1	0.7	0.6
Two or More Races	2.7	3.4	3.8
<b>Income and Wealth (\$)</b>			
Median Household Income	78,607	103,178	117,515
Median Home Value (Owner Occupied)	272,900	467,500	534,800
Median Rent	1,385	1,693	1,823
<b>Percent Below Poverty Line</b>	8.6	7.0	6.7
<b>Educational Attainment (%)</b>			
College Degree or Higher	31.9	58.3	60.7
High School Diploma or GED	86.1	91.1	92.0
<b>Sources: United States Census Bureau, "QuickFacts," as follows:</b>			
Prince George's: <a href="https://www.census.gov/quickfacts/fact/table/princegeorgescountymaryland/IPE120217#IPE120217">https://www.census.gov/quickfacts/fact/table/princegeorgescountymaryland/IPE120217#IPE120217</a>			
Montgomery: <a href="https://www.census.gov/quickfacts/montgomerycountymaryland">https://www.census.gov/quickfacts/montgomerycountymaryland</a>			
Fairfax: <a href="https://www.census.gov/quickfacts/fact/table/fairfaxcountyvirginia/PST045217">https://www.census.gov/quickfacts/fact/table/fairfaxcountyvirginia/PST045217</a>			

## **Data Collection and Analysis<sup>8</sup>**

*Data Collection.* The observation-based data I gathered during my two-year study consist mostly of weekly attendance of full council and council committee hearings.<sup>9</sup> PGC's council is in session all year, except for August and December recesses. I generally observed three quarters, if not all, hearings held each week, attending hearings focused on policy, budgeting/appropriations, and executive branch oversight. In addition, to observe political and civic activity outside of formal policy and budget development processes, I went to community forums, including town-hall meetings council members and the county executive hosted; civic, tenant, and home owner association meetings; and neighborhood and church festivals. I learned about community events through word of mouth, local media, and council member and community organization listservs.

In addition, I conducted 58 interviews with county leaders and members of the general public. To allow myself time to acclimate to PGC's daily rhythms and to build relationships, I conducted all of my interviews during the second year of my study. Overall, county leaders and residents were quite supportive of my research, allowing me ready access to widely advertised, as well as more obscure events—for example, informal gatherings with constituent groups in council members' districts.

Thirty of my interviews were with two groups of PGC leaders—(a) local, state, and federal policymakers and their high-level staff, including all county council members and a majority of county school board members, and (b) business and non-profit

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<sup>8</sup> See Appendix 1 for my interview guides and Appendix 2 for respondent characteristics.

<sup>9</sup> Prince George's Council has four committees: Health, Education, and Human Services; Transportation, Housing, and the Environment; Public Safety and Fiscal Management; and Planning, Zoning, and Economic Development.

executives (see Appendix 1 for more information about leaders interviewed). Broadly speaking, my questions for leaders were in four categories: (1) motivation to hold their current position—i.e., why they ran for office/accepted their current position; (2) the most important political issues they believe the county faces and how they try to shape them; (3) constituent/client interaction—for example, how they learn about, respond to, and prioritize constituent/lobbyist interests; and (4) collaboration/contention among institutions and actors they believe affect their ability to achieve their goals—for example, how they try to build political coalitions. I prompted discussion about economic development and public schools, if these topics did not come up organically, as I identified these issues as among the most salient during my direct observations.

The remaining 28 interviews were with PGC residents, most of whom were not regularly engaged in politics, though most reported voting in major elections. Four of the 28 residents were interviewed as part of a focus group I organized through the young adult ministry of the church I attended. All residents are African American and most are middle class (see Appendix 2 for resident demographics). I recruited respondents at the community meetings, as well as the church, I attended; and I asked respondents to recommend others I might interview. In my sample of 28 residents, I sought class, age, gender, geographic (e.g., residence inside versus outside the beltway), and family and parenting status variation.

Questions for residents were in these six categories: (1) motivation for moving to/remaining in PGC; (2) how they experience the county day to day, for instance, where they shop; (3) interactions with dominant institutions in PGC, such as schools; (4) interactions with non-governmental institutions, for example, churches and civic



organizations; (5) their level of satisfaction with their quality of life and the factors they perceive to contribute to their experience; and (6) their perspectives on county politicians and political processes, including their effectiveness in making progress on issues important to the respondent. The combination of direct observation and interviews allowed me to see how policy decisions were made and to inquire about the intentions behind leaders' and residents' actions, in addition to the meanings they lent them, yielding a dynamic understanding of how the Black middle class navigates and influences government and market constraints and opportunities.

The publicly available information I draw upon include government documents and newspaper and other media reports. When I compare PGC to other counties in the D.C. region, I usually reference Montgomery County, Maryland. I selected these counties because they are the counties with which PGC competes most for residents and private development. Furthermore, Montgomery and Fairfax Counties are comparable to PGC on two important dimensions affecting counties' fiscal opportunities and constraints: (1) proximity to Washington, D.C. and (2) population size (see Chart 2 below).

*Data Analysis.* I used the qualitative data analysis software Atlas.ti, to identify patterns in my fieldnotes and interviews, employing both inductive and deductive coding schemes. The inductive portion entailed categorizing clusters of issues leaders and residents discussed and what they associated with them. For instance, many residents were concerned about school quality, so I coded all material in their interview related this topic and then noted what they connected to it, such as level of teacher experience or student-to-teacher ratios. From there, I connected issues to each other. On the deductive

side, I paired inductive material with concepts in social science theory regarding resource distribution competition and market and government roles in shaping such distribution.

*Data Limitations.* While my observations systematically cover policy and budget deliberation done in public, some decision-making processes are private. Examples include county executive negotiations with developers regarding tax incentives. I was also unable to observe how councilmembers, the county executive, and other decisionmakers pressure each other to vote certain ways. But even with these limitations, I witnessed how leaders justified their policy decisions to the public and the public's responses to those decisions. And in the final analysis, the public's view—voters' perceptions—determine whether officials remain in office to carry out their agendas. Furthermore, I interviewed key decisionmakers and inquired about how they decided to champion issues. While I expect they were not entirely forthcoming with me, by interviewing them after a year in the field, I had built rapport and demonstrated my thoroughness as a researcher. Many jokingly remarked on how I had become a council "fixture," with one council member saying he hoped my notes led to a movie where Denzel Washington would play him. Most leaders granted me at least one-hour-long interviews, and many offered two.

My observations are also limited by the fact that I do not know what I do not know. While I sought to attend meetings throughout the county on a range of topics, and as advertised by a variety of groups through local newspapers, community listservs, library bulletin boards, and elected official newsletters, in addition to those I learned about through word of mouth, there are inevitably groups I missed. However, over the course of my two years of observation, constituents' and leaders' concerns clustered

around certain themes, an indication I was likely uncovering common community concerns and thus reaching “saturation.”

While my purposive sample does not allow me to address the pervasiveness of political interests and positions within PGC, it illuminates points of convergence and divergence among decisionmakers, between decisionmakers and the public, and between various resident groups. It was important I focus on elected officials because they have policy and budget authority—domains at the heart of my research questions. With more time in the field, I would have interviewed more non-elected leaders, as such people influence residents’ “tastes” and “values,” which in turn influence their policy and budget priorities.

In the section below, I provide historical background regarding Prince George’s County’s economic and political development. This information contextualizes the ethnographic data and publicly available information I analyze in upcoming chapters. One cannot interpret the contours of contemporary decisionmakers’ structural opportunities and constraints without knowing PGC’s *logue duree*—the entrenched social processes making some social outcomes more likely than others, absent significant intervention from dominant institutions.

### **Prince George’s County in Sociohistorical Context**

Prince George’s County (PGC) was founded in 1696 and is one of 24 counties in the state of Maryland (Johnson 2002). Counties are the primary unit of government in the state. Since 1970, a “home rule” charter has given PGC authority to govern its 28 municipalities and unincorporated areas. In addition to these three bodies—state, county, and municipal governments—two other entities wield significant authority in PGC: the

Washington Suburban Sanitary Commission (WSSC), which controls water and sewer systems; and the Maryland National Capital Park and Planning Commission (M-NCPPC), which plans subdivisions, recommends zoning classifications, issues building permits, and purchases, develops, and maintains park lands. WSSC and M-NCPPC are jointly controlled by PGC and its neighbor to the north, Montgomery County.

Since its founding, PGC has had a significant Black population. Many current Prince George's residents are the descendants of enslaved Africans who cultivated agriculture, such as wheat and corn, though the primary commodity during the antebellum period was tobacco (Johnson 2002: 23). Free Black communities included Rossville, Valley Lane, and Oxon Hill, carving out footholds of Black autonomy prior to the Civil War. After the Civil War ended in 1865, and African Americans in the United States were emancipated and attained citizenship, most Black Prince Georgians who remained in the county farmed their own land or worked as sharecroppers or as laborers (Johnson:24). In terms of Blacks' political participation, when Black men gained the right to vote with the passage of the Fifteenth Amendment, unlike Blacks in Deep South states, PGC Blacks did not experience significant increased political power, even though they represented 46 percent of the county's population, roughly the Black population until the mid-twentieth century (Johnson:60).

In the post-World War II period, with increasing numbers of Blacks attaining middle class status due to the enactment of civil rights protections, and with jobs plentiful in the D.C. region due to employment options in federal and state government and health care and education sectors, Blacks increasingly found white-collar work. White collar jobs led to salaries allowing them to afford middle-class homes in D.C. and its suburbs.

African Americans with college-degrees, or other post-secondary education, were especially well positioned to benefit from federal anti-discrimination legislation and race-targeted hiring, most importantly, affirmative action in federal, state, and local government civil service ranks and government contracts (Katznelson 2005; Wilson 2012). At the local level, Blacks across the class spectrum benefited from the Marion Barry Administration in Washington, D.C. (Hyra 2017). Barry, first elected in 1978, and the first Black mayor of D.C., focused on providing government jobs to Blacks, both through contracts and direct hiring programs (Barnes 2014).

A sizable portion of Blacks seeking returns to their class status in the form of higher quality single family and town homes went to Prince George's County. In the 1970s and 1980s, PGC was a majority White and working class jurisdiction, making it the most affordable county contiguous to D.C. PGC also had significant land available for development and relatively lenient zoning regulations, when compared to neighboring counties, enabling developers to respond quickly to increased housing demand (Johnson 2002). The county transitioned from majority-White and working class to majority-Black and middle class in the 1990s (Ibid.). In addition, pull factors, demonstrated the region's expanding opportunity structure and its opening to more Blacks. These factors were coupled with push factors that evinced continuing racialized barriers. In particular, certain D.C. area jurisdictions' actively erected formal and informal processes to restrict the number of Blacks who could move to their areas. Zoning ordinances were chief among the tools majority-White locales utilized (Johnson:31).

The late 1980s and 1990s period was also a critical transition point for PGC politically. Blacks attained prominent county offices, many of them developing their

political acumen under influential White Democrats. Whites at the helm of the Democratic machine at that time included: Paris Glendening, PGC county executive from 1982 to 1994, and later Maryland governor from 1995 to 2003; Steny Hoyer, a former Maryland legislator and a current U.S. Congressman representing a portion of PGC since 1981; and Mike Miller, current President of the Maryland Senate, holding his seat representing a portion of PGC since 1975—and making him the longest serving Senate President in the country (Abramowitz 1994).

While there was a lag between PGC becoming majority Black and Blacks assuming political control of the county, in 1994, Wayne Curry, became the first Black county executive. The majority of Black leaders I interviewed credit Curry with creating and carrying out the vision for Prince George’s most contemporary county leaders continue to pursue—from expansion in the number and quality of publicly and privately provided goods and services; to a broader range of housing types, including housing stock attractive to upper-income residents, what Curry called “executive housing;” to retail, recreation, and entertainment opportunities on par with those in neighboring counties. I discuss the continuing influence of Curry’s vision in Chapter 4: Development.

As Blacks increasingly moved into PGC from the 1960s forward, Whites increasingly moved out. Still, many stayed and a significant portion of those who did fought to maintain the “color line,”<sup>10</sup> especially with regard to public school integration. School integration was emblematic of the interdependent social challenges catalyzed by sweeping demographic, legal, and policy changes. In Chapter 5: K-12 Public Schools, I

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<sup>10</sup> I borrow this term from late sociologist W.E.B. Du Bois’s *The Souls of Black Folk* (Du Bois 2007 [1903]).

discuss how the history of racial segregation and integration affect current education opportunities and challenges.

Other important structural changes enacted in the 1970s and 1980s include county residents passing strict limits on PGC officials' authority to raise taxes or fees. Limits on revenue generation paired with a burgeoning population led to PGC weathering significant fiscal challenges in the 1980s and 1990s, most notably the county running deficits in the tens of millions of dollars many fiscal years and a downgrading of its bond rating.<sup>11</sup> In 1994, Wayne Curry, the first Black county executive, laid off county employees and cut services to balance the budget. But by the time he left office, PGC's fiscal health had recovered considerably: the county was running a surplus and the bond rating had rebounded to AAA, the highest rating.

Nonetheless, budget challenges have remained a perennial issue in the county. In January 2017, the Prince George's Council Blue Ribbon Commission on the Structural Deficit issued a report identifying several factors that may cause the county to take in less revenue than its expenditures starting in fiscal year 2018, leading to annual budget gaps, or deficits, in outyears. These gaps, if not filled by tax base expansion, tax rate increases, or funding transfers from state or federal government, could lead to a decline in county-provided services, as Maryland requires counties to balance their budgets each year.

The report states six factors contribute to PGC's propensity to run deficits: (1) protracted recovery from the Great Recession; (2) reductions in state and federal aid across spending categories, from public schools to transportation infrastructure; (3)

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<sup>11</sup> Bond ratings are important because letting bonds is one of the primary tools local governments use to pay for large infrastructure projects—from erecting new municipal buildings and schools, to building roads, to replacing sewers.

PGC's commitment to make up for Recession-related county employee salary and benefits cuts; (4) the need to compensate for state reductions in contributions to the county employee pension plan; (5) increased debt service, or interest, on bonds and other borrowing; and (6) pressure from bond rating agencies to increase funding for the Risk Management Fund (or "Rainy Day Fund" for emergency expenses)—a fund rating agencies scrutinize intensely when determining a county's bond rating (PGC's is at the top level, AAA, and county leaders are committed to maintaining this status). These fiscal challenges create the contours within which PGC officials make policy and budget decisions. But these are not the only factors affecting county officials' capacity to govern. Regional market and government processes that have a racially disparate impact also foment unique challenges for PGC leaders.

While Prince George's County officials only have authority within their county, I investigate their decisions as fundamentally and inseparably intertwined with D.C. area economic and political dynamics, over which PGC officials have limited, if any, control. Investigating how PGC decisionmakers manage the county budget within regional processes reveals mechanisms underpinning: (1) how racism is meted out through routine governing and market practices; and (2) how costs and benefits of regional growth are distributed across space—between cities and suburbs and within each of these areas.

### **Manuscript Summary**

In the next chapter, Chapter 2: Structural Precarity and Peril—Resource Inflow, I discuss the sources of PGC revenue, noting how racial residential segregation limits tax base growth because Blacks' homes and commercial properties generally have less market value than those of neighboring majority White counties. I argue PGC takes in



inadequate revenue to support high-quality vital public goods and services and connect PGC's property values to the county's role as the D.C. region's "sink" for a disproportionate share of negative development externalities. And I explain how a voter-imposed restriction on elected officials' authority to raise taxes constricts PGC leaders' budget management options, particularly when economic growth slows or contracts.

Chapter 3: Structural Precarity and Peril—Resource Outflow, captures the other side of the ledger—demand for county spending on public good and services. I find because PGC receives and retains more high-needs populations and its revenue does not expand commensurate with demand, budget allocations among vital public goods and services become increasingly thinner. I contend that until PGC leaders improve public goods and services quality, PGC is unlikely to attract a proportionate or greater share of high income residents and businesses in the region. But the county cannot do so until it has more revenue—and therefore the county fights to overcome a "vicious cycle."

In Chapter 4: Development—A Rising Tide to Lift All Boats?, I explain how county officials seek to end the vicious cycle through targeted private economic investment, particularly near mass transit hubs. I point to successes to date, but find it is too early to determine whether development will lead to adequate tax revenue to support high quality goods and services or whether development will be broadly shared across class and ethno-racial groups. However, I note that given the scale of revenue the county needs to meet resident demand for services, development alone is unlikely to be a panacea. In addition, I discuss class conflict between upper middle class Blacks and those less socio-economically advantaged with regard to the types of development they seek, as

well as PGC’s unique headwinds in attracting private investment due to its majority-Black composition.

Chapter 5: K-12 Public Schools—Overcoming Regional Racial and Economic Segregation Constraints highlights how severe budget constraints affect a core public good, K-12 schools. Consistent with Chapter Two and Three findings, the public school budget does not expand fast enough to meet students’ needs, most of whom come from moderate and low-income households. PGC’s low-income student population is about double those of Montgomery and Fairfax Counties. Because of wide variation in school system performance, many Prince Georgians who can afford to opt out of the public system do so, sending their children to private school. I note how distrust of the school system, particularly among the Black middle class, demonstrates the “limits of linked fate” among African Americans—that is, when and under what terms economically advantaged Blacks seek returns to their class status in ways in tension with race solidarity.

Finally, in Chapter 6: Findings, Theory Contributions, Future Research Directions, and Policy Recommendations, I summarize my key findings and connect them to the *longue duree* of African descendant people’s incorporation into the English colonies and eventually what became the United States. I then highlight how my data show middle class Blacks face barriers their middle class White counterparts do not due to racialized regional social processes. Next I elaborate on how the “weight of linked fate”—Blacks’ disproportionate responsibility for low-income Blacks—and the “limits of linked fate” shape African Americans’ political and economic strategies. I also explain the policy implications of my research and offer policy recommendations.

## CHAPTER 2: Structural Precarity and Peril—Resource Inflow

**“The eastern half of the region, including...large parts of Prince George’s County, carry the region’s burden of poverty and distress. This includes neighborhoods with the majority of the region’s minority populations, poor residents, subsidized housing, its lowest home values, and its highest crime rates. In contrast, the District’s western neighborhoods and suburbs enjoy the bulk of the region’s prosperity, jobs, amenities, and high-valued neighborhoods.”**

- Willow Lung-Amam, “An Equitable Future for the Washington, D.C. Region?” (2017)

Tax revenue is the life blood of government. Without funding governments cannot execute their responsibilities. The United States has a federal structure, whereby tax revenue flows through three interdependent levels of governing authority—federal, state, and local. Based on the U.S. Constitution, authority not explicitly given to the national government falls to states and states determine local jurisdictions’ power (United States National Archives 2019). In most cases, states share significant decision-making authority and resources with counties, municipalities, and other local bodies. But over the past several decades, states have increasingly reduced the amount of funding they transfer to local jurisdictions, yet have not concomitantly withdrawn locales’ responsibilities, and this while the United States population continues to grow, particularly in certain metropolitan areas, such as the Washington, D.C. region, where Prince George’s County (PGC), my fieldsite, is located.

While nationwide most local leaders have contended with state and federal funding retrenchment over the past several decades, long-standing systemic inequality patterns mean some locales are more vulnerable than others. Majority-Black counties experience both the ongoing federal and state resource contraction trend, *plus* additional dimensions of fragility—what I characterize as “structural precarity and peril”—due to

contemporary economic and political processes' racially disparate consequences and racism's *longue duree*.

PGC faces five constraints related to its racial, and increasingly its ethnic, demographics—majority Black, with a growing Latino, largely immigrant, population—as well as from the county's relative position in the D.C. Metropolitan Area. In this chapter, I focus on *resource inflow*—the county's capacity to raise revenue through direct taxation of residents and businesses and through inter-governmental transfers. In the next chapter, I discuss *resource outflow*—pressures on county resources stemming from the population it serves and state mandates for county expenditures.

PGC's inflow constraints include: (1) tax flow insufficient for meeting residents' needs; (2) embeddedness in a regional economy with wealthier neighboring jurisdictions, rendering PGC the “sink” for negative market effects in the region's economy; (3) market actors targeting Blacks for toxic financial arrangements; (4) all levels of government historically and currently underfunding Blacks' public goods and services—most notable for poverty alleviation: social services and public schools; and (5) voter-imposed tax revenue generation restrictions passed during the county's transition from majority White to majority Black.

I argue PGC's opportunities and constraints are underpinned by interconnected regional market and government-led resource distribution processes. And I show how relationships among these processes erode the Black middle class' capacity to maintain thriving households and communities—defined as securing government and market interactions on terms likely to promote Blacks' wellbeing and resilience after exogenous

shocks, such as economic recessions. I highlight the interface between metropolitan area resource and people flows and the budgetary consequences for Prince George's County.

### **Insufficient Tax Flow for Meeting Residents' Needs**

PGC, even as a majority middle class county, does not have enough revenue each fiscal year to fund all programs up to the limit authorized. While many U.S. counties manage budget constraints, PGC's are particularly severe and reflect unique constraints related to its having a majority Black population. According to the Blue Ribbon Commission on Addressing the Structural Deficit, "...the County's structural deficit will grow over the next six years...an annual budget gap of \$28 million to \$229 million is projected between Fiscal Year (FY) 2018 and FY 2023, even with revenue projections accounting for anticipated new revenues of \$35 million to \$41 million from the expanded National Harbor complex." Given these constraints, decisionmakers, particularly the county council, which appropriates funds, and the county executive, who proposes the budget and determines programs to emphasize within the limits of his or her discretion, make hard tradeoffs between vital public goods and services.

*Prince George's County's Revenue Sources.* PGC's revenue streams are largely derived from the county's tax base. As in most counties, the portion of PGC's tax base grounded in its direct authority—property taxes—is a function of the assessable value of residential and commercial properties and the degree of their appreciation over time. Among PGC's main inflow constraints is that it receives and retains a disproportionate share of the D.C. region's moderate and low income residents, many of whom have significant social service needs and contribute less in taxes than do high-income residents. Thus, the county's inflow just to maintain current levels of public goods and

services provision, let alone improve their provision or invest in promising new programs, must keep pace with high-needs population growth. In Chapter 3: Structural Precarity and Peril—Outflow, I elaborate on demands on the county budget, explaining how high-needs populations create budgetary distress.

Many of PGC’s budgetary headwinds in providing high quality public goods and services reflect regional flows of people and capital positioning the county to receive more of the costs of regional development and fewer of the benefits. A primary indicator of a county’s fiscal health is how much tax revenue it garners annually, as captured in the county’s annual budget.

**County Revenue Flows: Interconnections between Tax Base and Budget Capacity**

Prince George’s County has considerably less revenue to invest in public goods and services when compared to two neighboring counties—Montgomery and Fairfax. To provide a sense of the scale of PGC’s budget and revenue generating potential relative to these counties, below is a chart in which I show PGC’s operating budget, median home value, and poverty rate next to those of its neighbors (see Figure 4 below).

**Figure 4**

	<u>Prince George's</u>	<u>Montgomery</u>	<u>Fairfax</u>
<b>Operating Budget, All Sources (in Billions)</b>	\$3.9	\$5.4	\$8.0
<b>Per Capita Spending</b>	\$4,273	\$5,100	\$6,966
<b>Median Home Value</b>	\$272,000	\$468,000	\$535,000
<b>Percent Population Below Poverty</b>	8.6	7.0	6.7

Sources: County Revenue Offices, as follows:  
 Fairfax: [https://www.fairfaxcounty.gov/budget/sites/budget/files/assets/documents/fy2018/adopted/overview/07\\_executive\\_summary.pdf](https://www.fairfaxcounty.gov/budget/sites/budget/files/assets/documents/fy2018/adopted/overview/07_executive_summary.pdf)  
 Prince George's: <https://www.princegeorgescountymd.gov/DocumentCenter/View/17965/Budget-OverviewPDF>  
 Montgomery: [https://www2.montgomerycountymd.gov/mcgportalapps/Press\\_Detail.aspx?Item\\_ID=21126](https://www2.montgomerycountymd.gov/mcgportalapps/Press_Detail.aspx?Item_ID=21126)

PGC's fiscal year 2018 operating budget was about \$1.5 billion less than Montgomery's and about half that of Fairfax's. As a result, Prince George's annual per capita spending—the amount spent per person in 2018—was substantially below that of its neighbors, spending about \$1,000 less than Montgomery and about \$2,500 less than Fairfax. With regard to median home value, Montgomery's is nearly \$200,000 higher than PGC's and Fairfax's is about \$263,000 greater, or nearly double that of Prince George's. Because home values are a core portion of the base upon which local tax rates are levied, PGC officials would likely have to enact higher tax rates to attain revenue levels similar to those of Montgomery and Fairfax Counties.

In addition, as indicated by PGC's poverty rate being about two percent higher than Montgomery's and Fairfax's, PGC has more high-needs populations to serve. One contributor to this disparity is likely connected to wage growth being slower in PGC than in surrounding counties in recent years, increasing by 29 percent between 2002 and 2012 in PGC and by between 29.8 and 44.4 percent in nearby jurisdictions (Maryland National Capital Park and Planning 2014:67). At the same time, current and prospective residents, especially those who are middle and upper middle class are tax rate sensitive. If these residents do not perceive their tax contributions enable them to maintain, if not enhance, their quality of life and their ability to invest in their futures—perhaps most consequentially their children's educations—they are likely to move to a nearby county they believe does. Yet until the county takes in adequate revenue, its public goods and services quality will stagnate, if not decline. PGC is caught in a vicious cycle. When I asked the PGC council chair what he hears most from constituents regarding satisfaction with public goods and services, he stated:

It's a very, very difficult conversation and what it comes down to is how you feel about what you pay, so it's a value judgment. What you attempt to do is try to create an environment where people feel like they're getting bang for their buck. That's really what it comes down to.

As PGC seeks to increase tax revenue, what factors thwart the county's efforts?

The fundamental constraint is continued White stigmatization of Black people and the spaces they occupy, as demonstrated by racial residential segregation (Bobo, et al., 2012). Racial residential segregation effects are a combination of contemporary racism and the cumulation of the *longue duree* of anti-Black racism.

### **Whites' Racism and Stigmatization of "Black Space" Undermines PGC's Tax Base**

In majority-Black neighborhoods two inter-related social processes challenge PGC's capacity to increase revenue: Blacks, on average, buy homes worth less than White's homes due to Blacks' lower incomes and wealth; and the slower appreciation of Blacks' homes due to Whites' unwillingness to live in Black neighborhoods. As a result, demand for homes in majority-Black communities comes almost exclusively from other Blacks—a minority group constituting 13 percent of the U.S. population. The D.C. area is no exception to these trends (Wiggins, Morello, and Keating 2011).

While demand for PGC's housing is largely driven by Blacks, and increasingly by Latinos, Montgomery and Fairfax Counties' housing is considered desirable by *all* racial and ethnic groups, with Whites the most influential group, as they are the United States population majority and are significantly wealthier than Blacks, on average, resulting in more Whites being in a position to buy homes—during both economic boom and bust periods. Below I highlight how bust periods reinforce PGC's budget trajectory.

Not only are Whites drawn to Montgomery and Fairfax Counties to a greater extent than Prince George's County, these jurisdictions have less poverty in their middle



class neighborhoods and do not have pockets of concentrated Black poverty.

Montgomery's Black population is about 20 percent and Fairfax's about 10, while Blacks are 65 percent of PGC's population (United States Census Bureau 2018d). As a result, Montgomery and Fairfax Counties racial composition positions them to *benefit* from the racialized regional economy, while PGC is *harmed*. Therefore, notwithstanding the tax rates levied, Montgomery and Fairfax counties have larger and more resilient residential tax bases, which is especially important during economic cycle downturns.

