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Integration without Assimilation: Black Social Life in a Diverse Suburb

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Integration without Assimilation: Black Social Life in a Diverse Suburb

A dissertation submitted to the
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by

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The face of cities and suburbs has changed. The majority of Americans now live in suburbs and today’s suburbs are becoming more racially diverse than ever before. However, most research on this topic is limited to quantitative research designs that cannot fully ascertain the quality of race relations in this changing landscape. My research uses an ethnographic approach to investigate social life in one racially diverse suburb of Cleveland, OH: Shaker Heights. Specifically, I investigate how African Americans who occupy this space—as residents, employees, and visitors—think about, describe, and participate in social life in a diverse suburb.

After two years of ethnographic fieldwork, I conclude that, although Shaker Heights is statistically integrated, the residential spaces and social lives of black adults do not reflect this demographic reality. Moreover, black adults interpret the rare, discrete instances where racial diversity is promoted as inauthentic. Finally, my research explores connections and commonalities among the black adults living in the segregated sections of Shaker Heights. This information will help scholars better understand dynamics of race relations in a neighborhood context that is both seldom explored and growing in demographic importance.
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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS AND DEDICATION

I thank the employees, residents, and visitors of Shaker Heights whose participation and support made this study possible. Although the naming convention I use may obfuscate your identity, I hope that you can still hear your voice when you read these pages. I hope that my reporting captures your reality. I owe special thanks to community members in the Moreland neighborhood for their kindness and time. From the first event I attended to the last one, I always felt welcome and included as a neighbor. I thank the helpful staff at Shaker Heights library for allowing me to peruse the local history archives and for providing facilities and private space for conducting interviews. Thanks to the many members of the Shaker Heights business community who met me for coffee or welcomed me into their homes. I also thank the staff and patrons at the black-owned and black-run businesses in Shaker for their willingness to speak with me about their experiences.

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I dedicate this dissertation to my grandmother, Ramona Lynn Cyrus Grigsby. In 2012, when I was a graduating Master’s student, my grandma read my entire thesis. I cannot remember her being more proud. Today, she is living with a severe form of vascular dementia. She began declining the year I moved to Shaker Heights to conduct research and today lives in one of the community’s memory care facilities. Luckily, I was able to visit with my grandma frequently during the research process. Although she will be unable to read this doctoral thesis, she is my biggest fan. This is for her.
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CHAPTER 1: INSIDE SHAKER HEIGHTS

They wanted diversity here in Shaker years and years ago, but I think they stuck their foot in their mouth. They spoke too soon because they didn’t know that the economy was going to change and that black people were going to earn more money and be able to afford to live in Shaker. —Clarence

On a snowy Friday in November of 2016, I made plans to meet two friends at a bar in Shaker Heights, Ohio, called Touch of Italy. I met up with Patrick, late thirties, who had been living at his parents’ house in Shaker for the last month. His parents have lived in the same house since Patrick was a child. He has not lived in “Shaker” since he left for college, but he, his wife, and his young daughter are home while they wait to relocate to Washington, DC for work. We also met Will, who is Patrick’s best friend and former college roommate. Will lives in a suburb outside of Shaker, to the southeast of Cleveland. Will is the one that suggested—or a group text message—that we meet at Touch of Italy. I texted Will “there are no bars in Shaker” and he seemed surprised. Will told me that whenever he visits Shaker, Touch of Italy is usually the place he hangs out.

Touch of Italy Bar and Grille sits on Chagrin Boulevard across the street from the Lee-Chagrin shopping plaza in the heart of Shaker Heights. There is a parking lot in the rear of the building. The parking lot was mostly full at 9:00 p.m.—four open spaces of about 40 total. Stores in the Shaker plaza shut down at nine o’clock each night so the parking lot across the street was mostly vacant. I arrived at Touch of Italy at nine and sat in my car for several minutes waiting for Patrick and Will to arrive. I noticed an older Asian man walking to his car and a black couple around my age walking into the bar. The Asian man’s car was parked next to me on my left and on my right was a black woman in her fifties. The Asian man drove a Ford Taurus and the black
woman drove a Chrysler Sebring. With the exception of the one Asian man, all of the people that I saw in the parking lot were black.