### **Regional Embeddedness: PGC's Economic Position Shapes Its Budget Capacity**

**“...Even though we call ourselves living in Prince George's we really weren't living in Prince George's, we were living in an economic commercial racial circle. A circumference. And it's called D.C., and it's called Virginia, and it's called Prince George's, but when you look at the dynamics of resources and housing structures and banking and finance it's where you live in that circle [that matters].”**

As the former Maryland appointed official, education activist, and retired professor quoted above captures, no county is an island in the Washington Metropolitan Area. Decisions in one locale reverberate beyond that jurisdiction's boundaries—“it's an economic, commercial, racial circle” and it's “where you live in that circle” that strongly predicts the relative benefits and costs households, neighborhoods, and local jurisdictions experience from regional flows of people and capital.

Metropolitan area economies usually do not map perfectly to jurisdiction boundaries, encompassing many locales, and in some cases, states, as with the D.C. area. While jurisdictions divide their territory into zones to determine building type, use, and density, and incentivize certain kinds of business activity through public infrastructure investment and tax and fee structures, jurisdictions ultimately have limited control over

whether, when, and how people and enterprises use their land masses. Counties' positioning in a region is as much a function of *other counties' capacities* as their own.

Middle class Black counties' tax revenue generation challenges, for the reasons discussed above, render their budgets more fragile than those of middle class White counties. In addition to budget precarity stemming from their racial composition, virtually all counties in a region compete to attract and retain at least a proportionate share of affluent residents; and with regard to the other half of the socio-economic continuum, they want no more than their share (if not fewer). Similarly with economic development, county decisionmakers want businesses offering amenities appealing to affluent residents—both to attract such residents and to yield the higher tax revenue they provide. While PGC's population is middle class overall and therefore can make a compelling business case to firms targeting affluent populations, the county has fewer middle class residents than neighboring counties, and certainly fewer upper middle class and wealthy residents. The Prince George's Council Chair, when reflecting on where PGC falls in relation to neighboring counties' median income stated:

We compete with the region and while Prince George's County is the most affluent...I would call it income, a higher income than most in the country. If you took median household income, we have one of the higher median household incomes and you superimpose that over a majority minority jurisdiction, then we go way up the scale. The state of Maryland is the richest state in the union. So, your numbers start to fall precipitously when you start to think about median household income. Median household income in the state of Maryland, we're number 11.

### **Variation within the Black Middle Class**

Among the Black middle class, there is a wide range of statuses in PGC, as elsewhere in the United States (Lacy 2007, Landry and Marsh 2011, Pattillo 2013). At the upper end, are affluent white-collar professionals with graduate degrees—doctors, lawyers, engineers, and government and business elites—living in homes with three-car

garages—and at the other end are white-collar professionals in sales and clerical jobs—living in modest single family and townhomes, many of whom are a paycheck or two away from slipping into poverty. Black households’ vulnerability in large measure reflects the wealth gap discussed in the introduction. As the inter-county competition for people and resources plays out, some counties “win” and “lose” more than others, with profound implications for counties’ tax revenue inflow and outflow.

Virtually all PGC officials I spoke to, and some residents, are well versed in how home values and tax generation capacity are connected. Residents are generally not as informed as policy officials, but most home owners I interviewed had a sense of the relative positioning of their homes’ value within the D.C. region. While all residents indicated some disappointment about this, the biggest divide with regard to whether residents felt mild versus deep dissatisfaction with their home value was between residents with school-age children and those without. Those without children tended to be more satisfied.

County officials, and those they hired to conduct studies on their behalf, also reminded residents about home values’ influence on the county’s fiscal fate. For instance, in 2018, the county council initiated a housing strategy study to learn the extent to which PGC’s housing stock is meeting current residents’ needs and the kinds of housing the county would need to achieve its development goals. At a meeting designed to solicit resident input on the strategy, residents were shown charts comparing PGC home values and demographics to those of neighboring counties. Upon learning PGC usually falls well behind its neighbors on most measures, a middle-class Black woman lamented while shaking her head side to side:

I [am] disappointed to see that the housing values are lower here than elsewhere in the region...I know that has to be balanced by taxation...the values are going up more slowly here than in surrounding counties.

In Chapter Three: Structural Precarity and Peril—Outflow, I explain how the Black middle class' responsibility for a disproportionate share of the D.C. region's high-needs populations creates unique budget constraints for Prince George's officials as they devise budget priorities. Through what pathways do low-income residents come to PGC in disproportionate number? Among the most robust processes affecting PGC's socio-economic demographics is D.C. area gentrification.

### **Gentrification: Movement of People and Capital and County Budget Trajectories**

Significant gentrification has occurred in metropolitan areas nation-wide from the late 1990s to the present. From this period forward, cities experienced net population growth after decades of population decline (Ehrenhalt 2012, Florida 2017). The D.C. area, as the fifth fastest growing U.S. region in 2017, out of 382 metropolitan statistical areas, has experienced substantial population in migration (United States Census Bureau 2018a). More than 65,000 people moved to the area in 2017. Whites movement into city neighborhoods, particularly communities with significant percentages of low-income people and Blacks and Latinos is often labeled "gentrification." Gentrification processes entail interactions between affluent people's decisions about where they seek to live, government policy, and market activity (Lees, Slater, and Wyly 2007).

When high-income residents move into low-income neighborhoods, businesses catering to economically advantaged residents' interests follow them, potentially pushing out businesses catering to low income residents, making it more difficult for low-income residents to meet their needs within their income constraints. Furthermore, affluent

residents, in general, have greater influence over the political process than do poor residents—both because upper middle class residents usually have more acumen for navigating dominant institutions and because decisionmakers are more responsive to them (Hyra 2017). Decisionmakers' are generally receptive to high-income resident demands because, as discussed above, officials want more of these residents and the businesses targeting them because they bolster budgets through their tax contributions. And officials know affluent residents have options regarding where to live.

Once gentrification processes are underway, communities may remain in a transition phase for 10 or more years—with a range of residents across the socio-economic spectrum living in the same neighborhood. But few neighborhoods stabilize as socio-economically integrated. Rather, most reach a tipping point such that low-income residents are virtually entirely pushed out because the neighborhood does not allow them to meet their needs and wants within their budget constraints or the neighborhood does not offer cultural amenities or other forms of “use value” they seek (Florida 2017).

However, predicting which neighborhoods will gentrify in a region is not straight forward. Cities often have development plans for years before acting on them. Describing which set of blocks is ripe for gentrification often involves speculation, with government or market activity subtly signaling to investors changes are afoot that may increase an area's “exchange value”—its ability to sustain higher rents (Logan and Molotch 2007).

*Gentrification: D.C. Area Patterns.* Neighborhoods are inherently dynamic—people move in, people move out. However, turnover intensity varies as does the degree to which those replacing those leaving match on demographic attributes associated with access to material and symbolic resources. With regard to gentrification especially, the

degree of change in neighborhoods' race and class mix is the most salient. In the United States, race and class inequities overlap significantly because White people tend to have more resources than non-Whites.

As discussed in the introduction, in the wake of The Modern Civil Rights Movement, there was mass White exodus from cities and into suburbs. Simultaneously, federal and state government withdrew significant financial support from cities, which were increasingly composed of Black majorities, owing to Whites' departure. But, as noted above, this trend has reversed in many major U.S. cities, particularly those on United States east and west coasts. One such city, Washington D.C., has experienced some the most intense gentrification of any city nation-wide.

The National Community Reinvestment Coalition (NCRC) in a 2019 report found that from 2000 to 2013 D.C. experienced the most gentrification by percentage of "eligible neighborhoods," with the term defined as "if in 2000 [neighborhoods/census blocks] were in the lower 40 percent of home values and family incomes in that [Washington, D.C.] metropolitan area (Richardson, Mitchell, and Franco 2019). The report estimates that about 20,000 mostly African American residents were pushed out of their neighborhoods. While it is unclear where those who left settled, that this many people left their neighborhoods in recent years demonstrates D.C. overall has become a considerably more expensive place to live, making it less likely it will have many neighborhoods where people with moderate and low incomes can afford to live.

As people are pushed out of their neighborhoods, they likely look for the most affordable place to move and a place close to social networks and cultural and other familiar social rhythms. Prince George's County's inner ring multi-family housing units,

or apartments, are the most affordable in the D.C. area. Furthermore, by moving to PGC most families can stay proximate to the District, as PGC has the longest border with D.C., allowing people literally to cross a street to move between jurisdictions. Mass transit, buses and the subway, also connect PGC and D.C. communities.

As D.C. area neighborhoods absorb new residents, the *entire* metropolitan area is transformed. The ebb and flow of neighborhood succession reverberates regionally—market and government actions in one jurisdiction have downstream consequences for those nearby. Importantly, as this dynamic plays out, D.C. area communities are differently positioned with regard to their ability both to *influence* development patterns, as well as the extent to which they *absorb more benefits versus harm* from decisions made in neighboring jurisdictions.

Because neighborhoods' trajectories are in large part driven by whether they are attracting people with racial and ethnic and socio-economic characteristics similar to the current population, leaders and residents alike are sensitive to these changes. In PGC, multiple types of neighborhood shifts are occurring simultaneously, with some neighborhoods declining as others are gentrifying. Gentrification in PGC, as described in Chapter 4: Development, is largely happening near mass transit hubs in both inner and outer beltway communities. A middle class Black resident when I asked him to describe his neighborhood and what, if anything, stood out as significant changes over the past few years remarked:

With new influx of Hispanic population and that continuing to grow, and then a new influx of persons of lesser income who are coming from the Washington, D.C.'s or other places where gentrification is running rampant, the county is having to reconfigure the way that it implements policy and programs to be able to meet the needs of new folks who are coming into the county.

The resident's comment reflects the movement of different ethno-racial groups into PGC and the social consequences. Due to the county's economic position, relative to neighboring locales, many PGC neighborhoods receive a significant number of socio-economically disadvantaged residents, some of them likely displaced from other D.C. communities that have become less affordable.

*Neighborhood Succession: Consequences for PGC's Budget.* The household financial precarity people bring with them sets the stage for county-level budget vulnerability. A council member, when considering the trajectory of many inside-the-beltway "established" neighborhoods with "all brick homes," noted that for many Blacks there are myriad stressors affecting neighborhoods' stability, including inter-generational transfers of property creating many home vacancies:

...We're fortunate in that we have some stable residence, but the unfortunate issue is that they are aging out and so what happens is their homes become available. You may have tenants in there if they're renting it that people may not necessarily want. So you have some of these issues that come along where you have people leaving out because their kids have moved away...

Importantly for the stability of PGC's Black middle class, which areas gentrify and the extent to which newly-arrived and long-time residents' interests are served in the long run reflects decades-long racialized market and government processes.

*The Tale of Two Inner-Ring Suburbs.* To highlight how while neighborhood change is expected, it occurs within the contours of long-standing racial and economic inequalities, I compare the development trajectory of PGC's inside-the-beltway or inner-ring suburban communities and those of its neighbor, Arlington County, Virginia—as their fates have diverged demonstrably. Inner-ring communities tend to have a similar housing stock mix: compact split-level single-family homes and townhomes alongside



apartment complexes. But developers' investment in such communities in the D.C. region varies markedly.

In PGC, apartment owners have minimally maintained their buildings. From the 1970s forward, the population living in much of the county's inner-ring transitioned from White and working class to Black and middle class, working class, and poor. Rents have been fairly flat, accounting for inflation. Today, according to a widely accessible search engine for apartments, Zillow, the cheapest one-bedroom apartment in the PGC inner-ring community of Capitol Heights rents for \$868 (Zillow: Capitol Heights 2018).

Developers have not taken the same approach in Crystal City, part of Arlington County in Virginia, however. There, investors have refurbished apartment stock, modernizing many into luxury housing units. From the 1970s forward, Crystal City's population transitioned from overwhelmingly White to a mixture of mostly White, with substantial Latino and Asian populations, and few Blacks. Most residents are middle class or higher socio-economic status. Rents have increased steadily over the past several decades. The lowest rent one can pay for a Crystal City apartment, according to Zillow, is \$1,495—about \$600 more than what one would pay in PGC (Zillow: Crystal City 2018). In 2018, the Amazon corporation named Crystal City the site of one of its new headquarters, reinforcing Arlington's economic position in the D.C. region (O'Connell and McCartney 2018). Prince George's County also bid for the Amazon site, but was not selected—in fact, all D.C. area sites that bid made Amazon's short list, except PGC (Cameron and O'Connell 2018).

Given the dynamic described above, Prince George's does not receive property tax revenues that would accompany higher-valued properties, while Arlington does. This

constitutes a *vicious cycle* for PGC: without more revenue the county cannot afford to improve public goods and services, but without improved public goods and services and appealing amenities, developers are unlikely to invest in their apartment stock. And in the meantime, PGC will continue to attract and retain a disproportionate share of the region's low-income residents, while Arlington receives the opposite—a disproportionate share of the region's high-income residents; or as the Maryland education activist and retired professor quoted above framed it when I asked about PGC's economic opportunities: "This will be more of the warehouse community, if you will."

Prince George's County's relative economic position in the D.C. region when compared to its wealthier neighbors is "racialized" because much of the county's disadvantage stems from the continued stigmatization of Blacks and the spaces they occupy. Another way in which race matters is that Black communities have been and continue to be targeted by market actors for toxic financial arrangements. Most recently during the Great Recession of 2007-2009.

### **Market Actors Prey Upon Black Communities**

#### **Great Recession of 2007 to 2009**

*Great Recession: National Trends.* The Great Recession was the worst economic contraction since the Great Depression of the late 1920s and 1930s. Nationwide, eight percent of Black homeowners lost their properties, effectively erasing Blacks' homeownership gains made after the landmark Fair Housing Act of 1968 (McMullen 2019). During economic contractions, because White households have more wealth, they have built-in capacity to withstand economic shocks, making them less likely to

experience long-term economic hardship or “scarring” after downturns. This means majority-White counties’ tax bases are generally more resilient too.

Americans nationwide lost their homes during the foreclosure crisis. Yet the recession was highly racialized and some communities were harder hit than others (Lacy 2012). Variation in hardship concentration reflects racial residential segregation. Black neighborhoods, particularly those in lower middle class neighborhoods were targeted, as these were places where people were striving for “The American Dream,” but often where people had credit and other limitations. Still, even Blacks who qualified for standard mortgages were more likely than their White counterparts to have a non-standard home loan in the lead up to the foreclosure crisis (Ibid.).

*Great Recession: Variation in D.C. Region Jurisdictions’ Experiences.* Consistent with national trends, the extent to which D.C. area households and jurisdictions experienced significant recession-related fallout was deeply connected to their racial composition. Thousands of Black middle-class families flocked to PGC during the late 1990s early 2000s economic boom to buy new homes. A substantial contingent of homebuyers and people who refinanced, signed non-standard, or even predatory contracts, the terms of which families could afford when the housing market was expanding, but not when it contracted and lenders enforced adverse terms. Because lenders targeted Black communities for non-standard mortgages (Rugh and Massey 2010), and Prince George’s is majority Black, PGC experienced more harm than neighboring counties, which have smaller Black populations.

Prince George’s has taken longer to recover from recession setbacks than its neighbors. PGC residents have lost far more wealth and the county has lost far more

revenue than neighboring majority-White locales (Fletcher 2015). In my interview with a county council member whose district is mostly inside of the beltway in the northern half of the county, one of the areas that endured a high foreclosure rate, she described her district's Great Recession experience this way—a description not unlike what I heard from other council members:

There's a rule of thumb in the community development world...if more than 60 percent of your block is rental or non-home owner occupied then you can start to experience quality of life changes in your community. I think there are some neighborhoods where we're seeing data points that are like that and part of it is we had an intense amount of foreclosures in Prince George's County. We still have a lot of foreclosures in Prince George's County. There was a moment in time when I came into office [2016] where every neighborhood that I door knocked as I was running for elected office there was hands down a vacant house in every one of them and you could obviously detect it. The grass was growing high. Maybe it was boarded up. It was clearly poorly maintained. Nowadays, we still have vacant homes in our neighborhoods. I'm not sure it's on that scale as it was but we had two of our zip codes in my district were hot spots for foreclosures in the peak of the crisis.

As the council member above described, the recession was “intense” with many “hot spot” neighborhoods throughout the county, creating conditions leading to longer recovery in PGC than in neighboring locales. Because demand for housing in the county is largely driven by African Americans home purchasers and they were the racial group most devastated by the foreclosure crisis, demand for PGC's homes remains relatively tepid, when compared to neighboring jurisdictions. The council member quoted above framed recession-related scarring this way:

It took us longer than anyone in the region to dig out... We're still digging out and it affected our African American middle class in the worst way. People lost their homes and that's how you build wealth in this country, is by home ownership and it hit us hard. There's a consequence to that that I think we're still trying to figure out.

*The Great Recession and PGC Neighborhood Effects.* As the councilmember describes, recession-related ills felt in PGC communities include neighborhood instability. At county government hearings and community meetings, especially at

council members' "listening sessions"—open forums most held several times a year to learn constituent concerns—residents reported profound neighborhood changes indicating their neighborhoods were becoming less stable. Among the most common concerns were commercial and other non-residential activities in their communities.

In response to resident complaints about non-residential activity, the county council held hearings at which it invited agencies, such as the Department of Inspections and Enforcement to discuss what has changed in communities since the recession and the extent to which their authority allows them to remedy concerns. At these hearings, agencies heads and residents noted increases in pop-up parties and restaurants and short-term leasing (e.g., Air BnB). Residents who testified also expressed concern about loitering on or near vacant properties and suspected drug use as a driving factor.

Another reason recession-era effects have lingered in PGC is it was not only felt more deeply there, it was more protracted. Several county leaders said they saw signs of economic strain in neighborhoods long before the foreclosure crisis became a national issue. The comments below from a former federal elected official who represented a portion of PGC exemplify those I heard from leaders:

...I was running on these issues in 2006 because as I was driving around the county, I would drive through neighborhoods and I'd say, "God, what is going on?" Even in my own neighborhood. Homes that were boarded up and abandoned and stuff, and in 2006 I'd say, "Something is going on here," and I didn't quite understand it, but obviously when the financial disaster happened in 2008...Prince George's County was one of the epicenters of the housing crisis.

*Great Recession and PGC Budget Implications.* In addition to direct household and neighborhood consequences, the PGC government budget has retrenched significantly due to the economic downturn. County government's capacity to provide quality public goods and services is tethered to residential and commercial property

values. Property values, particularly homes' values, plummeted in the wake of the recession. Not only did homes' assessed value decline demonstrably, thus shrinking the tax base, homes banks foreclosed on sat idle for months, even years. And bank-owned properties do not generate tax revenue.

Loss of tax revenue due to foreclosure also means PGC has had less money to cover social service and other programs people tend to seek when enduring financial hardship—both those in financial distress before the recession and those newly distressed by the recession. During and in the wake of the Recession, no agency or program went unscathed—with less inflow county officials spread the already-thin budget even thinner. For instance, teachers' first post-recession pay increase was in fiscal year 2018. As another example of the shrinking budget's impact, a resident representing Friends of the Library made the following comment at a county-executive hosted “budget listening session”: “The library budget was cut 10 years ago by 40 percent and to date the budget has not been fully restored. As a result, libraries have short hours...”.

*Everyday Predation.* Great Recession fallout compounds chronic—daily—predation many PGC communities face because they have substantial low-income and populations. Extractive businesses include pay-day lenders and pawn shops. As the Maryland, education activist, and retired professor quoted above observed: “There is increasingly now a phenomenon of taking advantage of people who need access to payday loans and high-interest credit and those kinds of things. That's a major thing that's creeping into our community.”

Financial industry actors can execute exploitative regimes efficiently, and often with impunity, in majority-Black spaces because their targeted consumer group is the

majority population and the effects are concentrated in Black communities, with few immediate spillover effects in White communities due to racial residential segregation. Furthermore, given extant research on Whites' racial attitudes, most harbor negative stereotypes about Blacks, including of significance in this scenario, that Blacks are incompetent and lazy—thus likely leading many Whites to believe Blacks themselves are at fault for their experiences (Bobo, et al. 2012). Extractive financial arrangements undermine neighborhood stability and county revenue generation capacity. As residents lose ground in providing stable lives for themselves, county social services and public schools bear the fallout.

### **Harms from Other Aspects of PGC Resident and Government Financial Precarity**

#### **Residents' Concentration in Federal Government and Related Industry Workforces**

Across the board, a substantial portion of D.C. area residents work for the federal government or industries connected to it. African Americans nationwide are over represented in government at the local, state, and federal levels because they face more discrimination in the private labor market (Pager and Shephard 2008). With regard to the federal government in particular, whereas Blacks are 13 percent of the population, they are 18 percent of the federal workforce (U.S. Office of Personnel Management 2017). Thus, Blacks' household income is intimately tied to the vicissitudes of federal government activity. In the words of the PGC Council Chair: “When the federal government sneezes, Prince George's gets a cold.”

For instance, when swaths of the federal government closed in late 2018/early 2019 because the President and Congress did not reach a budget agreement, federal workers were furloughed and Blacks were especially hard hit. During this partial

government shutdown, 800,000 workers nationwide did not receive pay for over a month. But the epicenter of fallout was the D.C. area, as it is home to the nation's capital and has the greatest number and highest density of federal workers. Among workers furloughed were thousands of Prince Georgians and many noted significant hardship—from food insecurity to inability to pay their rent or mortgages (Simons 2019).

In response to the strains families faced, PGC officials guided residents to several sources of support, including government-run and non-profit programs (Prince George's County Government 2019c). Notably, the county did not provide additional funding from its own budget. However, the acting superintendent of Prince George's County Public Schools (PGCPS) announced—through media and a mass e-mail to parents—that children who come to school in need of a meal would receive one upon request, regardless of whether the household had established it qualifies for free and reduced price meals. Hence, children who otherwise would not qualify for meals had access to them. This reflects general PGCPS policy—never to turn away a hungry child—but by advertising the policy the system increased the likelihood of uptake.

### **Voter Imposed Limitations on PGC Government Tax Generation Authority**

As outlined in the introduction, during the late 1970s and 1980s, Prince Georgians passed several measures to restrict significantly elected officials' authority to raise taxes. These measures include: Tax Reform Initiative by Marylanders (TRIM), Question I, and the Homestead Tax Cap. TRIM addresses property tax rates, Question I user fees for county services, and the Homestead Tax Cap restricts the amount of money the county can receive from state taxes related to the private residences (Prince George's County



Council 2017). Combined they effectively prevent county officials from increasing any county taxes and fees without voter approval through referendum.

These restrictions were enacted during intense population growth, which led to a building boom. In effort to respond to increased housing demand quickly and due to relatively open zoning laws, when compared to neighboring counties, many new structures were erected in PGC without long-term planning for adequate public facilities—from schools, to roads, to fire and police forces (Prince George’s County Council 2017).

PGC’s enactment of tax restrictions was also coterminous with a national wave of “taxpayer revolts” in the 1970s and 1980s (Harvey 2007). While rapid development in PGC and national anti-tax sentiment were likely among the frames influencing voters when they considered whether to support TRIM, the county’s racial transition was the issue generating the most controversy at the time—and particularly the racial integration of Prince George’s County Public Schools. In the final analysis, the politics underpinning tax limitations placed on government reflect voters’ beliefs about how much money government should have, who should bear the tax burden, and on whom or for what taxes should be spent. When TRIM passed, Whites were still the majority, but taxes were increasingly going to an expanding Black population.

### **Tax Restrictions and PGC’s Racial Transition**

Prince Georgians passed TRIM in 1978. At that time, Blacks’ share of the PGC population was growing steadily toward a majority. Whites were fiercely resisting integrating public schools—many White parents protested, at times violently—and the

majority of PGC’s voters supported George Wallace, an avowed segregationist, in the Republican Presidential primary (Johnson: 2002:59).

When I asked a PGC government civil servant in senior positions since the 1990s Curry Administration “What do you think led to TRIM’s passage?,” he articulated the perspective I heard from most Black PGC officials:

Can I tell you honestly? I think it was the transition and the color of the people that were getting into government. And I think also the desegregation [of county public schools] suit added a lot to it because people did not want to spend their money busing children from the inner beltway to the outer beltway. And we had a lot of people who did not have faith in Black people in general or Black elected officials...People don’t want to say it, but we have to be honest with ourselves...I’ll never forget I overheard a [White] councilmember say—“Oh my God—all the people with the brains are leaving Upper Marlboro [the seat of county government]”

Similarly, a councilmember framed TRIM’s passage and PGC’s racial transition this way:

It was just during a time when the change was happening between Whites, the White flight and African Americans taking over. And as Whites still have a lot of remnants of power. It's what happens, right? We don't wanna pay for the other. If everybody looked Irish, and Italian, and German, and whatever, they wouldn't have minded paying for those kids to go to school...

### **Current Resistance to Overturning TRIM**

Whatever the motivation behind TRIM, Prince Georgians continue to oppose its repeal. Since TRIM became law, county executives, including Black executives, have tried to repeal it and each time PGC voters resoundingly reject the proposition (Hernandez 2015). The reasons voters support TRIM varies, but several themes emerged during interviews and observations of the county’s political processes, including: (1) many residents already struggling financially, do not want to raise their taxes and fees because they cannot afford them; (2) residents are frustrated they do not have public goods and services and amenities comparable to neighboring counties; and (3) residents believe county officials do not use current funds effectively and efficiently and do not

want to entrust, or “reward,” county government with more money—that is, residents argue they do not get what they *already* pay for. However, residents’ perceptions and the reality of PGC’s structural limitations do not always align, albeit certain high-profile cases seemingly confirm residents’ suspicions.

In my interviews with residents, none said they supported TRIM’s repeal. When I asked residents whether they support TRIM and the basis of their position, about half knew what TRIM was; for the others, I explained what TRIM is and then asked their position. A middle class retired Black woman respondent captured the perspective of most respondents when she said: “I think it’s still a good idea for them to check with us first.” However, the strength of respondents’ opposition to overturning TRIM varied. When I asked them whether there were any issues for which they would consider raising their taxes, about half said no. Among those who said yes, more funding for public schools was the issue they usually named. PGC residents’ deep reluctance to overturn TRIM, and similar measures, is not only about how much they believe they ought to pay in taxes, but also influenced by resident satisfaction with county leadership, particularly their ability to use tax revenue they already receive to support residents’ quality of life.

### **Tax Increase Resistance and PGC Quality of Life**

Within the past decade, there have been high-profile mismanagement and malfeasance cases. For instance, in 2011, the county executive was convicted of taking bribes (Thompson 2011). Cases like this, while not necessarily demonstrating systemic government corruption, bolster the narrative that PGC’s government cannot appropriately handle tax dollars. A council member whose district is in the southern half of the county,

consisting mostly of neighborhoods inside the beltway, described the resident sentiment many councilmembers said they heard from constituents:

Well people want to see when you walk outside your door—if the community doesn't look the way you want it to look, if you're cutting services, like go from two day to one day [per week] trash and then you see more trash in the community, so you're cutting trash and I see more trash. If they don't have, you know, if they feel like the people that they've put in elected office are not using their resources wisely, they not going to give you any more

Notwithstanding PGC residents' frustration with the level of service they receive, based on my observations and interviews with county leaders, I did not find indications of systemic corruption or incompetence. Overall, the issues PGC faces are those typical of large bureaucracies—for example, equity and responsiveness to residents' concerns and consistent, effective, and efficient enforcement of regulations. In fact, councilmembers demonstrated great care in crafting laws. The refrain the council chair and vice chair stated during dozens of work sessions to amend bills to reflect residents,' businesses,' and experts' feedback on proposed legislation was: “measure twice and cut once.” The council chair, in his interview noted how he assiduously incorporates voter education into his town hall and other meetings, so residents understand the basis of his decisions, stating: “I'd rather under promise and over deliver.” When I observed a luncheon he gave to seniors at an assisted living facility, he peppered his remarks with statistics regarding the trajectory of PGC's revenue and how he and his colleagues sought to prioritize expenditures. Other council members when hosting town halls or resident “meet and greets” took similar steps.

### **Local Media Depictions of PGC and Its Governing Officials**

Media amplify Prince George's residents' negative perception of their government. As the only mostly-Black county in the region, PGC receives significant

attention—there is a “fishbowl” effect. To counter negative perceptions, councilmembers often said “we need to tell our story” as they focused on exemplary individual and group achievements among Prince Georgians, such as when they passed resolutions honoring non-profit organizations doing work in alignment with special emphasis days or months. PGC leaders “telling [their] stories” reflects W.E.B Du Bois’s concept of “double consciousness”—a distinction between how Blacks perceive themselves and how they believe Whites perceive them (Du Bois 2007 [1903]).

However, unlike “double consciousness,” Black middle class “respectability politics” compound media depictions. Many economically advantaged Blacks hold themselves to standards not only reflecting their values, but also criteria they anticipate Whites will use to evaluate Blacks’ competency and moral rectitude. Consequently, many affluent Blacks take a hardline stance against Blacks’ behaviors they think may jeopardize the entire group’s standing in United States society. To enact social distance, wrong-doers are often publicly shamed harshly. A PGC official intimately involved in internal Democratic Party affairs stated there are particular challenges when seeking to hold Black government officials accountable when the county is majority Black because even though broader economic and political forces outside of Blacks’ control shape county constraints and opportunities, the face of local government is Black—“you’re used to fighting against ‘the man’; now it seems you’re ‘the man.’”

Cathy Cohen, as discussed in the introduction, conceptualizes Blacks’ strict policing of each other as constitutive of “advanced marginalization”—the contingent terms upon which a minority of African Americans, largely the Black middle class, gains access to dominant institutions’ resources. Negative stories also likely stand out because

most Americans, have minimal knowledge about how government works and thus have limited ability to interpret media reports within socio-historical context (Annenberg School of Public Policy Center 2017).

### **PGC Residents' Quality of Life Perceptions and Knowledge about Government**

PGC residents, likely in line with most Americans, usually only pay attention when government fails to meet their expectations. For instance, the vast majority of resident respondents could not name one county official other than the county executive and many could not name the county executive. While PGC residents are not unique in their level of understanding of government, they do face unique challenges. PGC middle class residents, for example, are virtually unaware of how the county's disproportionate "responsibility" for the D.C. region's low-income households hampers PGC's capacity to invest in the middle class' priorities. During my focus group, when we discussed county budget allocations, all participants said they wanted more money invested in education. When I told them over 60 percent of the budget is already dedicated to that area, they were astonished.

For PGC residents to comprehend their county's capacity to support a high quality of life, they need to know *more and different* information than Whites in neighboring counties. This is because in traveling through the D.C. region Black residents' expectations become informed by other counties' public goods, services, and amenities. They assume PGC has the same resources as majority-White counties. The Black middle class' unmet expectations leads to a cycle of frustration, which often transforms into anti-government sentiment and mistrust, in turn leading some to want to freeze or cut taxes. To be clear, raising county taxes *alone* would likely be insufficient for increasing revenue

to levels necessary to meet all PGC residents' needs. For this to happen, the county must recover the state and federal support it has lost over the past several decades. Short of that, as discussed in Chapter 4: Economic Development, county officials feel inordinate pressure to attract private investment and high-income households. Notwithstanding these critical caveats, were PGC officials to have authority to raise and lower taxes, they would have an additional tool for managing county resources during economic contractions.

### **Summary and Conclusions**

Tax revenue, the “life blood” enabling governments to perform their responsibilities, has been on a downward slope nationally, relative to population growth and resident need. Federal and state governments support local jurisdictions now less than they did prior to the 1970s when “neoliberal” governing models started to take hold in the United States (and elsewhere around the world), emphasizing market-based, as opposed to government funded, processes for meeting human needs (Harvey 2007). Now nearly two generations after this trend commenced, communities across the United States are experiencing the long-term consequences—from ill maintained infrastructure to overcrowded and underfunded public schools.

In the dynamic movement of material resources and migration within and between regions, there has been uneven distribution of the costs and benefits of increasingly market-driven policies. And this variation is fundamentally connected to entrenched class and race inequality, reflecting legacy inequities and new forms. One that has deep historical roots and that continues to advantage Whites and disadvantage Blacks is racial residential segregation. Such racial separation has led to Whites' homes, on average, having more value than those of Blacks. Because the local tax base is tied to the

value of private property, governments serving mostly Black constituents garner less in revenue for a given tax rate. As demonstrated by PGC's experience, even when a metropolitan area is growing rapidly in population and wealth, majority-Black areas are less well positioned to receive a proportionate share of positive returns to such expansion.

Black communities' disadvantages limit both Black households' wealth accumulation and local jurisdictions' capacity to support resident wellbeing through the provision of high-quality public goods and services. Therefore Blacks contend with constraints inherited from the Jim Crow Era, such as "redlining" of majority Black areas, plus today's instantiations of financial industry discrimination. The common thread between Jim Crow and contemporary racial residential segregation is Whites' continued stigmatization of Black people and the places in which they reside. While middle class Blacks fare better, on average, than less economically advantaged African Americans, they reap fewer benefits from and face greater barriers to maintaining their class status than their middle class White counterparts.

In the case of PGC, at the same time it garners less tax revenue than neighboring jurisdictions, there are *more* demands for that same revenue, as majority-Black areas serve more high-needs populations. The county receives and retains more low-income populations because of its disadvantaged position within the D.C. area, relative to neighboring locales, such as Montgomery and Fairfax Counties, which have more high-income households and fewer Blacks. PGC, as the most affordable jurisdiction, absorbs people displaced by gentrification elsewhere in the region, as well as people moving from outside the region seeking an affordable place to live. The combination of these social processes renders PGC the "sink" for negative development externalities in the D.C. area.



In addition to the structural constraints PGC faces because of its relative economic capacity, it contends with discriminatory market practices targeted toward or disproportionately affecting Black people, as exemplified by the Great Recession foreclosure crisis. Lost value in PGC properties during the recession meant an already-strained county budget became even more distressed, causing the county to reduce or cut public goods and services for several years afterward.

Finally, limitations on PGC officials' authority to raise taxes were passed during the 1990s when the county transitioned from majority-White to majority Black. These restrictions mean decisionmakers do not have the ability to raise taxes when the tax base shrinks to enable county coffers to garner adequate revenue to pay for vital public goods and services. While county leaders, including African Americans officials, have sought to overturn these limitations, residents have resoundingly voted down their attempts. Many residents believe the county does not manage its current resources effectively. And some see the public goods and services offered in neighboring jurisdictions and become frustrated they are not available in PGC. Media reports about PGC highlight government mismanagement, further solidifying residents' distrust of their elected officials.

In this chapter, I showed how African Americans encounter structural disadvantage, even under the best market conditions and when most residents are middle class and live in a suburb, indicating the persistent role of racism in shaping their life chances. Racism is mediated by multiple levels of inter-connected social organization—household, neighborhood, local jurisdiction, and metropolitan area. Given PGC receives significantly less resource inflow than neighboring counties, how do officials prioritize spending? What are the implications for PGC residents' quality of life?

## CHAPTER 3: Structural Precarity and Peril—Resource Outflow

**“In the words of former Vice President Joe Biden, ‘Don’t tell me what you value, show me your budget, and I’ll tell you what you value.’ Take a careful look at this budget. You will see our shared values reflected in continued investments in education, public infrastructure, economic development, improved human service delivery, safe communities and support for the County’s most vulnerable residents. Revenues are improving, in part because of a full year of MGM National Harbor [casino] related receipts, but we still have miles to go before we sleep. Laying the groundwork for the future, the Council approached this year’s budget process with cautious optimism, making very modest and prudent investments and adjustments in FY [fiscal year] 2018. Continuing to lead the region as the economy grows, will depend greatly on the fiscal prudence we exercise today. That is why the work of the Blue Ribbon Commission is so critically important. The commission’s recommendations for addressing the structural deficit and related fiscal challenges were factored into our FY 18 budget considerations, and will also play an important role in all future County spending decisions, as we work to safeguard our financial health. The adopted spending plan is not only a budget for the new fiscal year—it is part of a multi-year, measured and long-term financial strategy that will require structural balance to succeed.”**

- Prince George’s County Council Chairman (remarks made as council approved fiscal year 2018 budget)

In the previous chapter, I showed how Black middle class household structural precarity and Prince George’s County (PGC) revenue instability are intimately intertwined. PGC’s relative economic position in the D.C. area leads to significant budget challenges as county officials seek to raise adequate revenue to support vital public goods and services. Without sufficient life blood—tax revenue—PGC leaders manage budget constraints by making harsh tradeoffs between government services.

Since the Great Recession, PGC’s budget has rebounded considerably, but the recovery rate is too low to restore funds cut during the economic downturn while also expanding vital public services. Expansion is necessary because the population is growing and PGC receives and retains a disproportionate share of the D.C. region’s low-income households. Below I explain how after county leaders allocate funding to the two largest spending categories—K-12 public schools and law enforcement—as well as meet mandatory spending requirements, such as pension contributions, a minimal amount is

left for all other programs. County leaders manage severe constraint by cutting and thinning programs in ways leading to many PGC services being less robust than what residents need to maintain a high quality of life.

With the contours of county budgeting in mind, how do PGC residents petition for funding and to what effect? How do policy officials decide how to allocate revenue? What do funding priorities indicate about PGC's opportunity structure, as nested within a regional context and prevailing social tensions among residents? Below I discuss how individuals and groups competed for a slice of the fiscal year 2018 PGC budget. Then I address how county officials made tradeoffs between constituent requests and how their spending priorities indicate social cleavages. I highlight tensions between the Black middle class and residents less socio-economically advantaged, as well as between Blacks and Latinos.

### **Competing for a Slice of the Pie: The Fiscal Year 2018 Budget Negotiation Process**

The discretionary budget is the portion of the budget requiring annual approval. Below I only address the discretionary budget because mandatory budget spending is automatic. Employee pensions and bond interest payments are mandatory spending examples. All local governments are subject to state mandates. They are responsible for providing certain public goods and services. In PGC, K-12 schools and public safety agencies consume the lion's share, with schools allocated 65 percent and public safety 25. State requirements combined with PGC decisionmakers' own priorities drive budget distribution among programs. For reasons discussed in the previous chapter, PGC makes more drastic budget tradeoffs than nearby majority White counties because PGC garners less tax revenue.

With regard to schools, officials are constrained by Maryland’s maintenance of effort requirement, which limits PGC’s ability to cut most school spending categories year to year. In terms of police, PGC technically has more discretion. There is not a state maintenance of effort requirement per se, but effectively here too there is one. In part, the police force’s privileged position stems from PGC’s status as a majority Black county. County officials combat anti-Black stigma underpinned by Whites’ assumptions about Blacks’ predisposition to criminality (Muhammad 2010). Furthermore, Blacks are more likely than Whites to be crime victims—this is because Blacks are disproportionately socio-economically disadvantaged relative to other racial and ethnic groups (Ibid.); and this too encourages support for growth in police funding.

After schools and police allocations, *all* other public goods and services—from social services to road repair—are supported with the remaining 10 percent. PGC’s budget outflow capacity—the amount of money it has for public goods and service provision—is inextricably linked to its revenue inflow, which is severely constrained for reasons explained in the prior chapter. Therefore, increasing resident and other stakeholder budget demands lead to rationing allocations more and more stringently.

U.S. states, in general, require counties to balance their operating cost budgets annually, and Maryland is no exception.<sup>12</sup> PGC decisionmakers approve upcoming fiscal year budgets based on revenue they expect to receive: locally generated tax and fee receipts and state and federal government fund transfers. Budget development is effectively solving an equation: on one side are “givens”—tax and fee receipts from all

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<sup>12</sup> PGC, like most counties, does borrow for capital expenditures, such as building roads and schools, usually by letting bonds.

sources. On the other side are variables driving revenue demand, which is mostly a function of population size and composition. Budget decision making politics are grounded in *how much weight* to lend each program—more weight for one program, or variable, necessarily requires trading off less weight for another.<sup>13</sup> Given the budget is the financial plan for reconciling competing quality of life interests among county residents and other stakeholders, “budget season”—the spring period when most budget deliberation occurs—is contentious. Ultimately, as the council chairman stated in the epigraph, PGC’s budget is a financial plan and a statement of its values and vision.

Regardless of decisionmakers’ intent, revenue scarcity leads to hard tradeoffs between core public goods and services. Tradeoffs are made in a context where spending scale varies demonstrably by program. When PGC decisionmakers allocate a few million more for social services, which usually receive a county contribution (as distinct from state and federal allocations) of \$15 million or less, program performance is significantly affected; whereas as a few million additional for public schools, where the county spends about \$1 billion dollars annually, has much less impact. Still, discretionary budget funding levels are intense at all allocation scales.

### **The Pie: Bakers and Ingredients**

The fiscal year 2017 budget was the first post-recession budget where PGC officials expected a surplus in the upcoming fiscal year. A county executive office senior

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<sup>13</sup> Decisionmakers must also factor in states mandates, as counties derive their authority from state law, so adapting to state requirements in non-negotiable. The mandate that has the most significant impact, for reasons elaborated in Chapter Five: K-12 Public Schools, is the school system maintenance of effort requirement. Effectively, once the county makes new investments in schools, it must continue that same investment, accounting for inflation and student enrollment.

staff member commented to a Washington Post reporter when the 2017 proposed budget was announced: “The past five years, we have been in winter doldrums... This is spring eternal. This is the first time we are making investments and can do some actual fun stuff” (Hernandez 2016).

For fiscal year (FY) 2018, based on PGC’s expected revenue, as predicted by the county’s Office of Management and Budget (OMB),<sup>14</sup> the county council approved a \$3.9 billion budget, a \$200,000 million, or 4.3 percent, increase above FY 2017’s \$3.7 billion budget (Prince George’s County Office of Management and Budget 2018). This revenue includes funds raised through the county’s direct taxing authority, as well as through grants and other funding transfers from Maryland and the federal government. Real property taxes, followed by personal property taxes, and taxes on the transfer and recordation of property titles, are the main sources of county-generated revenue. In FY 2017, PGC generated about \$771 million in real property taxes, about a \$55 million increase over the prior year, indicating economic growth and Great Recession recovery.

Prince George’s largest source of revenue from the State of Maryland is its public schools grant, followed by its portion of state income taxes. In FY 2018, the county expected to receive about \$633 million in income tax revenue from Maryland, an increase of about \$42 million, or seven percent, over the FY 2017 approved level. For public schools, the county expected to receive about \$1.1 billion in state aid in FY 2018, an increase of about \$19 million, or about two percent, above the FY 2017 approved budget.

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<sup>14</sup> The Office of Management and Budget (OMB) is the agency responsible for proposing the county executive’s budget and for carrying out the council approved budget the council approves.

## Budget Slices by Program: An Overview

**“As you can see, once you take 60 percent off, there’s not much left for quality of life needs in the county, but we put money where needed to provide quality of life...the good news is we had a little increase...the council fought amongst ourselves on how to spend the money, but if you can’t fight, you don’t need to be in the game...”**

- PGC Councilmember at spring 2017 community meeting where he briefed his constituents on the fiscal year 2018 approved budget

Given schools and police receive the vast majority of county revenue, a significant portion of budget negotiations concerns a relatively small amount of the county budget, about 300 million dollars. During “budget season,” spanning from March, when the county executive proposes the budget to the county council, to May, when the council approves the budget, county residents, civic organizations, businesses, and other parties, participate in a series of committee hearings at the county’s municipal building and community meetings, culminating in an approved budget before the beginning of the next fiscal year. According to county leaders I interviewed, during the Great Recession, the budget debate mostly consisted of negotiating among agencies and constituent groups about *how much to cut* from government programs, not *how much to invest* beyond the budget base. Public schools were the only spending category that did not experience cuts due to Maryland maintenance of effort requirements. However, PGC officials did freeze school personnel—teachers, administrators, and staff—pay. Consequently, as discussed below, school employees were among the most persistent and vocal groups during the FY 2018 budget deliberation process as they sought increased compensation to make up for recession era losses.

As recession fallout waned, budget negotiations became more expansive, incorporating fulsome discussions about how to improve Prince Georgians’ quality of

life. Still, 2018 budget decisions demonstrate the county continues to recover. Officials work toward making programs whole over several years. How quickly programs have recovered relative to each other has intensified competition between groups. Persistent recession recovery means PGC officials often do not meet resident service delivery expectations. Decisionmakers sought stakeholder buy in for their budget strategy by hosting community meetings where they solicited input on budget priorities and informed constituents about the county's fiscal state.

### **Great Expectations: Constituent Groups Petition for Bigger Budget Slices**

During the winter and spring of 2017, the county executive and county council held six budget listening sessions—each held three in high schools in northern, central, and southern portions of the county. At these meetings, before residents petitioned for how they wanted county resources spent, PGC's Office of Management and Budget (OMB) civil service staff presented about 10 "fiscal outlook" slides. OMB staff explained PGC's revenue trajectory from the recession period to the present, emphasizing the extent to which increased revenue has led to additional funding that could be allocated to programs the next fiscal year. County officials, particularly council members and the county executive, reinforced OMB's presentation to signal to residents that most groups would likely not feel satisfied with the approved budget. With a warm, but wry smile, the county executive often began his "budget listening sessions" by saying: "I'm always delighted to hear how to spend your tax dollars, but I'm also happy to hear ideas on how to save dollars." Notwithstanding this appeal, residents and other stakeholders sought significant funding increases for the programs they championed. Some groups were particularly persistent in their efforts. Two county employee unions—those for school



personnel and police officers—were among the most committed. Union leaders testified at nearly every budget hearing and were usually flanked by rank and file union members.

*Prince George’s County Public Schools (PGCPS)*. PGCPS has two persistent advocate pools—teachers and parents. Teachers, through their union president and other officers, petitioned decisionmakers throughout the budget deliberation process. Their primary demand was recovery of pay increases lost during the Great Recession. Other priorities included an expanded teacher mentor program and more classroom support through teachers’ aides. The union president argued that because Prince George’s County paid teachers less than neighboring jurisdictions, the attrition rate for teachers is high, leading to less experienced teachers in classrooms, which in turn affects teacher efficacy. At budget hearings, usually 30-50 teachers were present. They sat together and wore matching red t-shirts, with their union name—Prince George’s County Educators Association (PGCEA)—embossed on the front. A PGCEA senior officer represented her members’ interests this way at a school board hearing regarding how to reconcile the county executive’s proposed schools budget with the county council’s appropriation, which resulted in the need for cuts:

This is an opportunity for you...we are very concerned about the cuts by the county executive...and county council...the things that bother us the most are the things cut out of the budget...as under appreciated as we’re feeling, that didn’t help...take control of this budget...don’t let anyone tell you it’s not your budget...teachers need to know they’re appreciated by being appropriately compensated...the most important thing for us is to make sure that they have PAR [peer assistance review] mentor teachers...half of teachers have less than six years of experience...instead of literacy coaches, hire mentors...teachers will stay because they’re comfortable and confident...

Parents were also vocal petitioners. Those whose children attend specialty and magnet schools, such as Montessori, language immersion, and high performing charter schools, attended meetings consistently and made the clearest demands of

decisionmakers, relative to other parents. These parents have above-average knowledge and material resources, evinced by their ability to: learn about alternative schooling options, evaluate whether a program is a good fit for their child, apply to their school of choice, and regularly organize participation in the budget negotiation process. In addition, socio-economically advantaged parents are usually in a better position to transport their children to and from specialty schools. This is important because transportation is not guaranteed if students attend a non-neighborhood school.

Resources specialty school parents marshal are disproportionately the province of middle and upper middle class parents. Before many of them testified, they shared their professional credentials—for example, software engineer, college professor, lawyer, et cetera, as well as stay-at-home parents, whose ability to remain at home full time suggests the household breadwinner earns a white-collar professional salary. In their campaign for resources, specialty schools' PTA presidents spoke at nearly every hearing I attended and were accompanied by 10-20 additional parents. While disproportionately affluent, specialty school parents are a multi-racial coalition: about three quarters are African American and about one quarter are European American. Few Latinos or Asians participated. Given the PGCPS student population is about 60 percent African American, 30 percent Latino, and five percent White, White and Black parents were overrepresented and Latino parents significantly underrepresented.

Within this group of active parents, those whose children attended language immersion programs were the most tenacious in their participation. They sought adequate funding for their children's current school and the creation of new middle and high schools offering language immersion, in order for their children to have a bilingual

education throughout their K-12 tenure. Currently, there are not enough slots in middle and high schools to permit all students who attend language immersion in elementary school to stay in a language immersion program through grade 12 (Prince George's County Public Schools 2018b). Some parents explicitly threatened to leave the school system if their interests were not met. A Black mother of a second grader who testified at a school board budget hearing typifies such statements:

I'm here to support language immersion...I stand in the gap for my child...he asked me does the school board know what it will feel like to not learn another language?...I said maybe, maybe not...his normal is learning two languages...he's in the 2nd grade and reading on the 4th grade reading level...the only way we go from good to great is to invest in our schools...I don't want to have to move to a new county or pull my child out of the system.

At fewer hearings, parents from less advantaged backgrounds made their concerns known. A greater mix of parents across the class spectrum came to hearings related to media-publicized issues, such as a state inquiry into the integrity of the graduation rate after school board members questioned whether schools were allowing students to graduate who had not met requirements. At a hearing related to the graduation rate, a parent from a less advantaged school said: "All I know is these kids can't read." Consistent with this parent's concern, during my interviews with school board members, many indicated PGCPs classrooms, particularly those in low-income neighborhoods, would benefit from reading resource specialists and other paraprofessionals to support teachers' efforts, especially in light of increasingly large class sizes.

Parent participation level differences by class indicate the degree of pressure policy officials encounter as they determine funding levels representing different class group priorities. While decisionmakers seek to be responsive to socio-economically advantaged parents because they want to keep their children in the school system,

officials are still responsible for less advantaged students. The Black middle class, unlike the White middle class, does not have the political and economic power to insulate itself from low-income students' needs.

*Law Enforcement.* Behind schools, the next largest budget expenditure is the police department. They too made explicit appeals to fill the gap in pay created by recession-era salary freezes, arguing increased investment would enable PGC's crime rate to continue to decline and would support community-based policing strategies. Not only are improved crime rates and community-police interaction important for police efficacy, they are central to the county building its reputation as a safe place to live and do business, and thus connected to its economic development strategy.

Twenty five percent of the county budget is consumed by police, fire, sheriff, and correctional forces, with police receiving the majority of law enforcement funds. Crime has been trending downward in Prince George's County from the late 1990s/early 2000s, as it has been in most parts of the United States (Maryland Governor's Office of Crime Control and Prevention 2018, Sharkey 2018). The community-police relationship has continued to improve as well. At a council committee hearing, the Police Chief stated with regard to crime trends:

We will soon have a baseline and that we will try to maintain—we will no longer see huge drops in crime; the department is approaching an inflection point because we've gotten rid of the criminal dilantants and are now dealing with people who are more sophisticated...and we're more sophisticated...

In contrast to the present, from the 1970s to the early 1990s, crime levels and community-police relations were at levels unacceptable to most Prince Georgians. And even after this nadir, in 2004, PGC signed a Memorandum of Agreement with the U.S.

Justice Department due to a “pattern of practice of excessive force” and other misconduct (U.S. Justice Department 2004). However, despite significant crime rate improvement over the past decade, PGC’s reputation as unsafe persists. That the county is stigmatized as excessively crime-ridden may reflect nation-wide perceptions of Blacks as having a propensity toward violence, criminality, and other forms of social deviance (Alexander 2012; Muhammad 2010). This broader social backdrop makes it difficult for PGC officials to cut the police budget without incurring severe criticism.

The Police Chief, a White man in his late 40s who grew up in the county, is personable, doling out hugs as often as handshakes, and is a self-described “data geek.” He prides himself on, in his words: “dynamic” and “sophisticated” analysis, including a “strategic calendar” to detect crime patterns. When he testified before the council regarding the police budget, he never mentioned race unless asked directly about it, with the one exception his commitment to grooming a racially diverse corps of “command staff,” or high-level managers. But he alluded to race when discussing improvement in the level of trust between police and the community and the importance of community-based policing, where officers are assigned to patrol the same community most shifts and make a point of having regular non-confrontational, ideally trust-building interactions, with community members. Race was also implicit in his discussion of the department’s systematic process for introducing body cameras for patrol officers. The police department is working with the University of Maryland-College Park’s sociology department to test how cameras affect officer and public behavior. At the council budget hearings for police, the police chief touted the department’s achievements and its budget discipline as justification for why the department should receive all requested funding.

However, it is the Fraternal Order of Police, the police officer union, that engages in direct negotiations with the county executive over police compensation. Police representatives' relative power is greater than that of school personnel because police negotiate directly with the county executive's office for a comprehensive compensation contract and the county council votes on the final proposal; whereas for school personnel, the council allocates additional funding in the schools budget to provide pay and benefit increases—thus making it easier for the council to exercise its discretion.

*Budget Outcomes for Public Schools and Police.* The school budget in fiscal year 2018 was \$739 million, an increase of about \$41 million, or about six percent over the 2017 approved budget. But the budget increase is less than the amount needed to compensate fully for recession-era pay freezes. Funding was also allocated for existing specialty schools, including language immersion, with investment in additional language immersion programs in upper grade levels pushed to out years. Paraprofessional spending remained virtually unchanged. Overall, parents and teachers achieved some, but not all, of their goals, and middle class parents' interests were accommodated more than those of less socio-economically advantaged parents. The total budget for police in fiscal year 2018 was about \$331 million, an increase of about \$19 million, or six percent, above the FY 2017 approved level. The compensation package for police fully remedied recession-era salary and benefit freezes. Police fully attained their goal.

### **Thinner and Thinner Slices: Tradeoffs between Vital Public Services**

PGC is home to both a majority middle class population *and* a significant moderate and low income population *beyond the county's regional share*. Therefore not only does PGC have a smaller budget than its neighbors, it also spreads that budget

among more high-needs residents. High needs groups' steady, and at times increasing, populations exacerbate public resource strain. One group's fight for just a few million more dollars and the intensity of the deliberations about whether the county could afford the increase demonstrates how thin the slices are and yet how essential they are for nourishing resident quality of life.

*The Adults with Developmental Disabilities (DDA) Community.* The DDA community's experience exemplifies how state and federal underfunding of public goods and services has increasingly burdened local government, particularly locales like PGC already challenged by insufficient tax flow. In fiscal years 2017 and 2018, the DDA community was inadvertently harmed when PGC increased its minimum wage (Blackner 2016). Service providers are reimbursed at the state rate, which is lower than the county minimum wage. In 2017, county officials allowed DDA providers to pay the state, rather than the county, minimum wage, a move PGC decisionmakers thought would reduce harm to the DDA community. But providers complained this decision undermined their ability to attract and retain workers because prospective employees could earn more in virtually any other industry. Providers asked the county for "gap funding," money to support their paying workers the county minimum. A DDA provider's comments at one of several hearings regarding this community's needs captures the ethos of stakeholders' concerns and demands:

I'm here again because I can't meet the minimum wage...the state is not funding us...we're competing with fast food for staff...We have had to cut benefits...In this day of hateful rhetoric, let's be different—let's show love, and compassion...Martin Luther King said 'It's always the right time to do the right thing'—do the right thing by us.

In the end, PGC officials provided \$3.5 million in “Temporary Gap Funding” in the fiscal year 2018 budget, enabling providers to pay employees the county minimum wage, rather than the lower Maryland reimbursement rate. Officials used money from the Economic Development Incentives fund. Both PGC’s inability to cover the pay differential out of the social services budget and the overall social services budget indicate PGC’s funding of social services is far below the scale of resident need. Most funding for such programs is transfer revenue from the state and to a lesser extent federal grants. As an indication of just how tight PGC’s budget is, its wealthier neighbor, Montgomery County, enacted a similar minimum wage increase and offered gap funding as a matter of course when passing its FY 2018 budget; it simply increased its social services spending (Montgomery County 2017).