I was eager to get inside to see the layout of this place, to get a better idea of the patrons that are in there and how they were using the space.¹ I called Patrick to tell him I arrived. He stepped outside to smoke a cigar. He dapped me up and I asked him “how is it?” He said, “it’s real ‘hood in there. It’s a different crowd.” Patrick has been going to this bar off and on since he was in college in the late 1990s to the early 2000s. Will pulled up as we were talking and we all went inside. When we walked in there was hip-hop music playing at a volume comfortable for speaking. The bar was full and there was limited standing room. There were about 30 people in the bar. Women slightly outnumbered the men. As far as age, I guessed the range to be between 30 and 60. It seems like a bar for a slightly older or mature crowd. I did not see anyone who looked like they could be college-age. Everyone at the bar was black.

Patrick ran into a few old Shaker classmates and Will seemed to know a handful of people. One of them, Franklin, worked at Touch as the general manager. Franklin was super cool. He bought us a round of drinks. Franklin is not a large man but he is solid—I found out later that he was a former football standout at Shaker Heights High School. I was so eager to connect with Franklin with hopes of landing an interview, but I did not want to seem overzealous. I chatted with the guys and did my best to find common threads between Franklin and me. After touching on topics ranging from college sports, marriage, and religion, the conversation slowly faded. Franklin was walking around tending to his guests, popping into the conversation in spurts. At one point, we lost track of Will. Patrick and I stepped outside to find him in the back chatting with Franklin. Apparently, Will and Franklin have known each other all

¹ Prior to this outing, I had not visited Touch of Italy. For one, I have a gluten allergy and do not often go to Italian restaurants. More importantly, however, I did not know there was a bar scene inside of Touch of Italy. Shaker does not host many sit-down restaurants and I did not expect this one to be a site of social activity.
their lives and it showed. Patrick and I listened quietly while they shared stories and reminisced about childhood. While the four of us stood outside, three couples came and left and each person spoke to Franklin. Someone yelled “hey Franklin!” from a car in the parking lot. We stayed outside chatting for maybe 20 minutes before parting ways for the night.

This night out occurred about five months (and two interviews) into my fieldwork in Shaker Heights. I initially moved to Shaker to study black people’s experiences with and perceptions of neighborhood diversity. I discovered early on that Shaker Heights, a suburb celebrated for its early history of racial diversity, has pockets of segregation. Specifically, I noticed that the lives of black residents and visitors seem to converge in spaces that are not statistically integrated or representative of Shaker’s overall demographic makeup. This convergence of black lives includes people from outside of Shaker—who come for a standard of service, treatment, and behavior that meets their expectations or preferences—as well as people like me—I live in Shaker Heights, but am more likely to visit Touch of Italy than the Country Club to socialize. These early observations prompted further research questions. Where do black people spend time in Shaker? What do black people think about the diversity or lack thereof in the neighborhood? I also wanted to know whether social interactions in a diverse suburb supports or disrupts the concept of a black neighborhood experience. I report the answers to these questions throughout this dissertation.

In the remaining pages of this introductory chapter, I provide the theoretical background for my work, highlighting the important knowns and unknowns of what I refer to as the black neighborhood experience. Next, I discuss the research questions guiding the project. Third, I

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2 I use diverse, rather than integrated, to emphasize the racial composition only, leaving open the potential that diversity may exist with or without social integration.
describe the field site, data, and methodological approach. Finally, I provide an outline for the remaining chapters.

**Why Study Black Social Life in a Racially Diverse Suburb?**

Sociologists have long studied the phenomenon of residential segregation—the sifting and sorting of people into different neighborhoods based on race or other ascribed or achieved characteristics (Massey and Denton 1993; Park et al. 1925; Reardon and Bischoff 2011). Residential segregation has been shown to be especially pernicious for Black Americans, who experience segregation at the highest rates on average (Charles 2003; Massey and Denton 1993; Wilson 1996). Historical segregation patterns, housing preferences, and racial discrimination have resulted in a uniquely American racial geography characterized by a concentration of poverty and joblessness in black neighborhoods, the clustering of middle-class black neighborhoods near poor ones, and the isolation of black neighborhoods near the inner-city.

Times are changing and two interrelated urban phenomena—gentrification and suburbanization—are continuing to sift and sort people in our nation’s cities. These contemporary trends, combined with a nationwide diversity explosion, have created two consequential residential outcomes: (1) the emergence of multiethnic neighborhoods in both cities and suburbs, and (2) the increasing share of minorities living in suburbs. Social scientists have paid attention to this growing residential diversity via qualitative studies of multiethnic neighborhoods (Burke 2012; Mayorga-Gallo 2014). Moreover, a number of quantitative studies of suburban diversity have appeared in the literature (Frey 2015; Kye 2018; Timberlake, Howell, and Staight 2011). Surprisingly, however, very little has been published on the perceptions of

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and the quality of life for blacks in neighborhoods that are both racially diverse and suburban—a residential type that is becoming more common across the nation.