County leaders recognize they underinvest in social services. As a candidate, the county executive elected in 2018 stated at a neighborhood association meeting in a south county inside-the-beltway community: “we need more for social services...we have not invested enough in social services...we need to apply for more grants at the state and federal level...” Implicitly recognizing PGC’s budget constraints, her solution is to seek funding from non-county-based sources—the state and federal government.

Similarly, the senior pastor of one of the largest churches in PGC commented as follows with regard to insufficient social service spending and how his church works both independently and in coordination with county social service agencies to meet PGC residents’ needs; and in so doing, he identifies systematically underserved populations:

...I don't think we have a shelter, in Prince George's county...I know the church has participated in what we call warm nights, which is a program that rotates where people move around from church to church...it's back to this whole notion of those who are disenfranchised, those who are not part of the



main sector...So I think more could be done...We're talking about funding for social programs...when persons come here...We will help you with essentials, like electricity and rent, but they [church missionaries] have a resource booklet of all of the county agencies...they're referring to social services...So we interact with those.

*Trash Collection.* Social services are only one slice out of the 10 percent of the budget remaining for all other county spending after school and law enforcement agency allocations. County leaders struggle to fund many other core local government functions. One of these functions is trash collection. In 2016, the county switched from twice to once per week trash pickup (Prince George's County Department of the Environment 2019b). Council members and the county executive argued once a week collection was sufficient for keeping the county clean, that many residents did not put trash out on the second day, that other nearby jurisdictions have adopted similar schedules, and that reduced pick-up encouraged recycling, as people would be forced to be more cognizant of their waste stream due to their cans not easily accommodating a week's worth of trash if recyclable materials are not sorted out. And indeed Prince George's County is number one in Maryland for recycling and waste diversion (Prince George's Department of the Environment 2017). Yet in talking to county officials, none disputed cost savings as the primary driver in this decision.

Moreover, regardless of leaders' arguments, many residents voiced discontent over the trash collection policy. At nearly every forum where residents were given opportunity for open comment, at least one person, and usually several, complained. A county councilmember reflecting on the new trash policy and her constituents' response is consistent with what I observed at community meetings and heard during leader and resident interviews:

Councilmember: Whether you're talking about property taxes or just a change in service that will affect them, and they [PGC residents] perceive it, usually correctly, to be... If you're giving me, for example, once a week trash service instead of twice a week trash service but not reducing my taxes, that's the same as a tax increase. I've gotten those kinds of calls and those sort of challenges at meetings, public challenges.

Interviewer (author): "What's your response to a complaint like this?"

Councilmember: "You're right." But we also don't have the ability to raise taxes because of our tax cap. We have to take it to referendum, so the one way to deal with something like the solid waste fee that we can't increase and we're not able to cover the cost is to reduce service.

As the trash pickup examples shows, one way council members manage budget constraints is by diluting the quality of service they provide. Because they cannot expand the pie, they cut slices thinner and thinner to feed as many needs as possible, leaving most programs, and thus residents, hungry for more. In a context where thinning the budget has become routine, the county does not have resources to address fundamental causes, notably poverty, at the heart of its budget constraints, as meaningful poverty reduction programs require significant government financial investment. Nonetheless, PGC officials recently instituted an anti-poverty program that while not infusing new funding, seeks to coordinate and bolster existing programs.

*Transforming Neighborhoods Initiative (TNI)*. Established in 2012, through TNI, decisionmakers target resources to nine of the most economically challenged communities. Six programs are coordinated by the county and three, after improvement on 14 indicators, have transitioned to "community-led" (Prince George's County Executive 2015: xlvii). All TNI-designated areas reside within the Capital Beltway. Among the 14 indicators used to measure community distress are: children's kindergarten readiness, the percentage of households receiving Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (or "food stamps") benefits, foreclosure and unemployment rates, and crime levels (Ibid.). In addition, many of PGC's low-income neighborhoods are "food

deserts”—communities more than a mile away from a grocery store—and “food swamps”—areas with a high density of fast-food restaurants (Maryland National Capital Park and Planning Commission 2014:83).

TNI grew out of a law enforcement-focused program—Summer Crime Initiative.

After the Initiative’s success, according to the program’s website:

We evaluated data collected and determined that we could have a greater impact on raising the quality of life in areas deemed most in need of help by taking a more *holistic approach* to addressing the challenges of troubled communities [my emphasis].

The “holistic approach” PGC seeks is tethered to the county’s capacity to inject *additional* public goods and services into distressed neighborhoods. However, PGC’s budget constraints mean year to year officials struggle to maintain current service levels, let alone offer new funding. Consistent such fiscal limitations, there is not dedicated TNI funding; rather, TNI “strategically prioritizes resources” when officials determine budget allocations each year (Ibid.). While ameliorating poverty leads to one set of budget demands, on the other side of the socio-economic spectrum are the interests of the Black middle class.

### **Class Tension: Black Middle Class Interests Versus Those of Low-Income Residents**

**“There are middle-income people just hanging on and then there are the people in Mitchellville [an elite outside-the-beltway subdivision]”**

- PGC resident—Black man, 50s, during townhall meeting in southern PGC

People in the D.C. region (and beyond) familiar with Prince George’s often refer to it as the “preeminent” Black middle class county. By definition, the Black middle class is relatively more advantaged than Blacks are who are low-income or working class. But there is a range of affluence *within* the Black middle class, as the PGC resident quoted

above states. PGC Black households' political and economic priorities vary based on class location.

Upper middle class Blacks, often those with a graduate-level education and high incomes, are in a better position to substitute household resources for public goods and services. For instance, many of these residents send their children to private school. And as discussed in the next chapter, Black elites are best poised to benefit from the high-end development PGC officials are pursuing to expand the commercial tax base (Hendley and Posey 2018).

As PGC leaders seek to attract and retain socio-economically advantaged residents by offering public services and amenities comparable to nearby jurisdictions, decisionmakers are keenly aware of upper income residents' sensitivity to their sense of "tax value" and their ability and willingness to move to maximize it. PGC officials' recruitment efforts are hindered by their inability to raise taxes and by the fact that they would have to tax residents at a higher rate to garner the same revenue as nearby counties due to PGC's properties' average value.

Despite the development breakthroughs discussed in the next chapter, PGC's Black upper middle class over the past 20 years has been increasingly frustrated by their inability to access high-quality public goods and services and amenities. And many have "voted with their feet"—they have left PGC for surrounding counties in pursuit of a higher quality of life. A council member who represents a northern district spanning inside and outside the beltway communities recounted an exchange with a Black middle class constituent regarding his rationale for leaving PGC for a neighboring county:

A lot more families of color, African American and even Latino families, have said, 'I don't feel

that this is the best education for my kids. I don't feel A, that they might not be safe enough, and B, that it's not rigorous enough.' And they're leaving for other counties. I see it every year in my neighborhood. In fact, I just had a black family on my street that left for Howard County, and their boys were both in our neighborhood elementary, Bond Mill, which is an excellent school. He didn't want to go, but he said to me, 'My wife, she's fine with Bond Mill, but she wasn't comfortable with what comes after that, and she figures it's easier to leave while they're little.' That's always upsetting for me to hear.

Beyond public school quality, the suburban Black middle class, like its White peers, is concerned about transportation infrastructure, especially roads. Most middle class people rely on personal vehicles to move around the county and throughout the D.C. region. The middle class residents I spoke to and those who commented at county hearings and community meetings, largely focused road upkeep. Meanwhile, county leaders are as much focused on expanding mass transit opportunities, as they are roads—in part because transit is central to their development vision. Not unlike residents in most suburban locales, many middle class Prince Georgians use mass transit to commute to work, but otherwise almost exclusively use their car for transportation.

When I asked residents to describe their average work and weekend days, they discussed driving to buy groceries, pick up their children from school, and carry out other regular tasks. Also reflecting their lifestyle of residing in neighborhoods consisting of single-family homes, middle class residents complained about sidewalk upkeep, with particular concern for children's safety as they walk to school and play. Sidewalks also support adult recreation and increase "curb appeal," or neighborhoods' aesthetic appearance, and residents' ability to interact with neighbors with ease and safely.

Another aspect of curb appeal middle-class residents complained about at public meetings and in interviews was litter. Officials seek to be responsive to residents while stretching their budgets. And they want to reinforce a sense of community efficacy. One

way county leaders engage the public with regard to litter is through a smart phone application (app) sponsored by PGC's Department of the Environment (Prince George's County Department of the Environment 2019a). Through this app, residents and groups report community cleanup events, which the county uses to create maps for prioritizing trash clean-up funds. At a south county neighborhood association meeting, a Department of the Environment (DoE) representative incentivized resident-led cleanups by promising additional county resources to follow behind residents' efforts. The majority of residents at the meeting were over 50 years old and many elderly. Recognizing this, the DoE representative encouraged association members to recruit teenagers for the cleanup.

[We're] going to give you all a flier for Clean Sweep to walk your neighborhood and pick up litter...DPWT [Department of Public Works and Transportation], DoE [Department of the Environment] will come behind you...they're going to come to you off cycle...they'll go to the illegal dump site in your neighborhood...we need volunteers...the Dedicated 5 can change your community...it doesn't take many people...Extreme Teens is meeting across the hall—you should engage them and ask them to participate...I'm giving out community service hours...there's also an app that tracks the number of bags of trash you pick up over time...it's free...

This strategy for resource distribution—bolstering communities' willingness to commit their own time, energy, and resources to community cleanups—reinforces advantages based on income, age, and physical ability. Notwithstanding county leaders' efforts, middle class residents made it clear they believed maintaining county cleanliness a county government responsibility. At townhalls, listening sessions, “chat and chew,” and other gatherings where officials invited open public comment on county government performance, the declining state of PGC's physical infrastructure and excessive litter almost always came up. “In the Sunrise Community, the sidewalks are uprooted by trees—people walk in the streets—the roots are pushing the slabs out of the ground...we're told we're fined for not doing snow removal...it's unfair to fine us when

you won't improve it," said a resident (Black man, 50s) at a meeting hosted by a councilmember to inform constituents about budget decisions for the upcoming fiscal year. Councilmembers typically sought to distinguish their role as funding appropriators from agencies' prioritization of that funding across neighborhoods. For instance, at the budget meeting noted above, a councilmember said:

...There are lot of concerns about our roads—in this part of the county, the roads are embarrassing...somebody is not doing their job...we put \$20 million in the budget...I'd appreciate it if you [speaking to Department of Public Works and Transportation official] did something about it...I'm tired of getting hit...you can send the complaints to me, but the county executive he decides where to focus...

Unlike middle class residents who both petitioned individually and through civic associations, low-income residents' interests' were most often voiced by third parties, such as non-profits seeking resources to support their needs.

### **An Extra Layer of Resources: Incorporated Versus Unincorporated Areas in PGC**

Akin to regional fragmentation, even within PGC, resources are unevenly distributed. One mechanism through which this occurs is municipal incorporation. Regardless of class background, those living in municipalities tend to receive more public goods and services than those in unincorporated areas. However, class is still salient: municipalities with the most affluent residents offer the greatest advantages because they have stronger tax bases. Prince George's County has 27 municipalities. Each one has tax authority and provides services either in coordination with or in place of county services (Prince George's County Government 2019d). For instance, most have their own police forces and supplement the county's road repaving schedule. But importantly, none have their own K-12 school systems.

Municipalities' establishment is tethered to PGC's racial history. While racially integrated today and mostly Black or Latino, as in unincorporated PGC communities, most towns were founded as all-White or all-Black. For instance, historically Brentwood was the White town and North Brentwood the Black town. A guard rail used to separate the two municipalities still stands. Brentwood's administrator during my tour of his town explained many Brentwood residents would like to remove the rail, but North Brentwood has fought to keep it to honor the history of the role it served.

Variation in the public services towns offer residents largely hinge on their residents' socio-economic status. Municipalities' relative financial capacity is a microcosm of PGC's experience. Even with such heterogeneity, residents living in municipalities tended to be more satisfied with the range and quality of services they receive than are their counterparts in PGC's unincorporated areas. But this variation was attenuated if residents had children in public schools. In this vein, a council member with one of the wealthiest municipalities in his district remarked during his interview:

From my personal experience...for the most part, and it's not 100 percent, obviously, city residents were generally satisfied. If we were to do a survey of the city [names a wealthy municipality] residents, they would certainly say "I'm satisfied with the taxes I'm paying for the services that I'm getting." If I was to do that same survey in Prince George's County, I don't think I'd get that same result.

While municipalities supplement county-based resources, they do not bridge the gap between residents' expectations for public service provision and what they receive.

### **Ethno-Racial Budget Tension between the Black Middle Class and Latino Communities**

The economic and social processes discussed above have intensified within the past 20 years, with much of the increased budget strain linked to in migration of a disproportionate share of the D.C. region's low-income Blacks and Latinos. While the



Black middle class in major cities has lived adjacent to Blacks with low incomes for a century and a half, a phenomenon imposed by Whites forcibly segregating Blacks, significant Latino population growth outside of the southwestern U.S. has largely taken place after 1965 changes in immigration law, with the most precipitous increase in Latino population growth in the D.C. area occurring from the late 1990s forward (Lee and Bean 2010, Stepler and Lopez 2016). Latino population expansion over the past two decades has led to ethno-racial tension in PGC regarding budget priorities.

Though Blacks and Latinos share common interests as groups encountering discrimination from Whites in dominant institutions and as groups that are disproportionately poor when compared to non-Latino Whites (Semega, Fontenot, and Kollar 2017), Latino communities' needs often differ from those of Black communities in important ways, most notably its greater percentage of first and second generation Americans. Latinos are just under 20 percent of PGC residents and about a third of public school students. That the Latinos moving to PGC are disproportionately poor is an economic stressor: new residents with significant social service needs further pressure an already stretched-thin budget.

Latinos also often move into once majority-Black neighborhoods experiencing increasingly pervasive economic hardship, which is often why homes are available. This phenomenon intensified in the wake of the foreclosure crisis, though prior to the crisis, other factors had initiated the decline. Signs a neighborhood is struggling include: fewer owner-occupied homes, residents downwardly mobile in place, vacant homes, and poor home upkeep.

A significant portion of Black residents in struggling communities are retirees, many of whom are former government civil servants. Neighborhood turnover or succession is endemic to all places. But when those replacing out movers have markedly different social characteristics, there is often friction between newly arriving residents and those with longer neighborhood tenure. In the case of Latinos moving into Black neighborhoods, most Latinos are foreign born and many have limited English facility, creating obstacles to mutual understanding. In addition, many Latino household sizes are larger than those of long-time residents. Frequently several families share single-family homes, making rent or purchase more affordable and allowing family and friend networks to support each other's incorporation into the community.

Black residents living in neighborhoods where the Latino community is growing express concerns about maintaining their quality of life. They associate their community's distress, such as crumbling infrastructure, with Latino population growth. Long-time Black middle class residents complained at county hearings, councilmember townhalls, and neighborhood association meetings about Latinos moving in with large families, leading to a range of pressures on public goods and services—from school overcrowding to road wear and tear—as well as nuisances, such as limited parking near one's home. During her interview, a councilmember whose district includes Black neighborhoods with increasing Latino populations described Black-Latino tensions this way when I asked her in what ways these groups' interests diverge:

...Overcrowding, parking, litter—that is predominantly the concerns of the old guard African American community. They would like their area to remain nice and neat and without the influx of these newcomers who don't know the laws or don't respect general upkeep because they're not just familiar with whatever the process is, or they don't necessarily assimilate. But for the new generation and the new incomers, I mean, for them they're main priority is education. Right? We have incredibly overcrowded schools...the older generation, their kids have already graduated,

they're already out of the system, so they have no vested interest in education. So, that's the distinction there.

Consistent with this councilmember's assessment, when she attended a neighborhood association meeting in a majority Black and middle class community, and one with a large Latino population, an association officer (Black man, 60s) made this comment in response to the councilmember's explanation of budget resources she secured for constituents in the upcoming year's budget:

I'm not at all being parochial...I see the big picture, but we have a lot of citizens who are non-Hispanic people...a lot in your budget goes to Hispanic people and that's understandable...a lot of money is going where the biggest demographic is, but there are concerns...like the re-paving, the lack of code enforcement, too many people in a single family home...

Another councilmember with a significant Latino population echoed the association officer's concerns during her interview:

There are definitely pockets of this in [my district] as there are county-wide, where two and three families move into a single-family home, and then the challenges that creates for the surrounding community. They generate a lot more trash. They are parking way more cars. They're sending a lot more kids on a per-household basis to our schools. The schools are becoming really overcrowded. They tend not to really know the rules.

PGC officials have sought to address both Blacks' and Latinos' interests. For instance, with regard to home overcrowding, in 2018 the council considered, but did not enact, legislation limiting the number of occupants lawfully in a home. Under current law, there is virtually no limit to the number of people who can live in a home as long as they are family members. The new legislation would redefine occupancy limits from unlimited to one creating a maximum number of people based on homes' square footage, regardless of the relationship among people in the unit. At the same time, county leaders target resources toward Latinos, including through school resource allocations and by funding non-profits focused on Latino community needs and interests, such as those supporting Latino business development and providing immigration services.

## **Summary and Conclusions**

Prince George's County's fiscal fortunes are inextricably tethered to its relative position in the D.C. Metropolitan Area. While it is affluent, relative to most other majority-Black locales, it is not, relative to majority-White jurisdictions, particularly those with middle class majorities. Because PGC's tax base does not keep pace with demand for county services, county officials make hard tradeoffs between vital public goods and services and constituent groups' interests. These tradeoffs hurt all residents, but low-income residents are especially vulnerable because they have the least capacity to meet their needs in the market. As county decisionmakers determine how to allocate increasingly scarce funding, there are at least two prominent social cleavages—one based on class location and one based on race and ethnicity.

Given increasing demand for public resources, PGC is eager to expand the budget pie. Like most locales nationwide, PGC officials pursue this goal by courting development attractive to middle and high-income residents. This development strategy potentially leads to new revenue through multiple streams: commercial taxes and fees from businesses; property taxes, particularly when high-income people buy homes commensurate with their social status; and overall appreciation in property value as demand to live in an area leads to home value and rent increases. In the next chapter, I discuss Prince George's County's economic development vision and attendant strategies and what they portend for PGC's fiscal future and ultimately its capacity to improve public service provision in meaningful ways.

## **CHAPTER 4: DEVELOPMENT— A Rising Tide to Lift All Boats?**

**“Land use...It has so many tentacles and so much to it, but it's ultimately one of the most important things to the viability of any jurisdiction and that is how you use your land and waterways and transportation network to keep survival in your community.”**

- PGC Council chair

**“I don't want the story to be Prince George's was saved by gentrification; I want it to be that we saved it, the Black middle class.”**

- PGC, resident upper middle class Black woman

Prince George's County's (PGC) development trajectory, as with its budget constraints and opportunities, is fundamentally tied to development patterns in the D.C. region as a whole. How local jurisdictions zone, incentivize residential and commercial activity, and otherwise use their authority and discretion to leverage the value of land within their boundaries, are the primary means through which locales exercise agency in shaping their development trajectory and economies more broadly. These “tentacles,” as the council chair voices in the quote above, become the means with which PGC seeks economic opportunities, opportunities that might ameliorate county budget limitations.

### **Seeking Alignment: Developer and Community Interests**

Attaining the kind of development that would produce substantial and sustained increases in county tax revenue and ensuring that prosperity is broadly shared across the socio-economic spectrum are two goals often in tension. While this balance is a challenge for most counties, it is even more so for a majority Black county, even one that is majority middle class. In a given geographic area, there are usually multiple and competing interests for land use. As Logan and Molotch (2007) argue, one of the foremost axes of contention is “use value” versus “exchange value,” with residents

wanting land to support a high quality of life at minimal cost (use value) in ways frequently at odds with investors' desire to develop land for commercial, or other purposes, yielding increasingly higher profits (exchange value).

*Development Takes Shape in Racialized Contexts.* As the resident quoted in the epigraph points out, since the 1990s, PGC has become a haven for a group of people historically unable to access the full panoply of American opportunities, particularly in suburbs. While suburbs have never been “lily White,” the Post World War II suburban building boom catered to middle class Whites, while divesting in Blacks across the class spectrum and the locations in which they lived, including by discouraging their movement to suburbs. Historians and social scientists generally agree the immense mid twentieth century suburban expansion was “a consolidated form of consumption driven by the broad subsidizing of the nation’s middle class by the federal government” and underpinned by a “paradox” of “the extraordinary power of local political arenas on the one hand and the vast reach of federal power across jurisdiction and distance on the other” (Self 2006:147).

It was not until the Fair Housing Act of 1968, which outlawed discrimination on the basis of race in the rental and sale of housing units, that Blacks en masse could move to suburbs. While Modern Civil Rights era legislation, opened the U.S. opportunity structure to Blacks, leading to a burgeoning Black middle class, Blacks still contend with legacy and ongoing anti-Black discrimination. That is, tens of thousands of African Americans migrated to suburbs starting in the late 1960s and early 1970s, but at individual, household, and communal levels, they were never made whole from harm inflicted by racist market and government processes, nor were they fully protected from

continued barriers to their economic advancement, with equitable access to mortgage and other credit markets perhaps the *sin quo non* hurdle (Pager and Shephard 2008).

Consequently, Prince George's County, as a majority Black jurisdiction, plays the development game of seeking to expand its economy to generate more tax revenue on a field where other players—middle class and wealthy Whites—have historically had access to more material resources and have used their assets to create favorable market conditions for retaining them. White powerbrokers have parlayed their wealth into political influence, and other mechanisms, to reinforce their race-based advantages.

*Racialized Metropolitan and Prince George's County Development Options.* In the face of historical and contemporary disadvantage, PGC decisionmakers marshal county resources to leverage the county's comparative advantages, such as proximity to the U.S. capital. PGC officials seek to improve residents' quality of life by creating economic conditions likely to yield substantial and sustainable tax flows.

But developers' motivation to invest in Prince George's and PGC officials' motivation for seeking such investment do not necessarily align. And this is increasingly the case now nearly two decades into the neoliberal, market-focused, orientation toward governance that has ushered in significant retraction in government-provided public goods and services at all government levels. Private industry's power relative to government's was no more on display than during 2018 when D.C. area jurisdictions (as well as others nationwide) competed against each other to “win” the Amazon corporation's second headquarters (O'Connell and McCartney 2018). Locales offered billions in tax incentives to woo a highly profitable corporation. These jurisdictions knew that without such enticements, Amazon would likely not consider them because another

jurisdiction would offer tax sweeteners. Such a “race to the bottom” among locales is fueled by their increasingly stressed budgets as they adapt to drastically reduced state and federal government public investment, while residents’ needs remain steady, if not increase, in an economy awash with many low-wage jobs (Kalleberg 2013).

Yet development tendencies do not necessarily translate into each locale’s destiny. The course of PGC’s development could have multiple outcomes—ranging from new means to bolster the county’s economic stability in ways reflective of current resident interests, to various forms of economic and social destabilization of PGC communities, especially were the socio-economic and racial composition of county communities to change markedly. Change is virtually inevitable in all places, but its pace in the D.C. region is one of the fastest in the country (United States Census Bureau 2018a). And importantly, from the post World War II period forward, D.C. area jurisdictions have experienced uneven private investment—in terms of the amount and types of development they have received. Thus, some jurisdictions have realized more prosperity than others and many of the processes mediating this variation, consistent with overall U.S. patterns, have been and continue to be, highly racialized.

PGC’s development patterns and its population composition shifts reflect constraints resulting from Whites’ continuing stigmatization of Black people and their communities. Indeed, push and pull factors led to PGC, rather than other counties contiguous to D.C., becoming middle class Blacks’ destination in the wake of Modern Civil Rights Movement breakthroughs that facilitated Blacks’ access to white collar jobs. Many D.C. area White county leaders took racially discriminatory action to restrict Blacks’ ability to move into their jurisdictions (Johnson 2002). PGC leaders, as I show



below, are keenly aware of their economic opportunities and constraints, including how racism shapes them. Their development strategy accounts for demographic and other trends likely to affect PGC over the next decade. Among their main concerns is how to meet the needs of their disproportionate share of the region's low-income residents alongside those of middle class Blacks.

They also consider how class interests are influenced by the needs and interests of the county's three fastest growing demographic groups: Baby Boomers, Millennials, and Latinos (Maryland National Capital Park and Planning 2014:56-60). As part of my discussion below, I address the implications of generational and ethno-racial development preference differences, framing them as constitutive of county leaders' role in reconciling competing stakeholder interests as they pursue various forms of private investment. Here too the relative influence of these groups in PGC cannot be divorced from overall D.C. area people and resource flows.

### **Regional Embeddedness and PGC's Development Options**

D.C. area locales' racial composition and regional development patterns are fundamentally intertwined. A former mayor of a PGC municipality within a few miles of the D.C. line captured PGC's regional position this way:

It's been interesting watching this chocolate city turn into this latte city [Washington, D.C.] because they don't have any other choice. I have been here long enough that I have watched Alexandria [Virginia,] change from having projects in downtown to almost having no African Americans at all within the city of Alexandria. I have watched black communities, and Lincoln Heights in the upper part of Arlington County, black communities change from being black to white. Having seen this gentrification and influence of white urban professionals moving into the area and how the area became so exclusive. Once you cross the Potomac River, you can't afford to live there, even though 20 years ago you could have. Twenty 20 years ago there were large numbers of minorities that were living—same way with D.C.

PGC leaders' interests in commercial development are consistent with the prevailing posture of most local government leaders nationwide. Officials want more living wage jobs and projects providing lifestyle options appealing to affluent residents. Prince George's leaders' desire for commercial development is perhaps especially acute because its budget cannot keep pace with demand for county-provided services. And budget pressures show no signs of abating, as gentrification elsewhere in the D.C. region, particularly in the District of Columbia (Hyra 2017), force people to look for more affordable places to live—and PGC tops that list.

Ultimately, PGC leaders want the county's residential and commercial property values to appreciate demonstrably, as this is the base from which it draws most of its tax revenue. Securing a broader array of private amenities, particularly those targeting economically advantaged households, would potentially make PGC homes more appealing to affluent people. But PGC, as the jurisdictional “insurgent” relative to Whiter locales that have received significant high-end development dollars for decades, faces unique challenges as it pursues its development objectives.

### **PGC's Strategic Advantages in Regional Perspective**

Business or commercial tax revenue consists of taxes and fees levied on enterprises' property and activity, for instance, building permit fees. Other D.C. area counties, such as Fairfax and Montgomery, have a greater number of large, long-established, and lucrative enterprises than does PGC, which, like residential properties, strengthens these counties' tax generation capacity (Johnson 2002, Lung-Amam 2017). The majority of Fairfax and Montgomery businesses cater to their largely White middle and upper middle class residents, whereas Prince George's businesses target a broader

swath of the class spectrum, with many seeking patronage from low-income residents. The residential and commercial taxes PGC garners, relative to neighboring counties, indicates its relatively less strong position with regard to budget generation capacity.

Notwithstanding racial discrimination headwinds, Prince George’s development potential has always been promising for several reasons, including, among other factors: its proximity to D.C. and other regional hubs; neighborhoods’ easy access to the Capital Beltway; its 15 Metro subway stations; a concentration of federal government agencies; and the presence of the University of Maryland flagship campus. The first county executive, Wayne Curry, even during the tumult of the racial transition, and despite the entrenched skepticism he faced from racially biased developers, appreciated these advantages. Current PGC leaders credit Curry for being among the earliest leaders to envision a thriving Prince George’s County with public goods, services, and amenities on par with or exceeding those of neighboring majority White counties. He focused on attracting middle class and elite Blacks, calling PGC the “land of milk and honey.” In particular, Curry sought to provide Black professionals “executive housing.” A Maryland National Capital Park and Planning Commission (M-NCPPC) official who has served in senior county leadership posts since the Curry Administration described Curry’s vision, echoing what I heard from other PGC leaders:

...He [Wayne Curry, the first Black county executive] looked at the fact that we were the last vestige in the metropolitan area for development, which meant we also had the opportunity to get it right. He looked at where we’re located. We have easy access to the BW [Baltimore Washington] Parkway and Route 50; we’re ensconced right between DC and Baltimore. He looked at our rivers—the Anacostia, Potomac, and Patuxent. He looked at the potential for development, the potential for executive housing, the potential to bring businesses here and lure them because of our location. He looked at the opportunity for Metro [subway] development...

As this official indicates, not only is open land available, it is strategically placed, creating leverage for PGC to negotiate favorable terms with developers. What was true in the 1990s under the Curry Administration remains true to a significant extent today.

### **Development Strategies—Seizing Opportunity Amidst Significant Constraint**

**“The plan’s framework is organized around the themes of Work, Live, and Sustain, which helped guide the plan goals of capturing a greater share of the region’s forecasted job growth, creating walkable urban places, meeting the needs of the County’s changing population, and preserving valuable natural and historic resources.”**

- Plan 2035 Prince George’s, Foreward Letter by Prince George’s Planning Board Chairman

Plan 2035 Prince George’s County Approved General Plan, issued in 2014, is PGC’s development vision—its 20-year masterplan (Maryland National Capital Park and Planning Commission 2014). Like many other local governments’ development strategies (Krueger and Gibbs 2008), Plan 2035 champions “smart growth”-oriented projects, characterized by increased density at transportation hubs, and mixed-used communities where people work, play, shop, and recreate within short, ideally walkable and bikeable, distances. More specifically, the plan entails concentrating development in about 24 centers to promote investment near mass transit, particularly the county’s 15 Metro subway stops. The councilmember with the most PGC Metro stops made the following comment during her interview regarding the potential for development near these stations:

If you go to District of Columbia and you're at a metro stop, you have essentially probably double the rent that you would pay if you were in Prince George's County. In my district alone, where I have five of the 15 metro stations. I have the most out of any council districts and the potential for economic development is just over the moon.

### **County Agencies and Actors Leading Development Processes**

Several agencies play central roles in PGC economic development processes: the Economic Development Corporation (EDC), which actively pursues private investors;

Maryland National Capital Park and Planning Commission (M-NCCPC), which manages community growth plans and recreational facilities; the county council, which alone is responsible for appropriating funds related to development or any other publicly funded project; and the county executive's office, of which the EDC is one of several agencies with a development role.

The EDC offers prospective developers technical and material support. Its mission is "business attraction and expansion," including "business development, small business services, international business development, workforce services, and marketing/communications" (Prince George's Economic Development Corporation 2018a). In fiscal year 2018, the EDC budget was \$11 million, an increase of about \$2 million, or 18 percent, above its 2017 budget.

### **Expediting Development: Zoning Ordinance Overhaul**

Alongside a development vision, and technical and material support for potential private investors, PGC leaders have positioned the county for increased development by revamping its zoning law. By rewriting the zoning code, officials hope to create processes encouraging the sorts of development likely to expand the tax base and limit outright or discourage development that does not. The new code facilitates commercial tax base expansion by, among other things, streamlining and clarifying the development process. It also incentivizes new mixed-use developments, especially near transit stops. And in established communities, the new zoning law promotes infill development likely to extend the range and quality of retail and dining options.

All of these efforts are designed to attract new middle and high-income residents, shoppers, and employers to the county. Another motivation for the rewrite is that its last

major overhaul was over 50 years ago, well before PGC’s major demographic transitions and those of the D.C. region as a whole. Meetings leading up to the 2018 vote to approve the new zoning code entailed crafting ordinance language to meet four overarching goals established by M-NCPPC appointees and staff: “streamline and simplify the regulations and development approval process,” “modernize and consolidate our zones and development standards,” “incentivize economic and transit-oriented, mixed-use development,” and “protect and enhance stable residential neighborhoods” (Maryland National Capital Park and Planning Commission 2019a).

### **Zoning Rewrite Deliberation Process**

Between 2014 and the zoning code’s 2018 adoption, M-NCPPC staff hosted over 300 public meetings, including “listening sessions,” focus groups, and workshops. Staff engaged residents, civic groups, community-based businesses and non-profits, and corporate entities, including developers (Maryland National Capital Park and Planning Commission 2019b). Interested parties also left comments through online portals—from a dedicated website to social media outlets, such as Facebook. Others expressed their concerns through local elected officials, particularly their councilmembers, who also hosted community meeting regarding zoning.

During 2018 meetings geared toward residents, their most common concern was the degree of their influence throughout the zoning process, including input on what was developed and where, adequate notice about hearings regarding such decisions, and a sufficient timeline for community-developer negotiations. The approved ordinance addresses these concerns by requiring pre-application neighborhood meetings for large projects and a revised and more standardized public notification process. Overall, M-

NCPPC staff-led meetings elicited residents’ perspectives on their communities’ “use value.” At the same time, staff worked with county elected officials to create conditions to increase communities’ “exchange value,” while bearing residents’ interests in mind.

In addition to which projects are built and where, their quality is an important aspect of both their use and exchange values. One way to address use value is through project quality or design standards—from the materials used in structures, to investment requirements with regard to surrounding public infrastructure, such as sidewalks. The new zoning law raises minimum standards above what current law requires. In addition, “neighborhood compatibility” is a factor considered in site approvals. While “infill” projects in small areas on un- or underdeveloped parcels in established communities are encouraged, M-NCPPC recognizes many residents want less intense development immediately adjacent to single family and townhome communities. At the same time, these communities appreciate having proximate shopping options. While the new zoning code, alongside the county’s development vision, Plan 2035, and the strategic use of county resources to attract development, are largely within PGC leaders’ control, what is less so is the extent to which racism dampens private investment in the county.

### **Fighting Stigma, Fostering Pride: Race-Based Development Headwinds**

PGC leaders must overcome private investors’ racial prejudice, which rests on negative stereotypes and other assumptions about Black people as a group—principal among them in the context of development, the belief that most Black people are poor or do not have the education or sophistication to patronize establishments geared toward middle and upper middle class consumers. In addition, as with Whites deciding where to buy or rent homes, developers too, most of whom are White, stigmatize Black spaces.

As a result, county officials are at pains to offer an accurate picture of PGC's development potential. Underscoring the likelihood developer prejudice is in play when they decide whether to invest in PGC, county leaders use publicly available data, such as Census reports, to prove the county has concentrations of residents with education and income levels in line with corporations' current patrons. Unlike officials in majority White counties, PGC officials, as they seek to expand their commercial tax base through development, expend time, money, energy, and political capital to overcome developer skepticism about Blacks' capacity to sustain their businesses.

Despite developer reluctance to invest in PGC, based on my interviews with leaders and residents, most are optimistic about PGC's ability to attract development and for private investment to improve residents' quality of life. But amidst this generally optimistic outlook is sober recognition of the tasks involved in pursuing private investment. A PGC agency director in a critical role for shepherding county development explained his interactions with prospective investors as such:

Many people still think it's crime ridden...difficult to do business with, slow permitting process, undereducated work force. You don't really have the talent to be able to satisfy their needs. I really have to sell hard to show them [developers and other private investors] the facts on it because I think some of that is just...the 65 percent African-American—I think the perception is, is that you really may not have the kind of talent, but we really do. We've got 83,000 students that are going to our top three universities at any given time, we're cranking out 10,000 graduates a year.

PGC officials acknowledge their relative disadvantage compared to neighboring counties as they pursue private investment and sometimes account for their position through incentives designed to allay potential investors' reservations. However, PGC officials often disagreed with each other about the extent to which PGC's comparative advantages compensated for their disadvantages and therefore the type and amount of development incentives to deploy.



## **Enticing Development: Benefits and Costs of Tax Incentives**

When the EDC Director and other county executive staff testified before the council regarding development incentives, it was evident officials share a development vision. Contention centered on the degree to which businesses are *already inclined to invest* in PGC, regardless of incentives. Some decisionmakers noted PGC has the most land available for development, so developers have no choice but to come to PGC. This portion of the council was concerned the county “gives away too much” and that “businesses that want to come to Prince George’s need to show themselves willing to invest in the community, not just make a profit,” in the words of one council member. A councilmember evincing this position whose district is entirely inside of the beltway and who has a mixture of stable middle class households in single family homes alongside less stable families in low-rent apartments, made her development case by comparing how PGC fares relative to neighboring counties and how she believes race influences’ developers decisions:

They want grocery stores, they want the places they can shop. So they are vying for economic development and this why for the metro station because when you talk about, you know, race and politics you look at why are we being economically deprived in Prince George's County when we have less the cost of, you know it costs less to live here, to own a home here...to do development, and we also have the economic...ability to buy you know, at least high end or a little below high end food and clothes. So why don't we have that and when you look at the metro stations around the District of Columbia...not all of them are obviously developed, but you have amazing development around that metro station and even...the silver line is coming...look at what they've done in Fairfax.

Other councilmembers pointed to the county’s disadvantages, including its lower rent yields. A councilmember whose district is entirely outside of the beltway and whose district has some of the county’s wealthiest residents, articulated this position when he said in his interview:

Although you can provide incentives, you can provide streamlined processes for review...we have less of say in a private development entity coming in and saying, 'This is where I want to build X.' Because there are a number of factors that they consider about where they want to put their business...If you're saying for our area—we opened up a Harris Teeter...in the Bowie area. Could we have tried to get them to go down to South County or Mid County? I guess, but they made a decision that they thought this was the area. So, that still plays, whether it's discrimination, red-lining or just business sense...I'm not going to go into a community where I'm expecting a certain amount of return if that income level is not there...they're looking at all kinds of information—demographics, income...If parts of the county don't have those things, how do we encourage them to go there. Because at the end of the day they have to make money, right?

While councilmembers and other county leaders reached different conclusions about PGC's ability to attract and sustain businesses targeted toward middle and upper middle class residents, and the degree to which racism influenced developers' evaluations of PGC, virtually all members stated their primary criterion for deciding whether to offer incentives is the "but for" test—as in but for the incentive the business would not invest or invest in ways the county prefers. However, councilmembers stated they needed to do more analysis to determine whether "but for" criteria are met. They were frustrated that when the county executive sought approval of tax incentive packages, unlike the executive, they did not have staff to review proposals thoroughly. When the council deliberated its own fiscal year 2018 budget, they discussed how to increase funding for more analytical staff to assess corporate tax incentives.

One set of strategies for economic development focuses on drawing new external developers to the county. Another strategy is to strengthen county-based businesses' capacity. Promoting locally-owned businesses by ensuring they are first in line to receive county government contracts increases within-county economic synergies and supports businesses in developing capacity to compete for large-scale development contracts.

### **Buy Black: Driving Development through PGC-Based Business Growth**

**"We should not be spectators in our own county."**

- Prince George's County Councilmember

In addition to pursuing investment from developers—an externally focused strategy, as most developers are not PGC-based—county leaders seek to strengthen businesses already in the county. Councilmembers frame helping local businesses to capitalize on future development as simultaneously strengthening families' and PGC's financial wellbeing. At the household level, growing county-based Black-owned businesses facilitates Black families' wealth building. At the county level, more business activity leads to higher revenues through taxes and fees. And expanding businesses often hire employees, many of whom would likely be Prince Georgians. A councilmember remarked at a meeting he hosted to increase county-based business awareness of contracting opportunities: "...we want to fund county services...the only way to do that is to have a robust business community...we want to see businesses in our community thrive because we get more taxes...."

Nationwide, minority-owned businesses tend to be smaller than White-owned, often due to their having less access to capital (Robb 2012), and PGC businesses are consistent with this trend. Notwithstanding this limitation, as indicated by this section's epigraph, county leaders are committed to increasing county-based businesses' ability to participate in county and broader D.C. area business activity—they want Black businesses to absorb their share of regional development—"spectating" will not do. Officials focus on three pipelines to increase the number of contracts county-based businesses receive: (1) core PGC agency procurement, (2) new development construction, and (3) new development routine operations after construction.

With regard to agency purchasing activity, PGC leaders over the past 10 years have enacted laws requiring agencies to buy goods and services from certified county-based businesses, the most notable of which is the Jobs First Act of 2011. Jobs First mandates county-based businesses fill all agency contracts \$500,000 or less; and for contracts over \$500,000, 40 percent must be county based (Prince George’s County Office of Central Services 2019c). At the business leader meeting noted above, the councilmember hosting the event, and the primary Jobs First sponsor, elaborated on the goals for this law, stating:

...One of the things I’d like to see...let’s say you’re a prime [contractor] in Virginia...if you’re a Virginia company and you want the bid, you have to partner with businesses that are here...and where the industries are strong, we don’t need to bid those out...we should not be spectators in our county—people coming from outside our county to get our dollars.

The Office of Central Services (OCS), which is responsible for government-wide procurement processes, has a Supplier Diversity and Development Division (SDDD). SDDD’s primary activities include recruiting county businesses to attain the County Based Business Certification and educating businesses about contract opportunities and how to meet contract demands (Prince George’s County Office of Central Services 2019b). SDDD staff host meetings throughout the month and at various locations in PGC, such as local libraries, to facilitate business certification and to assist businesses in landing county contracts. PGC also maintains a registry of certified county-based business, which agencies and developers can use as they seek to comply with requirements to purchase from county-based vendors. At the meeting discussed above, a senior civil servant who oversees county contracts stated: “we need a create a supply chain that is as sophisticated as the jurisdictions around us.”

In terms of development projects, county leaders have increasingly negotiated with investors for greater commitment to use county-based businesses for project construction and ongoing activity after construction. Officials recognize a key limitation county businesses face is lack of capacity to respond to the scale of work major developments require. Thus, they have sought to ensure county businesses are subcontractors, providing components of major projects. At the same meeting, a PGC business owner thanked the council member and OCS official for their support in his attainment of a contract to supply water for a major county development project, MGM casino. County officials have also instituted programs to expand county business' access to capital, such as through EDC loan and grant programs.

While over the past 10 years, PGC officials have improved county business access to agency procurement contracts, many county leaders and business owners frequently expressed frustration regarding what seemed to them an excessive use of waivers to override the requirements, as well as the number of no-bid and automatically renewed contracts. At the business leader meeting discussed above, the councilmember hosting it remarked: "waivers can lead to waiving everything...but we don't want unintended consequences." The councilmember also connected new development and strengthening the county's small business community as a path for PGC's Black middle class to create assets and ultimately intergenerational wealth:

These opportunities don't mean anything unless our companies take advantage of them...we may have companies say they don't have the capacity...we have a community benefits agreement ...MGM [casino]—they hit that number for construction...we've not seen any other project come close—we want to see that on the operations side...you can see how these opportunities translate into generational wealth for those able to take advantage of those opportunities.

Furthermore, to the extent county residents and those passing through the county make purchases from Prince George’s-based businesses, money is circulating within the county. Such circulation synergizes business activity and strengthens the PGC business community’s ability to demonstrate vibrance, which in turn makes PGC attractive to other businesses considering locating in the D.C. area and developers assessing whether they can meet their supply chain needs locally, which often helps them cut cost.

### **Wind in PGC’s Development Sails: Recent Project Successes**

**“It’s [MGM Casino] been the economic game changer for us,” said a top county economic development official. “It’s kind of the wow factor that we hadn’t had before.” (Lazo 2017)**

One of the most high-profile development projects in the past 10 years has been the construction of MGM Casino. MGM, which opened in 2016, is a shining example of a project meeting, and even exceeding, PGC requirements for county small business utilization, as well for hiring PGC residents. Casino developers also signed a community benefits agreement and did not receive any tax incentives. Below I describe how the casino exemplifies PGC officials’ vision for new development, alongside a discussion of other major recently opened projects and those slated to open within the next few years.

However, private investment in PGC was already showing signs of heating up nearly a decade before the most recent projects to garner attention. One of the early flashpoints was when Wegmans (a high-end grocery store) opened its doors in 2011. Though located proximate to central county residents, the store was celebrated by Prince Georgians county wide—its arrival signaled PGC being recognized for its class standing, rather than stigmatized because most residents are Black. Wegmans is an anchor, alongside Costco, in the Woodmore Towne Centre. The grocery store quickly became a

thriving neighborhood hub, both in sales (Banister 2016) and in terms of its role in the community, earning the nickname “Club Wegmans” (Wiggins 2011). It offers residents elements conducive to informal gathering, such as a fireplace, televisions, wifi, comfortable seating, and eat-in dining; it is also a place to see, be seen. The store embraced its role, occasionally bringing in live music on Friday evenings. And Woodmore Town Centre has continued to attract new development. In 2017, a Nordstrom’s Rack opened to much fanfare, though some residents were disappointed it was an outlet store, rather than a full department store. The overwhelming success of Wegmans and the Woodmore Town Centre show the unmet demand for high-end consumption opportunities in Prince George’s County.

Some of that demand has been met with other 2017 project openings. In recognition of the intensity of new construction, a senior official leading development efforts quipped to a reporter during 2017 “Prince George’s is the dustiest county in the country.” Projects driving recent dust plumes include: the Purple Line light rail system; MGM casino at National Harbor in southern PGC; UM Regional Medical Center in central PGC; the health care provider Kaiser Permanente’s mid-Atlantic headquarters in northern PGC; U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services headquarters in southern PGC; Towne Square at Suitland Federal Centre also in south county; and Whole Foods in north county. Prior to this development string, and even before Wegmans, National Harbor, which opened in 2008, had been the county’s star development for its array and scale of entertainment, dining, and shopping offerings, as well as its scenic views of the Potomac River—all of which make it a regional draw (Cain 2017).

Among the list of developments noted above, three stand out for the tax revenue and living-wage jobs they could potentially generate and for their regional reach: National Harbor; MGM; and the regional medical center, expected to open in 2021.

### **National Harbor**

The complex sits on 350 acres on the banks of the Potomac River, with views of Washington, D.C. and Alexandria, Virginia (National Harbor 2019). A water taxi transports visitors between Alexandria and another area attraction, Georgetown in Washington, D.C. About 10 million people visit National Harbor annually (Ibid.). Its amenities include: Gaylord National Resort and Convention Center, Tanger Outlets, luxury boutiques, upscale restaurants, a marina and pier, thousands of hotel rooms, and hundreds of office and residential units. Perhaps the most physically prominent feature is the 180-foot ferris wheel, The Capital Wheel.

### **MGM Casino**

Prince Georgians approved MGM through a 2012 voter referendum regarding gaming in Maryland. In the lead up to the vote, there was deep division among county residents and other stakeholders, with supporters highlighting increased job opportunities, tax revenue, and high-end entertainment. Detractors voiced concerns about encouraging addictive behavior through gambling and reduced quality of life for communities immediately adjacent to the casino due to more traffic congestion and crime. In addition, according to press reports, there was disagreement among county residents, elected officials, and other county leaders regarding how casino tax revenue should be spent (Hernandez 2016). Oxon Hill residents, the people with whom MGM shares space, also pressed for more funding earmarked for their community exclusively. They argued that



because their community would absorb the brunt of the casino's negative effects, they should receive more of its benefits.

A community benefits agreement (CBA) established employment and contracting targets for MGM construction and operations. The casino has met or exceeded expectations for all CBA goals. For instance, MGM's target for the percentage of PGC residents it employs is 40 percent and 47 percent of the casino's four thousand employees lived in PGC in 2017, or just under 2,000 people (Lazo 2017). Some union leaders, however, question the quality of jobs generated, noting many are part-time, do not offer benefits, and pay lower wages than nearby National Harbor (Ibid.). With regard to contracting, county leaders sought to have 40 percent of building contracts go to county-based businesses and MGM met this goal, paying \$368 million to such businesses (Ibid.). MGM is also in compliance with the 40 percent target for operating contracts.

In fiscal year 2018, MGM generated just under \$23 million in tax revenue (Prince George's County Government 2019b). Half of the \$23 million dollars is allocated to education, defined as K-12 public schools, Prince George's Community College, and public libraries; the remainder goes to the county's general fund, which covers other core government services. Beyond contracts, employment, and tax revenue, in the CBA, MGM committed to fund a grant program for community-based organizations within its "impact area," the three-mile radius surrounding the casino. PGC Local Development Council (LDC) administers the grant. In 2018, \$337,000 was awarded to 11 organizations (Ricks 2018).

Overall, after two years of operation, MGM is widely construed as a development success, even among most of those who were initially skeptical. While most Oxon Hill

residents are generally supportive of MGM, noting casino activity has not created more traffic congestion or crime, they continue to petition for more tax revenue and direct casino contributions to local organizations over and above what other PGC neighborhoods receive. In the first year of MGM’s operation, at LDC monthly meetings, members of this body and residents discussed criteria for distributing grants and strategized about how to be effective representatives of their area to county government officials and to MGM. Recurring themes at these meetings, voiced by both LDC members and Oxon Hill residents included: (1) how much MGM paid the county in taxes, as the revenue does not come directly to the county, but is routed through the Maryland Lottery and Gaming Control Agency; and (2) ensuring “impact area” funds supplement, not supplant, revenue already designated in the county budget for the Oxon Hill area. An LDC member’s comment at a monthly meeting exemplifies how the LDC pursued its interests:

One of our principal recommendations was that funds from the LDC not be used to supplant money from the annual operating budget. One I see is police and fire—that’s certainly not in keeping with the LDC recommendation. Another recommendation the LDC made is that the state reimburse the county for 40 percent of funds used for repairing [Route] 210—we understand there is precedent for that other counties—since we’re improving a state road.

### **UM Regional Medical Center**

This 205-person Level II Trauma hospital complex is expected to open in 2021 (University of Maryland Capital Region Health 2019). It is located in one of the central-most PGC areas, Largo, Maryland, and is Metrorail accessible. PGC hopes the medical center will improve county-residents’ access to high-quality health care, as well as become a regional magnet for the same. Funding for the hospital is shared by Maryland and Prince George’s County, with the state paying for the majority of the \$543 million

project. In addition, the county seeks to make the hospital an engine for economic development. As with other areas targeted for intense development, county leaders envision a mixed-use community adjacent to the hospital.

PGC officials also seek synergies with an adjacent complex, FedEx Field, the home stadium for the Washington, D.C., National Football League team. FedEx Field opened in 1994 as Jack Kent Cooke Stadium and businesses thrived near the sports facility immediately following its opening. But economic activity has declined in the past 15 years, and decidedly so after nearby Landover Mall closed. As shown by the fate of stores near FedEx Field, landing sustainable, broadly-shared development is difficult.

### **Development Challenges: Poverty, Regional Disadvantage, and Competing Interests**

**“When you think about the strides that the county is making in producing new attractions that keep people in the county, we're still on the shorter end of the stick when it comes to having large-scale employers and even federal employers in the county relative to other counties... There's a part A that's really this affluent, African-American county. There's this part B that's been the tail of two—when I say two, I mean Prince George's and then the rest of the DMV, as we call it—Montgomery County, Northern Virginia, Washington, D.C. that hoards a majority share of other types of money that streams in.”**

- Middle class outside-the-way homeowner, lifelong PGC resident, man in 30s

Notwithstanding the promise of the three major developments and those of smaller scale discussed, PGC still lags nearby counties in attracting its share of businesses offering amenities targeting middle-class consumers and thus those most likely to establish conditions for sustainable increased tax revenue. PGC is also seeking to expand its middle class amenities in a context where retail presence is declining nationally. According to The Prince George's County High-End Retail Market Analysis, “broad industry and consumer trends” indicate retailers are “likely to reduce, rather than expand, their brick-and-mortar footprint nationwide” (Maryland National Capital Park

and Planning Commission 2016). At the same time, site selection for those stores that do open is racialized. And when new businesses open more stores, “their initial locations are most likely near established concentrations of luxury retailers, none of which are located in Prince George’s County” (Ibid.). Therefore, PGC is vying for increased high-end retail when companies are already concerned about stores’ long-term viability, a phenomenon likely driven by changing consumer habits whereby many people shop through the internet, and where companies are privileging proven locations.

Given retailers’ skeptical posture toward brick-and-mortar stores, they are even less inclined to expose themselves to more risk by placing stores in untested or not long established markets. Furthermore, Prince Georgians, though they complain about it, are accustomed to driving outside of the county for a “good mall,” in the words of many of the residents I interviewed. “When I want to shop for nice things, I go to Columbia Mall [a mall in nearby Howard County, Maryland],” an upper middle class PGC resident remarked in her interview when I asked her where she prefers to shop.

Certain retailer practices elsewhere in the D.C. region reinforce PGC’s disadvantaged position. For example, many ask customers for their residence zipcode as they check out. With this information, stores determine the radius within which they draw consumers. Through this mechanism, businesses learn PGC residents already come to non-PGC locations to shop. While on the one hand PGC residents are demonstrating they patronize high-end retailers, thus incentivizing these stores to open near a known customer base; on the other hand, stores are disincentivized from doing so because they have evidence of already capturing a regional market and thus only stand to increase profits by opening a PGC location if they believe more people would come or that current

customers would shop more frequently. A PGC councilmember remarked: “If I shop outside the county, I never give them [retailers] my zip code when they ask—it’s not fair to us,” when I asked her about PGC’s high-end retail prospects.

### **Managing Competing Interests While Enacting a Shared Vision**

As discussed in Plan 2035, a significant proportion of PGC development has not been concentrated near transit areas, contributing to sprawl and to public resources being “spread thinly” and often inadequately (Maryland National Capital Park and Planning Commission 2014:40). This development pattern has “failed to create a critical mass of residents, economic activity, and amenities essential to fostering vibrant, sustainable communities and regionally competitive business environments” (Ibid.). PGC has had difficulty stopping sprawl because there are competing interests in the county that are not easily reconciled, with some seeking to maintain the county’s suburban and rural character, while others want to increase density.

This conflict is managed in a context where the county is struggling to receive its share of regional development, undermining officials’ ability to insist on the strategic vision most advantageous to PGC. County leaders often do not have multiple options to choose among. However, as Plan 2035 recognizes, all development is not created equal: some investments are more likely to yield higher tax revenue in the *long* run than others.

### **Residents’ Socio-Economic Status and Their Development Perspective**

PGC leaders envision county communities thriving in ways similar to nearby wealthier, Whiter all-suburban jurisdictions, but PGC officials manage many of the social challenges inner cities encounter. This is especially the case in many county neighborhoods close to the D.C. border. Given anti-Black racial stigma, county officials’

decisions center on a core dilemma: whether to draw attention to social challenges, particularly those stemming from concentrated poverty that may help build the case for more state support, or to downplay such strains to lessen the possibility of scaring off well-to-do residents and high-end developers.

In a sense the county experiences collective “stereotype threat” (Steele and Aronson 1995). That is, PGC decisionmakers fear reinforcing negative images already saturating local media and informing PGC’s word-of-mouth reputation. Prince George’s officials deploy a multi-pronged strategy to fight stigma and foster pride, one largely involving creating a counter narrative about PGC, frequently expressed by county council members as “we need to tell our story.”

### **Black Middle Class Interests—Variation between Core and Elite Groups**

One downstream consequence of the Black middle class’ structural precarity and peril is a more ambivalent perspective on development. While upper middle class Blacks cheer on the increase in upscale amenities, the core Black middle class, and especially those near the threshold of slipping out of the middle class, fear getting priced out of their communities, or that their children will not be able to settle in the area if the cost of living becomes less affordable.

Among the middle class residents I spoke to, the majority of whom were members of the core and elite Black middle class, most were thrilled about PGC’s development trajectory. Many noted they have become accustomed to driving across county lines to go to a “good mall” or “nice restaurant” and were pleased they could increasingly find what they sought within the county. In the words of a man in his 30s who recently purchased a home near the University of Maryland:

Many residents, myself included, will have to go certain places if we want to shop at the higher level; if we want a white tablecloth experience. Up until recently, you had to go anywhere but in Prince George's County to be able to do that.

Many of these middle class residents recognize the tradeoffs of living in PGC versus other D.C. area jurisdictions, including how the county's racial composition has shaped and continues to influence PGC development and thus residents' capacity to maintain a high quality of life and accrue wealth through home ownership. The resident quoted above, when I asked him why he bought a home in PGC, responded:

...part of what made us decide to live here was price point. The county has been rising faster in terms of the percent growth of housing purchases relative to neighboring counties and municipalities in D.C. Even since it's rising...there's still the price points are still less than those that you see in other areas. They've always been less. Prince George's County has been sort of the bang for the buck, but sort of at the expense of folks who have darker skin. That's been something that we've been trying to, I'd say, move past and develop our way out of and just starting to see I think the fruit of that labor.

However, residents I interviewed and encountered during my fieldwork who felt their middle class status more tenuous were concerned about their or their children's displacement due to increased living costs as the quality of public goods and services and amenities improves near their homes. A federal civil servant retiree's comment exemplifies this perspective:

I moved into this house 40 years ago—my husband and I raised our two children here. I see a lot of development lately—some of it's good...it's getting more expensive, but I can't afford to move...and I don't want to move—this is my neighborhood.

A councilmember whose district is entirely inside the beltway and poised for development described the complexity of encouraging development both inclusive of current residents and appealing to prospective affluent residents this way:

The residents, some of the residents got so upset with me. The civic association, this ain't for them, this for me. This is my community. They're not going to, they [White people] don't come out here anyway and blah blah blah, and they didn't want nothing with their name on it. I said it is not for you only because you can't on one end tell me you want a Starbucks or you know, a fast casual like Sweet Green where your salad's going to cost you 10 bucks or 12 bucks or 17 bucks because I add the shrimp, the avocado, I'm adding sweet potatoes in there...it costs you money. So you need

other people to diversify the neighborhood... You need the retired people to spend the money and you need the federal workers...I can't afford a Sweet Green every day...

### **Mass Transit Development: Metrorail and the Purple Line**

Class tension is also evident in proposed development near mass transit stops. The county seeks both to reinvest in areas that already have transit access and to encourage dense development near new transit stops expected to open within the next several years. PGC has 15 Metrorail stops, connecting the county with the Washington region (Washington Metropolitan Area Transit Authority 2019). Within a couple years, another mass transit system will open, the Purple Line, linking Prince George's to Montgomery County. In its 16-mile route, the Purple Line will have 21 stops, anchored by Bethesda in Montgomery County and New Carrollton in Prince George's (Maryland Transit Administration 2019). This system brings significant value to the D.C. region because of its own stops and because it will enable more efficient use of other public transportation systems—Metro, Maryland Rail Commuter (MARC), Amtrak, and local buses.

In the lead up to the Purple Line's approval by Maryland, an ongoing concern among residents near planned stops is the extent to which the benefits of Purple Line construction will be shared across socio-economic groups. Many PGC neighborhoods along the Purple Line are some of the most affordable in the county, with a majority predominantly Latino and low income. Among the concerns is how new development will support this community's capacity to improve its quality of life. In theory, mass transit is a public investment supporting cost-effective and efficient movement for all, with low-income people especially benefiting because they tend not to have reliable transportation alternatives. However, low-income residents only realize such benefits if



they live within walking distance of transit stations. As development burgeons, rents may rise above what low-income people can afford, leading them to relocate to areas outside of the transit walkshed. At community meetings county leaders hosted to elicit resident comments on the Purple Line, socio-economic inclusiveness was one of the most prominent concerns residents raised. Many county leaders shared this concern, such as this councilmember who has several Purple Line stops in her district:

I mean, it could very well be that people are waiting to be displaced...and [apartment building owners] sell these...what are for the most part affordable apartments, so that they can build more expensive housing near the Purple Line and Purple Line stops. That's concerning.

PGC's 15 Metro stations, relative to those in other D.C. area jurisdictions are less developed. As PGC seeks to surround Metro stops with mixed-use communities, they too could price poor people out.

### **Summary and Conclusions**

Local jurisdiction leaders increasingly use development to expand their tax bases. They have few alternative revenue sources. And local jurisdictions' limitations are exacerbated by federal and state government retreat from public goods and services provision. Furthermore, local jurisdictions do not exist in isolation—they are regionally integrated.

PGC has many comparative advantages as it pursues development, including its proximity to D.C. It also has a strong Black middle class. County leaders have sought to position PGC for development that would expand the tax base using several strategies, including: (1) creating a clear vision of development priorities, (2) incentivizing certain types of development, (3) rewriting its zoning code, and (4) ensuring local businesses

participate in the building boom. Recent development seems promising—from Wegman’s grocery store, to MGM casino, to a regional hospital.

However, PGC faces steep challenges as it courts private investment, especially: (1) the continued stigmatization of Black people and their communities, (2) socio-economic tension between the Black middle class and those less economically advantaged, and (3) the scale of additional revenue PGC needs to provide high quality services to residents—particularly given the county serves a disproportionate share of D.C. region low-income households.

## **CHAPTER 5: PUBLIC SCHOOLS— Overcoming Regional Racial and Economic Segregation Constraints**

The consequences of Prince George’s County’s budget structural precarity and peril—inadequate revenue inflow relative to demand for public goods and services—is nowhere better exemplified than in the strain the county experiences in providing high-quality K-12 education. Prince George’s County Public Schools served 132,667 students in 2018, making PGCPS one of the 25 largest school districts in the country (Prince George’s County Public Schools 2018a). African Americans are the majority population, but Latinos are the fastest growing (34 percent) (Ibid.). Twenty percent of students are English language learners and 11.5 percent are in special education programs (Ibid.). And while PGCPS youth have a wide range of socio-economic backgrounds, the fastest growing populations are majority low income, reflecting PGC’s economic position in the D.C. region. Notwithstanding a substantial share of middle class students, most of those who attend PGCPS come from moderate or low-income households—61 percent qualify for reduced-priced meals (Ibid.).

Taken together, the population PGCPS serves tends to require above-average levels of per pupil investment to excel academically due to family and community level structural disadvantages. Prince George’s County’s ability to offer high quality public schools is shaped by the same regional, state, and market forces as those shaping other government services. However, unlike other programs, PGC receives half of its school budget from Maryland.

## **Public School Funding Levels in Regional and Historical Perspective**

### **Regional Perspective**

As shown in Figure 5 below, the need for additional funding to support student performance is conveyed by the percentage of PGCPs students meeting or exceeding mathematics and reading proficiency levels when compared to Fairfax and Montgomery Counties. For both subjects, about 50 percent fewer PGC students are proficient when compared to Fairfax. In comparison to Montgomery (MoCo), the gap for both subjects is about 20 percent, with MoCo the most apt comparison because its students take the same state evaluation as PGC students.

To compare PGC and MoCo student achievement with greater granularity, in Figure 6, I display the percentage of fourth and eighth graders meeting or exceeding Maryland English standards, as well as those meeting or exceeding fourth grade math and algebra I requirements. In PGC and MoCo, no more than half of students meet or exceed expectations in the categories displayed, indicating the need for more resources in both jurisdictions. But PGC's need is decidedly more severe than MoCo's: about 20 percent fewer PGC students meet or exceed fourth and eighth grade English standards than in MoCo; and about 30 percent fewer meet fourth grade math and algebra 1 standards.

Figure 5

<b>County Comparison of All Students Proficient in Reading and Mathematics in 2018</b>			
	<u>Prince George's</u>	<u>Montgomery</u>	<u>Fairfax</u>
<b>Reading</b>	24	54	81
<b>Mathematics</b>	26	48	81

Sources: state education agencies for Maryland and Virginia, as follows:  
 Prince George's and Montgomery Counties: <http://reportcard.msde.maryland.gov/Graphs/#/Assessments>  
 Fairfax County: <http://schoolquality.virginia.gov/divisions/fairfax-county-public-schools>

Figure 6

<b>PGC and MoCo Student Achievement Comparison, 2018 School Year</b>		
Percentage Students Meeting or Exceeding Maryland Standard		
	<u>PGC</u>	<u>MoCo</u>
<b>English</b>		
Grade 4	29.8	53.6
Grade 8	31.1	52.6
<b>Math</b>		
Grade 4	17.5	50.7
Algebra 1	11.4	40.6

Source: Maryland State Department of Education, "Data Downloads: ELA Math"  
<http://reportcard.msde.maryland.gov/Graphs/#/DataDownloads/datadownload/3/17/6/15/XXXX>

In light of PGCPS’s student demographics, budget constraints, and school performance levels, system leaders experience significant pressure to improve school quality. Furthermore, these three dimensions have embedded within them a fundamental tension, often pulling decisionmakers in different directions: demand to meet the substantial social service and other non-academic needs of their less advantaged students, while also offering cutting-edge academic opportunities, such as Science, Technology, Engineering, and Math (STEM) magnet programs, disproportionately desired by middle

and upper income residents. While PGC school officials attempt to offer all students resources commensurate with their capacities and interests, county-level budget constraints compel hard tradeoffs among spending priorities.

### **Historical Perspective**

After decades of severe underfunding, including underinvestment in school infrastructure maintenance and lack of new construction keeping pace with a growing population, there is wide variation in school quality within PGCPs. Those attending schools in relatively higher income neighborhoods and living outside of the beltway often fare better than their low-income and inner beltway peers. But even with relative advantage, many affluent parents opt out of PGCPs and into private school because they perceive the system incapable of supporting their children's learning needs.

PGCPs' current strain is rooted in 1970s and 1980s racial integration processes, which were contentious and protracted. These processes set the stage for the system's financial bind. That is, fallout from late twentieth century racial migration—the county's shift from majority White to majority Black—is now compounded by twenty first century migration patterns. Today, as discussed in preceding chapters, D.C. area jurisdictions increasingly do not receive a socio-economic cross section of households; rather, people with high incomes tend to cluster in some areas and those with low incomes in others. PGC receives a disproportionate share of low and moderate income families, with low-income Latino children the fastest growing PGCPs population. That the county budget is insufficient for meeting students' needs is a downstream consequence of the vicious cycle PGC is in with regard to expanding its tax base—and its tax base woes are inextricably connected to its relative economic position in the D.C. region.

Furthermore, PGC officials' options with regard to improving schools are not only tied to the specific history of PGC integration, but to nation-wide race and class integration patterns. The county exemplifies African Americans' centuries-long long struggle to attain adequate revenue for across-the-board high-performing public schools. Hence, at least three structural layers to account for when determining how social processes shape PGCPs' capacity to educate youth effectively, including PGC's embeddedness within: (1) the D.C. region; (2) federal, state, and local policy, tax, and other resource flow decisions; and (3) national patterns of racial segregation and other forms of discrimination preventing Blacks from accessing dominant institutions' resources

Contemporary disparities in access to high-performing schools is fundamentally fused with African Americans' long-standing fight for learning opportunities, a battle ongoing since the pre-Civil War period when most African descendant people were enslaved. Blacks' struggle began with many state and local governments prohibiting teaching enslaved Africans to read and other restrictions on their gaining knowledge and skills (King 2011). In *Black Reconstruction in America* ([1935] 2007), sociologist W.E.B. Du Bois elucidates Blacks' efforts and achievements in attaining their political, economic, and social rights in southern states in the decades immediately following the U.S. Civil War, as well as how White southerners eventually reinstated White hegemony in southern institutions—after which they sharply curtailed Blacks' access to public education by starkly underfunding Black schools, if they funded them at all.

Du Bois shows the importance Blacks placed on education as a means for socio-economic advancement. He notes in particular that Blacks elected to southern state

houses during the Reconstruction period spearheaded processes to amend state constitutions to guarantee a free public education to all children. Hundreds of schools for Blacks opened during Reconstruction throughout the South.<sup>15</sup> The history of post-Reconstruction school segregation and underfunding from the 1870s to the present shows Blacks' quest for access to well-resourced and high-performing schools has been endemic to their pre and post-bellum experience, an experience even socio-economically advantaged Blacks in the twenty first century have yet to overcome. While Blacks' pursuit of education never waned, the next period when the education opportunity structure opened significantly for Blacks was after World War II.

One of the core Modern Civil Rights Movement goals was gaining protection from racial discrimination in education, employment, and public accommodations. The history of how state and local governments financially supported racially segregated public schools remains the contemporary mechanism through which racial inequity in access to high quality public education persists: the local funding of public schools through property taxes (Goyette 2014). Black youth, on average, live in neighborhoods with inadequate tax bases for supporting K-12 education due to three mutually reinforcing social processes: (1) most students' school assignment is based on where they live, (2) racial residential segregation persists, and (3) dominant market actors value properties in majority Black neighborhoods less than those in majority White areas.

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<sup>15</sup> With the dawn of the Great Migration in the early twentieth century, such that by mid century about half the South's Black population shifted to northern and western metropolises, more Blacks gained access to better funded public schools. However, like southern schools, the schools Blacks attended outside of the south were usually significantly under-resourced when compared to those Whites attended.



The 1954 Supreme Court of the United States (SCOTUS) decision in *Brown v. Board of Education* ostensibly decoupled where one lived from one's access to high-performing schools because it outlawed racially-segregated schools in all states and mandated that *despite* neighborhoods' racial boundaries schools were to be racially integrated. State and local officials became legally obligated to devise processes to ensure Blacks and Whites did not learn in racially homogenous classrooms (Kluger 2004; Strauss 2018).

In 1968, in the face of continued widespread White resistance to racially integrated schools, SCOTUS in *Green v. County Board of Education of New Kent County, Virginia*, affirmed its commitment to remove all dimensions of racial discrimination in access to public education 'root and branch,' granting states and locales "wide latitude in shaping desegregation remedies" (Huchison 2004:2). *Swann v. Charlotte-Mecklenburg County Board of Education* (1971) (Kluger 2004), decided a few years later, approved busing as a tool to achieve this goal. Together, *Brown*, *Green*, and *Swann* created meaningful pathways to short circuit Whites' advantages by not only mandating Blacks and Whites attend racially integrated schools, but by preventing Whites from evading integration process by moving to all-White neighborhoods. In the early 1970s, school systems increasingly bused students and used other enforcement mechanisms—and racial segregation decreased (Erickson 2016).

Despite such inroads, attaining racial integration through busing could not overcome Whites' willingness to move to farther and farther flung suburban districts, areas generally with few racial and ethnic minorities, or from gerrymandering school district boundaries to isolate themselves. And SCOTUS in *Milliken v. Bradley*, decided in

1974, cooperated with Whites' integration avoidance strategies. Starting with *Milliken*, and as recently affirmed in *Meredith v. Jefferson County Board of Education* (2006), federal courts have ruled that regardless of whether school districts are contiguous, or within the same metropolitan area, only *within*-district integration is required, making it virtually impossible to merge urban and suburban student populations or students in adjacent suburban districts.

With Blacks, and other racial and ethnic minority groups, increasingly dispersing to suburbs, such that now many suburban districts are majority minority (as in PGC), axes of variation in public school quality have become more complex. Whereas the basis of variation prior to minorities' mass movement to suburbs was between city and suburban districts, now there is significant heterogeneity among suburban districts, as is the case between PGC and neighboring counties. Another important demographic change in suburbs is the increase in their poverty rates (Lacy 2016).

Through *Milliken* and downstream court cases, the judicial branch has conceded segregation by means other than explicit race exclusive legislation is permissible, even when there are marked racially disparate outcomes (Kluger 2004). Prior to *Brown*, de facto segregation was the primary means through which northern states instituted segregation, as opposed to southern states, which usually created "separate but equal" schools for Blacks and Whites.<sup>16</sup> Post-*Milliken*, de facto segregation is how racial segregation remains in place in most U.S. school districts. Today, racial segregation in schools is the outgrowth of Whites moving to mostly-White areas, drawing school district

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<sup>16</sup> "Separate but equal" was established by *Plessy v. Ferguson* in 1896, when the U.S. Supreme Court ruled states could maintain racially separate facilities in all public accommodations, including schools, so long as those accommodations were the same for both races, which they rarely were (Kluger 2004).

boundaries to reinforce racial homogeneity, and enacting exclusionary zoning laws to do the same (Goyette 2014).

Middle class Blacks, unlike Blacks who are poor, are potentially better positioned to access resources from dominant institutions, including school systems, because they tend to have knowledge and skills these institutions reward. But, as I show below, Blacks' socio-economic advantages do not necessarily yield greater access to high-performing schools because their jurisdictions serve a disproportionate share of regions' low-income populations, as is the case with Prince George's County. PGC's role as the sink for D.C. area negative effects of economic development means the county serves more high-needs students than neighboring counties and does so with a budget that cannot keep pace with growing system demand. The history of PGCPS racial segregation, integration, and re-segregation processes created a system weathered by underinvestment and thus especially vulnerable to new system stressors.

*Pushing Against "The Color Line": Integrating PGCPS.* Consistent with national patterns, Whites in PGC resisted Blacks' movement to the county, which increased precipitously in the 1970s as the burgeoning black middle class in the D.C. area sought suburban homes. PGCPS was one of the institutions where Whites were especially intent on maintaining the color line. Prior to *Milliken* and related rulings, PGCPS experienced significant upheaval as the system's administrators at first resisted racial integration and then instituted a court-mandated integration plan following *Brown*. After *Milliken*, and the transition from majority-White to majority-Black, the county has contended with both the downstream effects of the integration plan alongside social patterns leading to re-segregation, characterized by an increasingly high-needs population that is majority

Black and Latino, with the majority of Latino students immigrants or the children of immigrants.

In defiance of the *Brown* ruling, White PGC officials circumvented racially integrating PGCPs until the early 1970s (U.S. Commission on Civil Rights (USCCR 1976)). County lawmakers used a “freedom of choice” policy” to steer students to schools based on their race (Johnson 2002:109). According to a political appointee who would head a committee integral to the integration plan, White resistance to school integration was intense and widespread, including residents and county leaders:

It was very just raw, rank prejudice and racism—that’s at the parent level. At the leadership level...it’s the economics of it...This is 1973—Prince George’s County particularly is a very George Wallace area...it’s the upper South, like Alabama...People don’t know each other, live together, et cetera, so when you start talking about putting the kids together, that simply wasn’t going to work. So there was massive resistance...school buses being turned over, White mothers throwing eggs at the school buses...Also it [Prince George’s County] abuts the nation’s capital that is becoming significantly what we call a ‘chocolate city.’ So that black dynamic...caused a great deal of fear out here among the whites...

PGC African American parents, in 1972, with support from the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) and the American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU), challenged PGC’s integration policy in federal court. That same year, the U.S. District Court of Maryland ordered school integration and established a process for monitoring compliance, which remained in place until the mid-1990s. Implementing the court’s intervention led to major change for students and parents. The first year of the plan, about 13,000 additional students were bused to school than had been bused the prior year (USCCR 1976).

While busing was controversial, the provision PGCPs found the hardest to execute was the one requiring all PGCPs schools to have student bodies at least 10 percent, but no more than 50 percent, African American. European Americans left the county in

droves once integration requirements took hold, leaving fewer and fewer Whites with whom Blacks could integrate. When integration began in 1972, Blacks were about 25 percent of PGCPS; a decade later, their proportion had more than doubled to about 52 percent (Johnson 2002:114-115).

Fighting integration was not limited to Whites, however. Some blacks also resisted. The Black Coalition Against Unnecessary Busing (BCAUB), a parent-based organization, opposed busing to non-neighborhood schools (Johnson 2002). BCAUB was mostly composed of parents living in racially integrated, middle-class homes in outside-the-beltway neighborhoods. They did not want to send their children to inside-the-beltway schools, nor did they want children from inside-the-beltway areas sent to their schools. The organization argued African Americans bore the brunt of busing hassles, such as long school commutes. They also contended achievement outcomes for Black students in integrated schools were not markedly better than those of students in majority-Black schools (Ibid.). BCAUB's efforts demonstrate an early instance of class conflict within the Black community.

Despite pervasive opposition to integration, some parents and other stakeholders were committed to finding integration options to resolve the core issue at stake: racial equity in access to educational resources. The Council of 100, composed of Black and White parents, PGC government employees, and others with school system interests, was the most visible of these groups. It was established by the federal judge overseeing the county's integration plan. Despite Council efforts, and those of others working toward fair and pragmatic solutions, maintaining a racially and economically inclusive school system has remained elusive in PGC.

As the county program receiving the most revenue and one touching households across race, class, and geographic differences, contentiousness over integration scarcely waned during the nearly two decades the desegregation order was in place. Even the NAACP, a co-plaintiff in the case initiating the school integration lawsuit was not immune to dissent over the busing plan. But in 1980, when the school board approved a plan reducing the number of students bused by 25 percent, the NAACP filed suit against PGCPs a second time. In response, the school board argued the dramatic increase in the Black student population rendered it impossible to prevent some schools from exceeding 50 percent Black student enrollment, the court's ceiling. In the end, U.S. District Court found PGC in violation of the desegregation order (Johnson:115).

The remedy the court approved involved a combination of: reduced busing; magnet schools specializing in subject areas, such as the arts or sciences, and where students compete for admission; and "Milliken II schools", so named after a second case involving the *Milliken* plaintiff, whereby SCOTUS permitted majority-Black schools, if those schools receive compensatory funding and other additional resources (Johnson:116). PGC's *Milliken* schools involved the following, according to the political appointee who headed the Council of 100 Committee:

...What the judge ultimately came up with...was desegregation that did not involve school assignment... We called them Milliken Schools where you don't try to put kids on the bus from the inner beltway...put them on a bus at 6:00 in the morning...drive them all around the beltway just to put them next to a white child. That just doesn't work anymore. Black parents didn't want it. White parents didn't want it...But the black child still was not whole, still incompleteness from the years of segregation and denial and so we came up with...an equal distribution of resources.

PGCPS' "Milliken schools" in the mid 1980s and early 1990s involved: lowering student-teacher ratios; new instructional programs, including summer enrichment; and wrap-around social services, such as adding nurses and social workers to full-time school

staff. In addition, schools with the lowest standardized test scores received more resources. Because the Black population in PGC increased considerably during this period, the plan simultaneously sought to provide spending equity across schools, while accounting for changes in the county's racial demographics. In 1992, about 68 percent of the PGCPSS student population was Black and 24 percent was White (Ibid.).

School policy and program innovation during the period in which the desegregation order was in effect—from the early 1970s through the early 1990s—was driven by the desegregation plan itself and less so by the ingenuity of black county leaders. The two programs driving curriculum and other system offerings—the Black Male Achievement Program and the Multicultural Education Program—were part of the desegregation plan, not programs county leaders devised (Johnson:127). Over the integration plan's 20-year span, activists, the courts, and ad hoc committees have had the greatest influence on school policy. At no time during the integration period was there a unified black agenda. In 1998, the first black county executive, Wayne Curry, signed the final agreement ending court-ordered racial integration (Frazier 1998).

*Managing Re-segregation: PGCPSS from the 1990s to the Present.* Today's decisionmakers inherited PGCPSS' 1990s resource configuration. Under this arrangement, the county needs to overcome inequities inherited from the integration process, *plus* meet the needs of an increasingly low-income student population. *Milliken's* premise is that school systems can create high-performing schools *without* racial integration by providing sufficient resources to all schools, regardless of their racial and ethnic composition. However, justices writing the *Milliken* opinion did not sufficiently account for the profoundly racialized government and economic processes underpinning how

school systems are funded, how students are sorted into these systems, nor how schools and districts allocate resources to programs areas in ways disadvantaging racial and ethnic minority youth.

While about half of the PGCPs budget comes from Maryland, year-to-year state increases beyond those driven by inflation and increased enrollment are not guaranteed, as allocations are based on a statutorily-driven funding formula. Annual incremental increases in school spending are largely driven by the local share of the PGCPs budget. PGC, as the sink for D.C. area negative development externalities, struggles to provide the scale of increased spending PGCPs needs.

At least three interlocking social processes prevent *Milliken* schools from providing sufficient resources for PGCPs: (1) insufficient school funding from all levels of government, (2) county government and family financial instability due to racial residential segregation, and (3) the disproportionate concentration of negative spillover effects of gentrification in Black communities.

### **PGCPS Today: Inadequate Funding Leads to Hard Tradeoffs**

#### **Operating Costs**

PGC combines its locally generated funding with state funding to create its annual school budget, which in 2018 was just under two billion dollars, with state and local governments each contributing about half the revenue. But PGCPs' needs exceed its revenue. As noted, over 60 percent of the system's nearly 133,000 students come from low-income households, families which tend to need social services and other government resources to augment families' and neighborhoods' lack of resources (Prince George's County Public Schools 2018a). With more demand for services than funding



year to year, the county makes hard tradeoffs between core school programs and staffing.

A schoolboard member representing inner beltway communities in southern PGC

characterized the tradeoffs this way:

It's tough... We just celebrated negotiation contracts [teachers and other schools staff]... But you know, you're not given \$150 million more... you have to make the decisions. Do we not have this or do we not have that? Do we not have 20 literacy coaches? Instead, we only have 8... so things have to be cut... of course our priority... is going to be the education of students. But we also have to weigh the operations of schools. We have to weigh the payment of staff. And those all get weighed and it's a difficult boat...

PGCPS leaders know their budget capacity is inextricably tied to county and state revenue streams. While increasing the state allocation is one path to enhancing their annual budget (see discussion of state budget below), the most direct route, and the one where stakeholders have the greatest personal stake, is the county level.

Notwithstanding the county's budget constraints, the PGCPS school board chair in 2018 and for several years prior has worked with other school board members, the county executive, and the PGCPS CEO (superintendent) to craft a "game change" budget for public schools—the amount he believes necessary to realize significant system-wide improvement. The chair described his strategy as such:

What we said to the CEO [school superintendent] is, 'Give us a budget. Give us a game-changing budget. What would it take to significantly increase academic achievement in our schools?' Not moderately, but significant increase. And those budgets were asking for 100, 150 million dollars more than what the County had given us in previous years. And it was effective in kind of changing the discussion about what we needed, and it led to one year the County Executive said, 'Okay. The only way I can give you this is through a tax increase.' So the county executive tried to propose a property tax increase to pay for education, and it crashed and burned really bad. We went out and we fought hard for it, and we thought that the citizens and at least policy leaders were ready for it, and they weren't.

While PGC's council has approved school funding above state maintenance of effort (MoE) levels in the past four years, usually \$20 to \$40 dollars beyond MoE, the levels are far below the order of magnitude the school board considers "game changing."

As it stands, PGCPS consumes about 65 percent of the county budget, and after public safety takes its 25 percent, all other programs compete for the remaining 10 percent. From a resident-wide equity perspective, the council finds it difficult to justify increasing school spending at the expense of other core public services already underfunded.

Though the council has not enacted “game change” budgets, in collaboration with county agencies, county executive office staff, and PGCPS leaders, it has devised pathways through which to synergize the provision of human services to students, parents, and other neighborhood residents. Called “community schools,” under this model, leaders recognize schools as neighborhood activity hubs—places not only to support children and parents, but potential one-stop coordination sites for social service delivery to entire neighborhoods—from access to medical care to career counseling.

Community schools show promise, but they are in “demonstration” phase—and thus do not have an impact on most PGC residents’ quality of life. Bringing the program to scale would require tens of millions of dollars more annually, something the county cannot provide without trading off other public services. Ultimately, Prince George’s County is caught in a budget vice—on one side squeezed by inadequate revenue and on the other squeezed by disproportionate demand from high-needs students. A school board member reflecting on the board’s role in managing PGCPS budget constraints captures what I heard from other school leaders:

That's been very challenging for us, to try to make sure that all our kids are coming up and they all have the same level of resources to bring them all up to where they need to be. I'm really proud of the work that we have done as a board as far as introductions of our international schools...I have one in my district which I'm very proud of...Largo High School. The students that are in that program are doing very well with the challenges they have with the language barriers or even just the customs that we have here, to be able to adjust.

## Capital Expenditures

Another set of constraints, perhaps even more challenging, concern capital expenses. PGCPs' backlog of deferred maintenance on school buildings, need for new schools, and intensifying and geographically uneven population growth, compound operations-related constraints. At county council and school board hearings, school officials frequently petitioned for substantial increases in dedicated capital funding. In a recent report, PGCPs states it needs three billion dollars for capital expenses between 2017 and 2022 (PGCPs Educational Facilities Masterplan 2017). "...Those are the ones that are the most intractable for us. If your school is 50 years old, it's going to be 50 years old until we can build you a new school..." remarked the school board chair when I asked him about the greatest challenges facing PGCPs. Building new schools requires millions of dollars at the elementary and middle school levels and tens of millions at the high school level. Under the current funding arrangement for erecting schools, Maryland and the county share the cost, with the state usually paying at least half of construction costs (Hise, et al., 2018).

The combination of deferred maintenance on existing school infrastructure and the need to build new schools to relieve overcrowding, especially in north county schools, where Latino growth is most intense, leads the political appointee who headed a Council of 100 committee to call for a "broader state solution":

...unless the state had an education funding concept that spent reflecting that [shifts in demographic composition of students], which means the state spends more and sends money to the child, not based on county, but the child, then that was going to overtake any aspirations that we had. And that's still the challenge...It hasn't overtaken completely, but there's great stress...

At the state level, PGC is one of 24 counties vying for educational resources. While

counties can apply for grants and other forms of targeted funding, the vast majority comes from its Maryland school trust fund allocation.

### **Maryland's Contribution to School Funding**

Maryland distributes education resources based on local jurisdictions' ability to raise revenue through local property taxes, as well as student and school related factors. State transfers to counties are largely pupil based. Maryland allocates money to schools according to enrolled students' characteristics, including their socio-economic background, English proficiency level, and learning capacity (Checovich 2016; Hutchison 2004). Counter to the national trend, Maryland's funding formula leads to the state spending \$501 *more* per pupil in non-majority White school districts than in those majority-White (EdBuild 2019).<sup>17</sup>

But even with the state formula weighted to support disadvantaged students and majority-minority counties, PGCPS struggles to provide resources students need to excel. State aid's insufficiency reflects the depth of the county's unmet needs and thus the scale of increased revenue PGC requires to fund operations and make capital investments that would lead to a county-wide high-quality school system. An additional \$501 per pupil from Maryland each year does not compensate for historical and ongoing racialized resource distribution processes.

### **Racial Residential Segregation Continues to Curtail Increased Revenue for Schools**

There are limited pathways through which PGC can generate new funding: raise property taxes; take steps to increase the value, and thus tax yield, of existing property;

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<sup>17</sup> This same report found Virginia—home to Fairfax County, Prince's George's (PGC) neighbor to which I have compared PGC's fiscal experiences—also spends more in non-majority White school districts, \$255 additional.

create new tax generating entities, either residential or commercial (although in this case, the county would absorb new demand on public goods and services); or petition the state for more funding. With regard to requesting more state revenue, unless the state changes the funding formula, which requires new state legislation and hence other Maryland counties to support the bill, PGC's state transfer amount is fixed, only increasing to the extent enrollment grows.

As my and prior research shows, due to racial residential segregation, the Black middle class and Blacks with low incomes usually live in the same or adjacent neighborhoods. Affluent Blacks' proximity to less economically advantaged Blacks means they are responsible for their own *and* lower income blacks' needs, whereas the White middle class, on average, circumvents such responsibility.

### **Regional Embeddedness: PGC Role as “Regional Sink” Slows School Improvement**

As shown in Figure 6 below, about 60 percent of PGC's student population comes from low-income households, nearly double the share in nearby Montgomery and Fairfax Counties. This chart also shows PGC's relative wealth position in the D.C. region. PGC contributes about half as much to its public schools as Montgomery County and about a third as much as Fairfax. In terms of per pupil spending, all three counties spend within \$2,000 of each other. At first blush, county differences in spending may seem almost negligible, but when multiplied by PGCP's student population of over 130,000 students, were PGCP to have the same budget as its neighbors, it would have over 200 million dollars more to allocate each year. Furthermore, absolute differences in per pupil spending do not capture all of PGC's disadvantage: PGC serves a disproportionate share

of the region’s high-needs students and therefore it must provide more intensive, and thus usually more costly, services to students to support their learning.

**Figure 7**

<b>Fiscal Year 2018 Public School Spending in Prince George's, Montgomery, and Fairfax Counties</b>			
	<u>Prince George's</u>	<u>Montgomery</u>	<u>Fairfax</u>
<b>Total Student Enrollment</b>	132,667	161,302	189,000
<b>Total Spending*</b>	\$1.9 billion	\$2.5 billion	\$2.8 billion
County Contribution	\$739 million	\$1.67 billion	\$1.97 billion
State Contribution	\$1.1 billion	\$680 million	\$636 million
<b>Per Pupil Allocation</b>	\$14,300	\$15,498	\$14,815
<b>Percent Low-income Students**</b>	61	33	31

\* Does not add; remainder is federal and other contributions  
 \*\* Those qualifying for reduced-price meals  
**Sources: County boards of education, as follows:**  
 Prince George's: <https://www.princegeorgescountymd.gov/DocumentCenter/View/18010/Board-of-EducationPDF>  
 Montgomery: [https://www.montgomeryschoolsmd.org/uploadedFiles/departments/budget/fy2018/FY2018\\_OperatingBudgetSummary\\_FINALforWeb.pdf](https://www.montgomeryschoolsmd.org/uploadedFiles/departments/budget/fy2018/FY2018_OperatingBudgetSummary_FINALforWeb.pdf)  
 Fairfax: <https://www.fcps.edu/sites/default/files/media/pdf/FY18Approved%20Budget.pdf>

Chronic inadequate school funding leads to unique challenges for the Black middle class. Strain is evinced in two primary ways: (1) fights between and within schools over which programs to fund and (2) the middle class opting out of PGCPS.

**Limits of Linked Fate: Black Middle Class Responses to PGC Budget Constraints**

**Black Middle Class Agency**

I call instances when affluent Blacks seek geographic, financial, political, or other forms of social or institutional distance from less advantaged Blacks “the limits of linked fate.” That is, Blacks with relatively more access to material resources under some circumstances, seek returns to their class status through means in tension with racial solidarity. While linked fate indicates strain on the Black middle class, class-based resources nevertheless afford them *more capacity* for exercising agency—greater access to resources legible to and thus rewarded by White-controlled institutions as they resist these same institutions’ racist practices. Black middle class households, especially those

of Black elites, often have enough income to educate their children outside of the public school system—and many do.

In a briefing held by a PGC committee regarding PGCPS transportation challenges related to introducing programs largely at the behest of middle class parents, a councilwoman connected the challenges to systemic concerns about PGCPS:

Every year the same story...it's extremely frustrating—issues are system wide...we're so busy expanding programs that we've gotten away from neighborhood schools. We haven't gotten the foundation correct, but we're busy expanding these programs—\$100 million in the system can't work if [we're] shipping [students] from north county to south county...I understand challenges all the way around, but we're talking about for years...we might as well go back to the days of busing in the 1970s...

Many middle and upper income families navigate structural constraint by making context-specific decisions about when, how, and under what terms to deploy a race solidarity, or a linked fate, perspective, versus a class-leveraging perspective—one using class resources to differentiate and distance themselves from low-income Blacks. My research identifies how these strategies affect Blacks' local political and economic priorities.

PGC officials are acutely sensitized to middle class parents' desire for more educational opportunities for their children and their willingness to look outside PGCPS to achieve their objectives. The PGCPS school board chair in his interview stated middle class parents' distrust of PGCPS pervades many Black middle class social circles.

But the hardest kind of one that we've been trying to address is the overall kind of just the broader issue of trusting the system, and I'm not going to send my kids to your school 'cause we just don't—we heard how bad it was and my friend then sent their kid to school there and they got beat up. And I mean, you hear all of that constantly... We've been trying, with our parent and community advisory council...so trying to engage with parent and community and listen to them in different ways...

Reflecting sentiment I heard from residents and parents, a middle class PGC resident described the Black middle class' schooling choiceset as such:

Many parents in the county do look at the option of private schooling...that is because the school systems is not as good as it could be. Which is a tough thing that I've always grappled with and probably haven't done enough research to fully understand why, but to have the affluence that this county has, and for decades to not to have a stellar program as many other counties do, I don't quite understand what the major driving factor is or what the common denominator for why we can't seem to get that right. Because that would really drive the progress for the county for decades to come if we could really get that right.

This resident expresses frustration about PGCPs performance and recognizes school quality affects the county's development trajectory and the county's capacity to offer residents a high quality of life more broadly. Convincing middle class parents who have already opted out to opt back in and dissuading parents considering opting out to remain in the system, will require substantial, sustained improvement in county schools—a process likely to take years when parents want immediate solutions.

### **Strict Standards in a Context of Severe Resource Scarcity**

One way middle class Black parents whose children attend PGCPs schools demonstrate vigilance with regard to their children's education is through the strict standards they seek to enforce with regard to academic achievement and student behavior. PGC Black parents do this in a context where, nationwide, school decisionmakers tend to respond more punitively toward Blacks, when compared to Whites, when Blacks' behavior is considered "disruptive" to instruction (American Civil Liberties Union 2017, Losen and Skiba 2010). From the 1990s forward, the combination of "zero tolerance" policies for behavior deviating from teachers' and principals' expectations and increased high stakes standardized testing has led to school leaders being less lenient with students. For Black children, these policies have been implemented in a context where their schools, and other public goods and services in their communities, tend to be chronically underfunded. Structural inequities mean that no



matter how well-intentioned standards are, Black children are usually less equipped to meet them, yet they are held accountable for failing to do so.

While affluent Blacks are subject to the same constraints as less socio-economically advantaged Blacks, they navigate them with more material resources, as well as institutional knowledge and behavior repertoires rewarded by dominant institutions. Middle class Blacks are particularly committed to their children gaining access to curricula and other educational resources fostering college preparedness and to their children internalizing middle class behavior norms. Thus, many socio-economically advantaged Black parents, especially Black elites, withdraw from spaces they perceive to undermine their parenting goals, including contexts with significant proportions of moderate and low income Blacks, a process Karen Lacy (2007) calls “strategic assimilation.” Underscoring this point, based on my school board meeting observations and conversations with parents, outside of seeking more school resources for robust curricula, affluent Black parents’ concerns were most often in two categories: (1) school personnel’s responses to student behaviors inconsistent with behaviors White-controlled institutions reward and (2) lost instruction time as schools manage behavior issues.

*Potential Long-Term Consequences of the Black Middle Class Opting Out.*

Regardless of their motivation, that some middle class Black parents are non-participants in PGCPs undermines the integrity of the system in at least two ways: (1) fewer PGC residents have a direct stake in the school system’s success and therefore are less likely to hold schools accountable for providing sound instruction; and (2) county residents may be less willing to support increasing taxes and other fiscal measures requiring their consent to make the system stronger. Furthermore, by definition, when the Black middle

class opts out, socio-economic disadvantage is concentrated in certain schools and classrooms do not benefit from the Black middle class' social ties (social capital), strategies for activating institutional resources (cultural capital), and household material resources, including parents' direct donations or their organization of fundraisers.

Were middle-class parents to send their children to public schools, to the extent these parents advocate for policies with broad benefits, such as well-compensated and trained teachers at all schools in all classrooms, they would help both their own children and children from poor and working class families. And indeed some middle class parents do reconsider public schools even after opting out. During his interview, the school board chair recounted an instance of one family leaving PGCPs for private education, but later returning: "He told a story about how they started in private school and finally decided to in middle school put their daughter back in Prince George's County Public Schools and how happy they were...just satisfied." However, as shown above, middle class parents sometimes pursue interests that are not necessarily shared across the class spectrum. In a given fiscal year the school budget is a "fixed pie" with constituents vying to expand the slice they have, a process virtually inevitably requiring trading off funds for one program to increase the allocation for another.

Even if PGCPs quality improves demonstrably, there will likely remain a contingent of parents who opt out for reasons other than dissatisfaction with school quality. Some Prince Georgians want more control over the school curriculum, particularly given the unique challenges Black youth encounter. That Black youth have a clear sense of their history and are grounded in a positive identity with regard to their

African and African American heritage is important to many. A senior pastor of one of the largest PGC congregations explained the rationale for his church's school this way:

I always wanted to have a school where we taught our own, as some other cultures do...there wasn't any emphasis [in Prince George's County Public Schools] on the African American experience in Africa, our origin...So I wanted to make sure that the black experience was captured, early on in the minds of our young people...They've expanded out to the extent now that we have the Mandarin Chinese program exchange...Ground them in who they are, so they value who they are...And I think that fact is over also into a decrease of crime...if you have a value who you are and you don't have to steal anything and you don't have to go out there and try to become a rockstar or try to become a rapper, and...you have earning power, potential power, based on your giftedness...

As with other racial groups, it is likely that even were PGCPs to improve demonstrably many parents would still want to provide their children enhanced learning experiences not offered in public schools, motivated by the desire to offer their children certain kinds of identity formation and enriched curricular and co-curricular opportunities. But opting out of public schools for this reason is categorically different than what is occurring now. Middle class parents are leaving PGCPs in droves because they do not trust the system will provide their children a sound education in *core subjects*.

### **Summary and Conclusions**

In 2011, a Black mother from Akron, Ohio, was criminally charged for sending her children to a neighboring district, Fairlawn-Copley, where her father lived, rather than the Akron district where her home is. "It's overwhelming. I'm exhausted...I did this for them, so there it is. I did this for them," she commented regarding her decision (Canning and Tanglao 2011). That parents feel compelled to take such drastic measures to ensure their children receive a high-quality education and that school districts hire private detectives and pursue criminal penalties for those who violate laws regarding school assignment highlights what is at stake concerning U.S. public school systems: access to equitable resources. Those with disproportionately more resources often deploy

those resources to continue to retain more than their share and to justify status quo resource distribution arrangements. Those receiving less than their share fight to draw down more resources—both to have resources on par with advantaged jurisdictions and to make themselves whole after decades of underinvestment.

The fight for resource equity at the household and school level in PGC occurs in a context shaped by late twentieth and early twenty first century segregation, desegregation, and re-segregation processes. Integrating PGCPS was exceedingly fraught, characterized by Whites flouting the *Brown* decision for nearly two decades, and once forced by courts to integrate, abandoning the county and erecting barriers to Blacks success on their way out. Scars left by integration have been reopened, if they ever had truly healed, by stressors reflecting D.C. area development and migration patterns from the 2000s forward. Currently, PGC absorbs the lion's share of the region's low-income households and does not garner adequate revenue to fund public services adequately, including its public schools. Among public school wounds most difficult to close are those related to too few experienced and qualified teachers and an inadequate number of and poorly maintained schools.

Given PGCPS' distress, many Black middle class parents who can afford to opt out of the system do so. Most Black parents who leave do not trust the system to provide their children with a high-quality education in core academic subjects. Therefore, while middle class White parents who live in suburbs can largely take for granted that they have a "package deal"—a high-quality neighborhood, home, and school system—Black middle class Black parents usually pursue these elements piecemeal (Rhodes and Warkentien 2017). Consequently, Black parents are burdened with multiple simultaneous

taxes, reflecting legacy and ongoing racial inequality—among them: financial, time, money, and energy penalties, and less opportunity than their White counterparts to rely on government or the market system to create positive investment cycles bolstering household and county-level wellbeing.

The barriers the county faces as the D.C. region’s “sink” require concerted and significant government policy and market shifts. Prince George’s County has been “respecting the game,” but the game does not respect the county. What might game change policy and market practices consist of? In addition to policy recommendations, in next and final chapter, I summarize my key findings and discuss how they shape social science theory related to race, class, and the geography of opportunity in metropolitan areas.

## CHAPTER 6: Findings, Theory Contributions, Future Research Directions, and Policy Recommendations

The Black middle class experience shows severe racialized barriers remain within the United States opportunity structure. A college degree, white collar employment, and home ownership do not inoculate Blacks from racism's effects. In fact, the Black middle class' intermediate position between Blacks who are poor and middle class Whites means economically advantaged Blacks often *subsidize* the already more advantaged White middle class because they disproportionately absorb the fallout from voracious capitalist practices, especially virulent after decades of neoliberal policy at all government levels. Blacks' disadvantages are meted out through multiple mutually reinforcing scales of disadvantage: household, neighborhood, local jurisdiction, region, state, and nation.

Household-level income and wealth is the foundation upon which local government capacity is built. Most states delegate to local jurisdictions responsibility for maintaining core government services—from schools to police to road maintenance. States empower locales to fund government activity through taxes on residential and commercial property. Therefore that homes and businesses in majority Black communities tend to have less value than those in majority White areas means Black jurisdictions garner less revenue. With too little revenue to fund public goods and services adequately, local decisionmakers in Black jurisdictions often make hard tradeoffs between vital public goods and services. Thus, the Black middle class garners fewer returns to its class status than its White peers. Adding to this disadvantage is middle class Blacks' disproportionate responsibility for low-income households and their inheritance of legacy discrimination effects—the *long duree*'s downstream.

## **Core Research Findings**

PGC's ability to meet its residents' needs, relative to other D.C. area counties, is consistent with the pattern described above. Indeed, PGC's slower housing appreciation trajectory leads to inadequate revenue to fund public goods and services. The county's tax revenue is intimately connected to D.C. region economic development and migration patterns. As the region develops with ever increasing intensity, D.C. locales receive an uneven distribution of residents across the class spectrum and in terms of race and ethnicity. Those displaced by gentrification seek affordable places to live and many choose PGC because it has the lowest cost of living among counties contiguous with D.C. Furthermore, while like other racial and ethnic groups, Latinos have varying class statuses, most of those selecting PGC as their home have low and moderate incomes—and they are PGC's fastest growing population. These social processes show PGC attracts and retains more than its equitable share of economically disadvantaged residents and fewer than its equitable share of economically advantaged households, culminating in the county being caught in a *vicious cycle*.

PGC leaders actively and assiduously work to stem the vicious cycle. Decisionmakers' vision is crystallized in their development masterplan, Plan 2035. It entails targeted residential and commercial investment, particularly near mass transit, and mixed-use spaces, all of which are designed to attract middle and high income residents and businesses. Over the past decade, county officials' efforts have yielded much fruit. Several major projects have opened and more are slated to do so soon. Thus far, the development projects contributing the most to county revenue are: National Harbor, which opened in 2008; and MGM Casino, which opened in 2016.

In addition to pursuing investment from external entities, PGC leaders have taken steps to ensure county-based businesses receive contracts from the county government itself as well as from private investors. County officials' actions have created a protected market for PGC firms to thrive—and many are. PGC leaders also enacted a streamlined zoning code to facilitate efficient realization of their development agenda. To reiterate the councilmember quoted in Chapter 4, PGC leaders refuse to be development “spectators” in their own county. Given the spate of new development since the early twenty first century, and especially over the past 10 years, PGC leaders and residents are clearly not in the stands watching development unfold in their county—they are major players shaping their own destiny. PGC officials' agency and recent development achievements are remarkable given the unique challenges they face as a majority Black county— notable among them, their disproportionate responsibility for the region's low-income residents and racial discrimination in market transactions. PGC's council chair was perhaps prescient in this regard when in his interview he said: “it may take us longer to get the investment, but eventually developers will just see green [as in the opportunity to make a profit].” The steps local leaders have taken also indicate how PGC officials are holding themselves accountable for channeling investment in ways leading to a rising tide lifting all boats. And residents, particularly those who are middle class, are encouraged by these breakthroughs in and of themselves and are heartened by the increasing efficacy of the PGC government in meeting their needs and desires.

However, it is unclear whether development benefits will be shared across the class spectrum, and just as importantly, whether the scale of new revenue will be sufficient to close the gulf between county revenue intake and demand for public



services. Certainly middle and upper income Blacks are better positioned than those less socio-economically advantaged to reap development rewards. Nonetheless, all PGC residents, regardless of their class status, face headwinds in their effort to achieve economic stability, let alone upward mobility.

### **Contemporary Disadvantage and Racism's *Longue Duree***

The strain the Black middle class and PGC experience is constitutive of the centuries-long history of how African Americans have been incorporated into U.S. social systems. While the first Africans to arrive in the Americas were not enslaved—multiple labor arrangements co-existed during the first several decades of North American English colonies' existence—by the end of the seventeenth century, the Slave Codes passed in Virginia in the wake of an interracial labor revolt—Bacon's Rebellion—effectively established the “chattel slavery” system that would reign until the Civil War's end (Kendi 2016).

Under the chattel slavery system, enslaved Africans, in the words of U.S. Supreme Court Chief Justice Roger Taney (as articulated in the 1857 case *Scott v. Sanford* opinion): are “of an inferior order and altogether unfit to associate with the white race, either in social or political relations, and so far inferior that they had *no rights which the white man was bound to respect* [my emphasis added]” (Cornell Law School 2019). After the Civil War, Blacks ostensibly attained rights Whites and others were “bound to respect.” The Thirteenth, Fourteenth, and Fifteenth Amendments granted Blacks full citizenship rights and protections, and importantly, given most Blacks' prior status as enslaved, including their wages.

But Whites were never truly “bound” to respect Blacks’ rights, both in the sense that White-dominated institutions did not ensure Blacks could exercise their rights, and in the sense that dominant institutions and actors never made a sustained concerted commitment to Blacks’ equitable inclusion into U.S. society. Socially just incorporation would have required radical renegotiation of the racialized social order and the overhaul of U.S. political economy, which relied on wealth amassed by *excluding* Blacks from access to dominant institution resources and by *extracting* from their bodies scarcely, if at all, remunerated labor.

Consistent with Whites’ refusal to accept Blacks as their equals, the Jim Crow regime developed on Reconstruction’s heels. Through Jim Crow practices throughout the United States, though with regional variation in severity and means of execution, White racial dominance undergirded U.S. racial interaction from the post Reconstruction period to the mid twentieth century when landmark anti-discrimination laws were ushered in by The Modern Civil Rights Movement. Key among those laws are: The Civil Rights Act of 1964, the Voting Rights Act of 1965, and the Fair Housing Act of 1968. This triumvirate, which prohibited racial discrimination in education, employment, voting, and housing, opened the U.S. opportunity structure to an unprecedented number of African Americans.

Yet, as after Civil War Reconstruction, this opening was not predicated upon a fundamentally—root and branch—transformed U.S. social order, de-racialized in terms how it organizes material and symbolic resource distribution and one committed to equity among groups. Importantly, mid twentieth century civil rights legislation did not offer individual or group level redress for past government and market sponsored harms.

Broad expansion in the White middle class reflects a series of federal government actions in the twentieth century that facilitated Whites' wealth accumulation. Among the primary ways the federal government bolstered White wealth building was through housing policy. The Federal Housing Administration (FHA), established in the 1930s, alongside the Home Owners Loan Corporation (HOLC), developed home appraisal standards that evaluated neighborhood stability and risk. Under FHA/HOLC criteria, only all-White neighborhoods garnered the most favorable designation, creating conditions for Whites to become homeowners (Powell 2002:75-85). This process is called "redlining" because Blacks' neighborhoods were marked in red on FHA maps. Those living in or seeking to move into "redlined" neighborhoods—and thus the majority of Blacks—had minimal access to the mainstream credit market.

In the post World War II period, with housing demand acute, suburban growth expanded exponentially, with the federal government supporting such new building on cities' peripheries through, among other things, its funding of a national highway system, as well as Veterans Administration (VA) programs enacted by the GI Bill (Katznelson 2005). VA home buying programs made FHA practices begun in the 1930s even more generous: borrowers were subject to reduced down payment requirements—from 50 percent of homes' value to 10 percent—and could receive 30-year mortgages, whereas before most mortgages were five years (Katznelson 2005, Powell 2002). Because lending institutions throughout the United States used HOLC and FHA standards, and embedded within those standards was the fundamental assumption that Black neighborhoods were *inherently* high-risk, Blacks were systemically prevented from building wealth through

home ownership for decades, most Americans' primary wealth building asset (Oliver and Shapiro 2006).

Consequently, FHA/HOLC lending patterns instituted in the early twentieth century—notwithstanding federal government legislation in the latter twentieth, such as the Housing and Community Development Act of 1977 to correct for these patterns—render today's opportunity structure highly racialized. Whites and White communities inherit substantial wealth, while Blacks and Black communities inherit little. Because contemporary Black families, have less wealth than White families, on average, they are more vulnerable to economic downturns and have fewer resources to use in the market to meet their current needs and invest in their futures.

Under today's regime, the third major instantiation of the U.S. racialized social system—what I call “Veiled Virulent Racism ”—the first being the Slave Era and the second the Jim Crow—African Americans are sorted through a series of “screens” into different class locations (Katz, Stern, and Fader 2005). A post-secondary education and white collar job often lead to Blacks gaining more, though still not equitable, access to White-controlled resources. Two contradictory processes are simultaneously at work in the contemporary United States: (1) *some* African Americans, indeed more than ever before, are attaining access to dominant institutions' resources, yet (2) *all* African Americans are subject to the limitations of an anti-Black racial order leading to Blacks' life chances lagging those of Whites. Despite barriers all Blacks continue to face, the Black middle class and Black elites have a demonstrably better quality of life when compared to Blacks who are poor.

## Theory Contributions

### **Black Middle Class Bind: The “Weight” and “Limits” of Linked Fate**

Michael Dawson’s concept of “linked fate” is grounded in Blacks’ belief that their personal life chances are virtually one and the same with the fate of Blacks as a group (1994:10). As a political scientist, Dawson focuses on the extent to which Black solidarity affects the Black electorate—their policy priorities and party affiliation, for instance. I use his concept of “linked fate” to show how middle class Blacks’ bearing disproportionate responsibility for low-income Blacks creates mechanisms undermining middle class Blacks’ socio-economic status. I call this “the weight of linked fate.”

While certain state distribution schemes account for local poverty levels and revenue generation capacity, they do not come close to fully compensating for increased local jurisdiction public service demand from high-needs residents—made especially severe through racial residential segregation and neoliberal policies. Consequently, middle class Whites’ socio-economic status is usually *buttressed* by local government, while middle class Blacks’ is *eroded*.

But within the Black middle class, there is variation in household financial stability. Some advantaged Blacks take steps to create social, geographic, and financial distance between themselves and those less affluent. I label social processes through which middle class Blacks seek to create social, geographic, and financial distance between themselves and less advantaged Blacks the “limits of linked fate.” That is, some affluent African Americans employ strategies to realize returns to their class status in ways in tension with racial solidarity. Such strategies have been most pronounced with regard to public schools.

The primary contemporary instance of class-tension concerning schools occurs when some middle class Black parents opt out of public schools and into private. Many are concerned about academic rigor and their children's exposure to the "wrong crowd." This strategy has limited efficacy, however, not least because it is expensive. Unlike most middle class Whites who acquire a "package deal" of a quality home, neighborhood, and school, middle class Blacks who opt for private school pay for schools twice, eroding their often already fragile household resource base (Rhodes and Warkentien 2017)<sup>18</sup>.

The Black middle class' constrained schooling choiceset reflects Whites' continued stigmatization of Blacks and Black spaces, irrespective of Blacks' class status, the historical and contemporary consequences of which require government investment in Black communities at the scale of tens of billions of dollars to make them whole from past harm and to establish processes for current and future flourishing, including commitment to public school funding equity untethered from class or race hierarchies and students' place of residence. Therefore while some advantaged Blacks may in some instances seek to assert social distance in their conception of racial solidarity, in the final analysis, from the perspective of accessing dominant institutions' resources, affluent Blacks have few pathways through which to escape and do not get far when they do (Chetty, et al. 2018).

### **How the Black Middle Class Subsidizes the White Middle Class**

**"As a first-time homeowner now, in the county in Greenbelt, Maryland, part of what made us decide to live here was price point. The county has been rising faster in terms of the number of persons excuse me, rising faster in terms of the percent growth of housing purchases relative to neighboring counties and municipalities in D.C. Even since it's rising, even though that percentage is rising, there's still the price points are still less than those that you see in other areas. They've always been**

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<sup>18</sup> Notwithstanding Black middle class parents' efforts, it is unclear whether non-neighborhood schools lead to better academic achievement outcomes for their children (Rouse and Barrow 2008).

**less. Prince George's County has been sort of the bang for the buck, but sort of at the expense of folks who have darker skin [my emphasis added]. That's been something that we've been trying to, I'd say, move past and develop our way out of and just starting to see I think the fruit of that labor."**

— Middle class Prince George's County resident, man, 30s

Because economically advantaged African Americans in PGC absorb negative regional development externalities, they *insulate* Whites from managing their share of development costs. Black middle class neighborhoods—themselves already more socio-economically heterogenous and proximate to low-income neighborhoods than White middle class communities—serve the role of *buffer* between poor people, particularly low-income Blacks and Latinos, and affluent White communities. Fairfax and Montgomery Counties, for instance, are compelled to support fewer low-income residents' needs, leaving them with more resources to devote to high-income residents' interests. Because they do this successfully, demand for housing and commercial property increases in these counties, which raises property values, and in turn those counties' tax revenue streams and their residents' accumulated wealth.

Prince George's County, in contrast, due to inadequate revenue to meet county services demand, thins budget allocations for vital public goods and services, leading to less robust demand for PGC residential and commercial properties. The vicious cycle PGC finds itself in is the complement to the virtuous cycle neighboring counties experience. PGC bears what I call a "relative regional burden" of development. Or, in the words of the resident quoted above, "Prince George's County has been sort of the bang for the buck, but sort of at the expense of folks who have darker skin."

## **Future Research Directions and Imperatives**

My research shows the importance of examining multiple levels of structure and social processes *simultaneously*—household, neighborhood, local jurisdiction, region, state, and nation—to investigate their interdependencies. And these levels of social structure must be paired with other aspects of social differentiation constitutive of dynamics mediating U.S. residents’ life chances, including people’s ability to activate resources meted out by interlocking levels of government and to find living-wage jobs in a market increasingly conferring greater returns to a college education (Kalleberg 2013). Also important is ethno-racial positioning and immigration status (Abrajano and Hajnal 2015), in a society increasingly diverse in this regard, yet with Whites still the dominant group, and likely to continue to be so because of their inordinate wealth and political power (Bonilla-Silva 2010)—even as the country moves toward becoming “majority minority” by the mid twenty first century (Frey 2014 ).

Through such research on intersecting dimensions of inequality, we identify the mechanisms through which market and government actors leverage legacy inequality to create contemporary forms. For instance, we uncover how market actors in particular use uneven household and local jurisdiction income and wealth to advance corporate interests—such as, pressuring local government for tax abatements. Furthermore, because market actors privilege White people and majority White spaces, their decisions about where to invest and what to invest in often bolster their advantage.

Blacks have never been made whole from dominant institutions’ exclusive and extractive practices. Hence, requiring Blacks to use markets, and other processes not designed to realize equitable resource distribution, to meet their basic needs is at best



socio-historically ill-informed and at worst a strategy to evade reckoning with how contemporary social processes continue to create pathways for Whites' disproportionate wealth accumulation—and often at Blacks' expense. Social scientists should trace these “evasions” to show how markets and governments remain complicit in maintaining racism through facially non-racist practices. The racialized fallout of the Great Recession is a case in point. In addition, how household level distress shapes local government capacity is increasingly important to understand, given national trends in urban and suburban demographic shifts—characterized broadly by Whites increasingly moving back to cities and minorities, including immigrant groups, increasingly moving out to suburbs (Frey 2014, Frey 2011).

Among middle class African Americans, not only is their geographic concentration shifting from cities to suburbs, they are increasingly moving back to southern metropolitan areas in what researchers call a “Reverse Great Migration” (Frey 2014). Blacks moving south are disproportionately middle class, yet remain the most segregated racial group (Alba and Nee 2003, Frey 2018). Another salient ethno-racial social process is the increasing presence of immigrants in suburbs. Whereas throughout most of the twentieth century immigrants usually started their United States tenure in cities' ethnic enclaves, with only the most advantaged immigrants moving to suburbs, today more immigrants start out in suburbs and they have a wide range of socio-economic statuses. Many of the social patterns I found in the D.C. region may be present in others with similar racial, ethnic, immigrant, and class compositions, such as metropolitan areas surrounding Atlanta, Georgia; Charlotte, North Carolina; and Houston, Texas.

While recent gentrification research shows most high-poverty urban areas do not gentrify, those that do usually develop costs of living prohibitive to low-income households (Richardson, Mitchell, and Franco 2019). And these vulnerable households can likely find affordable living in Black middle class areas—the outskirts of cities and the inner-rings of suburbs—because such neighborhoods are more financially accessible than majority-White areas. Black neighborhoods with comparative advantages, such as those close to mass transit, are the most apt to gentrify.

In some jurisdictions currently majority-White, decisionmakers have erected additional hurdles—for example, restrictive zoning—to reinforce the barrier of high living costs in effort to make it more difficult for minorities to move into their neighborhoods (Johnson 2002). Thus, quantitative researchers, using U.S. Census and other national datasets, should investigate how the “relative regional burden” of gentrification and other forms of economic development is shared among racial and ethnic groups in metropolitan areas. This nexus of household and local level inequity is vastly understudied as a conduit through which inequality is “laundered” as benign when, it is potentially a malignancy plaguing already vulnerable communities—rendering them “sinks” striving to fight their way out of “vicious cycles,” as in the case of Prince George’s County.

### **“Black Counterpublic”: From Policy Reform to Radical Change**

#### **Black Political Imagination: Theoretical Frameworks and Trends in Thought**

Michael Dawson, in *Black Visions* argues African Americans’ political positions have historically been debated in “the black public sphere” or “the black counterpublic” (2001:23). The Black counterpublic is discursive space sustained through Black-

controlled institutions, most notably churches, media, and civic organizations. African Americans' political thought developed in dialectical fashion, through interaction between their "semi-autonomous" Black community—owing to Blacks' geographic, economic, social, and political marginalization within White-dominated American society—and political debates occurring elsewhere in the United States (2001:24).

Dawson contends six ideologies characterize variation in Black political thought from the Slave Era to the present, with multiple guiding frameworks co-existing in a given period.<sup>19</sup> Ideologies empower African Americans to interpret their relationship with government, as well as with other racial and ethnic groups in the United States. Such schemas also help Blacks to understand their social location in U.S. society—who their allies and enemies are and the extent to which Blacks' political interests are likely to be met by separating themselves from Whites (or other ethno-racial groups). In addition, Black ideologies provide analytical scaffolding for evaluating the Black community's stance on 'American Liberal Ideology' and capitalism (12). Evaluating capitalism's benefits and costs is increasingly imperative after decades of across-the-board government divestment in the provision of public goods and services, alongside expanding government deference to and reliance on markets.

The intersection of government retreat from support of public goods and services provision and profound racial inequities was brought into dire relief with Hurricane Katrina. During this 2005 natural disaster, thousands of Blacks were flooded out of their homes after government-managed levies failed to hold back flood waters from their

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<sup>19</sup> Dawson's six ideologies are: radical egalitarian, disillusioned liberal, black Marxist, black nationalist, black feminist, and black conservative (2001:14).

neighborhoods (Woods 2009). Federal and state government responses immediately after the disaster struck, as well as in the ensuing months and years afterward, revealed how U.S. resource distribution continues to be highly racialized, as Blacks were not afforded adequate government support to endure and rebound from Katrina.

Dawson contends that even with the election of the first Black President, Barack Obama in 2008, Black politics now, relative to the Modern Civil Rights Movement, is “weak.” But prior to Obama’s election, in the wake of Katrina’s floodwaters, a new generation of Black activists emerged. Focusing events in addition to Katrina included police shootings of unarmed Black men and women (Dawson 2011:162). The Black Lives Matter Movement (BLM) came to most Americans’ attention after the African American unarmed Black man Michael Brown was killed by police in August 2014 (Lowery 2017). BLM is explicitly “intersectional,” noting Blacks’ experience of oppression varies, based on their class, gender, and sexual orientation, among other identities (BLM website 2018). While acknowledging the multiple social locations Blacks simultaneously occupy, that organizers choose to call the movement “Black Lives Matter” indicates a decidedly “linked fate” orientation to their politics—that notwithstanding their other identities “Blackness” remains the most socially significant in determining key aspects of Blacks’ life chances, such as how they are likely to be treated by law enforcement. BLM is also led by college-educated activists, showing how access to educational and employment resources facilitate movements’ ability to organize and sustain themselves. The BLM website states: “#BlackLivesMatter is working for a world where Black lives are no longer systematically and intentionally targeted for demise...”.

Debate about how best to support Blacks' existential safety engendered by BLM is constitutive of a history of Black discourse about the most effective ways to realize the goals of the U.S. Black Liberation Struggle—African Americans' equitable access to dominant institutions' resources and redress for centuries of exclusion and extraction practices sponsored or condoned by the U.S. government. Underscoring the importance of direct action to expand access to dominant institutions' resources, political scientist Daniel Gillion (2013) shows at the federal level Congress, the President, and the Supreme Court make substantial policy shifts accommodating minority groups' interests when those groups engage in sustained, organized protest.

### **Black Political Imagination: From Respecting the Game to Changing the Game**

Below I highlight my study's major findings as instances of PGC officials "playing by the rules"—that is, adapting to extant government and market opportunities and constraints—without seeking significant change to the *terms by which* the game is played—what I call "respecting the game." Then I offer policy and other social change recommendations that would potentially significantly improve Blacks' quality of life—policies to "change the game." I appreciate local leaders' primary responsibility, including those in PGC, is to the people who elected them. At the same time, I offer "conversation starters" for "zooming out" to explore the range of what comprehensive social change might include, potentially lifting constraints local leaders manage.

#### *Case of Disrespect #1: Market Institutions and Actors Prey upon PGC's Black Residents*

*How PGC Respects the Game:* During the Great Recession, officials made cuts to public goods and services to meet rating agency requirements for a AAA bond rating,

even as they experienced shortfalls due to racially discriminatory actions that led to Blacks having a disproportionately high foreclosure rate. Furthermore, rating agencies were complicit in supporting financial sector practices leading to the foreclosure crisis.

*How PGC Could Change the Game:* The county could have resisted being held to the same rules as Whites when their residents were still recovering from financial industry actors' predation. This might have included county and state officials opening a formal inquiry into the issue to draw media attention and from there determining the extent to which bond holders were culpable and/or benefited from "bad actor" activity with regard to the foreclosure crisis. To the extent that bond holders gained, the county could have refused to pay that amount of the bonds. PGC officials might also have sought to coordinate efforts with other hard-hit U.S. locales to build a national case for more federal intervention in financial market practices. Lastly, Prince George's leaders might have coupled federal government petitioning with protests in areas where financial industry executives spend time to demand industry pay for community-level foreclosure harms.

*Case of Disrespect #2: Federal and State Governments Chronically Underfund Public Goods and Services Blacks Receive*

*How PGC Respects the Game:* PGC leaders make tradeoffs between vital public goods and services and thus severely underserve residents who contend with both the Black collective inheritance of government underfunding the services they receive, as well as direct hardship themselves if they are working class or poor, and responsibility for the working class and poor if they are middle class or higher socio-economic status.

*How PGC Could Change the Game:* the county could issue a report pinpointing historical and ongoing inequality and petition federal and state governments and corporations for redress and the development of more equitable political and economic arrangements going forward. For instance, the county could sue the state for decades of under-resourcing Black majority K-12 schools during the Jim Crow Era. Maryland’s historically Black colleges and universities (HBCUs) are doing this. The case is currently in court-ordered mediation (Seltzer 2019).

*Case of Disrespect #3: PGC is the “Sink” for D.C. Region Gentrification Effects*

*How PGC Respects the Game:* Prince George’s officials focus on private-investment led development. County officials want to make PGC more appealing to middle and high income residents—that is, make the county more akin to its neighbors.

*How PGC Could Change the Game:* Advocate for regional resource distribution and other measures to ameliorate the negative consequences of regional fragmentation, the origins and continuation of which are significantly race and class inflected. In particular, PGC elected officials, in coordination with D.C. region colleagues, should work toward tax levies to support the region’s economically distressed populations. A regional tax, alongside a regional minimum wage, could be designed to support low-income households to ensure their basic needs are met, regardless of where they live—thus attenuating the burden borne by the least wealthy locales, where the region’s poor tend to cluster because those areas are the most affordable. Metropolitan Washington Council of Governments (CoG), the primary D.C. area body coordinating regional activities and through which local jurisdiction leaders meet regularly, has identified “social equity” as a concern in its Region Forward planning priorities (Metropolitan

Washington Council of Governments 2018). Pursuing a regional minimum wage and regional tax would make this commitment concrete.

Wealthier counties' decisionmakers may be willing to participate in such a program because their middle class residents depend on the labor of low-income workers to support their lifestyle. For instance, childcare workers and people who work in the food industry, people who often make close to the minimum wage, are critical to middle class working families' daily routines. When low-income workers experience financial and other forms of instability, that has an impact on their productivity, which in turn threatens the middle class.' Given constraints of the federal system, each state could pass taxes designated for funding metropolitan areas within their boundaries. Maryland and Virginia would fund their own program, alongside D.C., and then use an established institution, such as CoG, to coordinate funding distribution.

#### *Policies and Political Activities Oriented Toward Race and Class Equity*

*Policy #1: Increase State Funding to Support Local Governments.* Local leaders, with few (short-term) alternatives, tend to compete with each other for direct private investment and state funding transfers. Such competition often leads to tepid, if any, increases in public well being, especially among historically marginalized groups. Cooperation is an alternative to competition, an agenda local leaders could negotiate among themselves and take to their respective state houses and governors to make the case for increased state support to local governments for public goods and services provision. As a society—voters particularly—need to *empower leaders* to do this.

Concomitant grassroots and elected official-driven energy devoted to public education regarding the vital role local and state government play or could play in



providing public goods and services equitably could increase public receptiveness toward more robust government. Public education in this vein might highlight that governments, unlike private entities, are: (1) focused on public wellbeing, not profit maximization; (2) accountable to an electorate, rather than to shareholders; and (3) capable of coordinating the movement of resources between other governments and across industries in ways individual companies cannot. Full-throated appeal for increased government authority and capacity needs to be coupled with a commitment to increase tax rates for both households and corporations—more on raising taxes below.

*Policy #2: The Case for Higher Taxes.* Since the 1980s, all levels of government have enacted significant personal and corporate tax cuts, decreasing government capacity to provide public goods and services (with the exception of law enforcement and military spending). Consequently, there is less money in government coffers for social programs (Harvey 2007). When enacting tax increases, government officials should not only seek to raise revenue, but to create mechanisms protecting public interests, particularly those of groups historically harmed, such as racial and ethnic minorities. Officials should also consider industries' histories of exclusion, extraction, and pollution, and their ongoing potential to deliver public benefit and cost. Taxes can force firms to account for the full cost of business. The Green New Deal progressive Democrats introduced in the U.S. Congress in January 2019 would significantly raise corporate and individual taxes, indicating some federal officials are open to reversing neoliberal policies (Rizzo 2019).

*Policy #3: Hold Financial Actors Accountable for Household and Community-Level Harms.* The Great Recession did not just harm families; it dashed the hopes of entire communities. Yet neither families nor communities have been made whole by

market bad actors. While the federal government back stopped toxic assets to prevent financial industry implosion, it did comparatively little to support families and neighborhoods. The American Recovery and Reinvestment Act of 2009 (or “stimulus”)—an \$800 billion federal investment in a host of programs—from physical infrastructure, to energy, to education—did not target communities that endured high foreclosure rates (Congressional Budget Office 2009).

The Consumer Financial Protection Bureau (CFPB) has authority to protect consumers from “unfair, deceptive, and abusive practices,” and the Dodd-Frank Wall Street Reform and Consumer Protection Act of 2010, which created CFPB, instituted new financial regulations to decrease the likelihood and severity of future financial industry crises. But neither CFPB nor Dodd-Frank make explicit whether, and if so, how industry actors are responsible for household and community level fallout from firms’ unscrupulous, if not illegal, actions (Consumer Financial Protection Bureau 2018, United States Securities and Exchange Commission 2018). For instance, at minimum, banks ought to pay local property taxes on the foreclosed homes they hold. They should also support communities’ social services programs, as foreclosure often precipitates families’ economic downward mobility, leading many to seek government aid, including unemployment benefits and food security assistance, such as the Supplemental Nutritional Assistance Program (or “food stamps”). Companies involved in a crisis should augment programs proportional to the damage they caused. With regard to the Great Recession, for example, the federal government “loan” financial industry firms received through the Toxic Assets Relief Program could have been conditioned on industry commitment to pay for government social service outlays.

*Policy #4: Create a Black Equity Fund.* Black people have experienced centuries of racist government and market practices. In the past 10 years, mainstream policy officials and public intellectuals have increasingly discussed “reparations” for harms. Prominent Black thinker TaNehisi Coates in 2014 authored the “Case for Reparations.” It was published in *The Atlantic*, a mainstream, if left leaning, publication, fomenting national debate on the topic (Coates 2014). More recently, Democratic Party candidates seeking the party’s nomination for the 2020 Presidential election have indicated support for reparations or other forms of systematic redress for Blacks (Herndon 2019). Current reparations discussions indicate more people recognize African Americans are uniquely positioned in the United States, warranting their receipt of targeted government investments.

The political actions discussed above are potential short-term and medium-term strategies for improving quality of life in the United States, particularly for people of African descent. But long-term, deep-seated social change requires reckoning with the past and a vastly more visionary plan for the future.

### **Final Thoughts: Envisioning Racial and Economic Justice in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century**

If there is no struggle, there is no progress. Those who profess to favor freedom, and yet depreciate agitation, are men who want crops without plowing up the ground. They want rain without thunder and lightning. They want the ocean without the awful roar of its many waters. This struggle may be a moral one; or it may be a physical one; or it may be both moral and physical; but it must be a struggle. Power concedes nothing without a demand. It never did and it never will.

— **Frederick Douglass**, “West India Emancipation Speech” at Canandaigua, New York, 1857

What happens to a dream deferred?

Does it dry up  
like a raisin in the sun?  
Or fester like a sore—  
And then run?  
Does it stink like rotten meat?

Or crust and sugar over—  
like a syrupy sweet?

Maybe it just sags  
like a heavy load.

*Or does it explode?*

— **Langston Hughes**, “Harlem,” 1951

“[We must seek after that] “larger freedom that encompasses all of mankind”  
— **Ella Baker**, as quoted in *Ella Baker and the Black Freedom Movement: a Radical Visionary* (2003)

If we—and now I mean the relatively conscious whites and the relatively conscious blacks, who must, like lovers, insist on, or create, the consciousness of the others—do not falter in our duty now, we may be able, handful that we are, to end the racial nightmare, and achieve our country and change the history of the world. If we do not dare everything, the fulfillment of that prophesy, re-created from the Bible in song by a slave, is upon us: God gave Noah the rainbow sign, no more water, the fire next time.”

— **James Baldwin**, *The Fire Next Time*, 1962

How do we imagine and struggle for a democracy that does not spawn forms of terror, that does not spawn war, that does not need enemies for its sustenance?

— **Angela Davis**, *The Meaning of Freedom and Other Difficult Dialogues*, 2012

African descendant Americans today pursue just inclusion in United States society as members of a centuries-long lineage of Africans doing the same across the Americas and Caribbean. Black intellectuals, such as those quoted above, have been calling on European descendant Americans to eradicate—root and branch—all social processes denying African people’s full humanity and citizenship rights. Africans in America seek forms of justice atoning for how their “unfreedom” has been the bedrock of European Americans’ freedom (Davis 2012). Blacks have wrestled among themselves and with other Americans, particularly White Americans controlling dominant institutions, about what “democracy”—self government recognizing the inviolable rights of all people—means. That is, who is affirmed as a member of the polity—persons who have standing the state recognizes, and once so recognized, can make demands on the state and expect to be treated justly? What social processes must be established,

maintained, and continually re-negotiated to push toward equitable social arrangements in reality, rather than mere promises scrolled on parchment, promises applicable to some, but not to others? How are people made whole after centuries of exploitation and exclusion? And alongside contemplating democracy's meaning and agitating against its cramped interpretations, there must be a re-evaluation of the material and symbolic value exchange systems. As Davis, quoted in the epigraph, queries: How do we "imagine" and "struggle" for a freedom we have never seen?

Notwithstanding heterogeneity in ideological approach and emphasis, Black thinkers have generally stood in unity regarding an *a priori*—before direct experience—commitment to an expansive circle of humanity. This issue is particularly acute for African descendant people because U.S. Slave Codes Whites instituted in the seventeenth century denied Blacks' humanity, deeming them and their progeny chattel.

Douglass, Hughes, Baker, Baldwin, and Davis, writing at different points over the course of the past couple centuries, as shown in the quotes opening this section, echo each other, as if in the call and response of a Negro Spiritual. They fervently resist the negation of African descendant people's humanity and champion the virtues of true democracy: "struggle," "dream," "larger freedom," "fire," "imagine." Their perspectives reflect Du Bois's "radical democracy," which seeks forms of governance overcoming race and class oppression (Marable 1985:47). Ella Baker's radical democracy is "participatory democracy," as demonstrated in her work with the Student Non-Violent Coordinating Committee and their Freedom Schools during The Modern Civil Rights Movement. Participatory democracy entails building relationships and marshaling material and organizational resources for broad grassroots campaigns within and across

communities and centered on mutually beneficial political priorities—in the case of Freedom Schools, an education both to build skills for economic survival and for active participation in government and civil society negotiations about how we ought to live and the means we will use to attain our goals.

Black luminaries do not so much advocate a specific set of social arrangements as much as they articulate values to use as we determine what to pursue, the history to account for, and the darker shadows of violence in our repertoire of behavior we must guard against. They confer intellectual light and moral sustenance, modeling how to see beyond the veils separating us, beckoning us to stand shoulder to shoulder, and work out through praxis—action informed by principle—the components of our Promised Land, a place where the circle of human concern is wide enough to embrace us all.

## **APPENDIX 1: Demographics of 58 PGC Leader and Resident Respondents**

### **30 Leaders**

- All PGC Council members
- Majority of School board members
- Former and current representatives to Congress
- Former and current representatives to Maryland legislature
- Business, civic, and religious leaders

### **28 Residents**

**Race:** All are African American

#### **Age (in years)**

- 25-40 = 9 people
- 41-60 = 10 people
- 61+ = 9 people

#### **Gender**

- 20 women
- 8 men

#### **Education level**

- Bachelor's degree or more = 18 people
- Less than bachelor's = 10 people

#### **Homeowner/renter**

- Owners = 20 people
- Renters = 8 people

#### **Income (in thousands)**

- \$41-60 = 3 people
- \$61-80 = 5 people
- \$81-100 = 5 people
- \$100+ = 15 people

## **APPENDIX 2: Respondent Interview Guides**

### **DEMOGRAPHICS**

Age

Race

Income (will hand respondents a large index card with income categories and ask them to point to the income category that best approximates their family's household income on their last tax return: less than \$25,000; \$25,001-\$35,000...increasing in \$10,000 increments until \$200,000, after which it will say \$200,001 and above)

Occupation

Education level

Length of time in Prince George's County

Have you always lived this location? (If not, ask where else they have lived)

Homeowner/renter

Number of people who live in the household (if there are children, ask whether the children attend public school in Prince George's)

### **QUESTIONS FOR ALL RESPONDENTS**

#### **Identity**

Walk me through a typical weekday in your life. How about a typical weekend day?  
(Probe for where they shop, recreate, etc.)

When you have free time, what do you enjoy doing? Paint me a picture of the sorts of people you hang out with when you (INSERT WHAT THEY DO)?

How do you identify racially (will ask this question twice because will ask demographic questions at the end of the interview)? When you (INSERT WHAT THEY DO WITH THEIR FREE TIME), what's your rough estimate of the percentage of people who are (INSERT RACIAL/ETHNIC CATEGORY)? What about other racial and ethnic groups? Does the racial and ethnic composition matter to you?

What does it mean to you to be "Black/African American" (or whatever racial or ethnic group they state)?



How close do you feel to Black people, to White people, to Latinos, to Asians?

How does race affect your life?

Describe your current class background. Is this the same or different from your class background when you were growing up? (If upwardly or downwardly mobile, what it's been like for you go from X to Y?)

Do you think there are political issues that pertain only to Black people (or whatever racial/ethnic group to which they claim to belong)? Can you give me some examples? What do you think drives this shared interest?

Do these issues overlap with issues other racial and ethnic groups, class groups, or other groups of Americans face?

### **Potential Sites of Class Conflict**

(If identify as Black) What do you think is the same and what do you think is different about being Black and middle-class versus Black and poor?

What do you like about living in Prince George's County?

What would you like to see improve? What do you think would need to change for this to happen?

If you were to describe Prince George's to a stranger, what would you say?

### **QUESTIONS FOR RESPONDENT SUBGROUPS**

#### **Elected Officials**

What motivated you to run for (INSERT CURRENT POSITION)? How long have you been in office? Have you held other elected positions? (If so, what positions, for how long did you serve?)

What do you like most about your job? Like least?

Describe your constituents. Is it easier to meet the needs of some groups as opposed to others? What do you think accounts for that?

Tell me about a bill/issue where you had trouble deciding how to vote. What made that decision hard? What ultimately determined how you voted?

What keeps you up at night/what worries you most about being an (INSERT NAME OF OFFICE)?

When big changes happen in Prince George's, who are the big players? Where do you fit in?

Can you walk me through the process of how a bill you sponsored became law? Start with the initial germ of the idea all the way to the bill being signed.

What are your top three goals this term? Who will likely be your allies on issue X, Y, Z? Who do you expect to oppose you on issue X, Y, and Z? How do you plan to overcome challenges?

What are your thoughts about (WILL NAME POLICY ISSUES FACING THE COUNCIL, such as grant funds distributed from the soon-to-open MGM casino at National Harbor)?

### **Community Leaders**

What do you like most about your job? Like least?

Describe your group members/clients/constituents. Is it easier to meet the needs of some groups as opposed to others? What do you think accounts for that?

What is your organization's mission? What challenges do you face in achieving it? What resources do you use to meet your mission?

What are the funding sources for [INSERT NAME OF ORGANIZATION]?

Sometimes people say their personal goals for an organization differ from the official mission of the organization, and sometimes people say there is perfect alignment, and some say it depends on the issue. What's the case for you—do you have personal goals for the organization that differ from the organization's mission?

Can you walk me through an example of how your organization handled a recent contentious issue involving your organization and another organization and/or your organization and Prince George's County? How was the issue resolved? Were you satisfied with the outcome?

What are you most proud of your organization for? What would your organization need to reach its full potential?

## **Residents**

What drew you to Prince George's County?

Looking back on what you expected to experience and what you've actually experienced, what has surprised you about living in Prince George's?

What you like most about living here? Like least?

What you think of the (INSERT ISSUES, e.g., the schools, police, roads, etc.)

Tell me about your neighbors. How often do you interact with them? What do you do with them?

What streets do you consider to be part of your neighborhood?

Are there parts of Prince George's that you won't go? What makes those places off limits for you?

If you were meeting with your Prince George's Council member right now, what would you tell him/her about your experience in Prince George's? Are there any actions you would request that they take?

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