My research takes a micro approach to investigate black people’s experiences of suburban diversity—focusing on Shaker Heights, a multiethnic suburb of Cleveland, Ohio. Shaker Heights is an ideal case study given its historical significance as an integrated suburb, but also for its representativeness as the kind of emergent multiethnic suburb described in demographic projections. Using ethnographic inquiry, I investigate how diversity is interpreted by black residents, and by black people who do not live in Shaker but spend a significant amount of time there, either as employees, visitors, or patrons. Specifically, I hope to understand how between- and within-group social interactions unfold in a “statistically integrated” (Mayorga-Gallo 2014) suburb and how they shape the perceptions and place-based experiences of African Americans.

I begin my inquiry from the vantage point that blacks in Shaker Heights occupy an especially elite\(^4\) status position in urban America. Shaker is the type of neighborhood that is often exalted in the black imagination as “most attractive” and that was historically difficult to find in segregated metropolitan areas.\(^5\) This is a relative distinction, of course—blacks in Shaker Heights are especially elite mostly when compared to other blacks in other neighborhood

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\(^4\) Many urban ethnographies gain scholarly attention and popular appeal because they examine one of the two poles of moral character—what Katz (2001) refers to as “especially low” and “especially elite.” Research on “especially low” black neighborhoods is predominant in the urban literature. However, my research—an ethnographic case study on the social life of blacks in a multiethnic, middle-class suburb—is warranted on the latter of these two grounds.

\(^5\) A popular trend in survey research indicates that racially integrated neighborhoods are considered the ideal, or the “most attractive,” neighborhood type for African Americans (Krysan 2002). These neighborhoods, with a high proportion of blacks plus diverse representation from other groups, are rare historically but are becoming more common as neighborhoods across the nation diversify—both as black families continue to suburbanize and as non-blacks return to city neighborhoods via processes of gentrification (Frey 2015).
contexts. For instance, survey research has shown that blacks consistently report an ideal of integrated living, yet the segregated landscape of most major cities proscribes the widespread attainment of this ideal. There is also an exaltation of suburban living in our society—suburban residence is symbolic of and empirically correlated with upward class mobility and “good living.” Blacks who live in and have access to non-segregated, middle-class suburban neighborhoods are largely ignored in the literature, perhaps because they are assumed to be (relatively) unexposed to the inequalities that fascinate most urban researchers.

Shaker Heights, then, represents a type of ideal for neighborhood integration and spatial mobility for Black Americans. It is logical to assume that the black people in Shaker have a better overall quality of life than blacks living in poorer, more racially segregated areas, and that they also experience less racial hostility and isolation than blacks in predominantly white, middle-class suburbs (Lacy 2007). Their diverse suburban neighborhood and their lives, it can be assumed, must diverge from the typical black neighborhood experience. However, this is only an assumption, and my research moves beyond assumption. I use an ethnographic case study design to address the gap in the literature on the black neighborhood experience. Specifically, I focus on how neighborhood diversity influences the lived experience of black people who occupy this somewhat atypical residential and social space.

6 This statement is a response to the following common critique: that whether researching the socially deviant (especially low) or the socially respectable (especially elite), there will be other groups who are lower or more elite than the subjects of study, depending on where the subjects is positioned socially (Katz 2001). Any individual or social group, all at once and at any given time, can be especially low, especially elite, and hopelessly mainstream depending on the point of comparison.

7 When asked to rank racial composition preferences of their ideal neighborhoods, most Americans choose a neighborhood with a slight majority of same-race neighbors (Krysan 2002). African Americans second-ranked ideal—to live in a racially diverse neighborhood—is seldom realized (Charles 2003).

The Black Neighborhood Experience

During the past century, urban sociologists have produced a comprehensive body of research on neighborhood race relations.\(^9\) I define race relations as *the way in which people feel about, behave toward, and are connected with members or communities of different racial groups*. After the Civil Rights Era, sociological research on neighborhood race relations shifted its gaze to focus on what I call the “black neighborhood experience,” by which I mean analyses of both the urban spaces where black people reside and the impacts of these spaces on residents’ daily lives and social interactions (Anderson 1990; Clark 1965; Liebow 1967; Wilson 1987). Macro-level changes in American society—including post-industrial urban decline and mass suburbanization during the 1960s and 1970s—had particularly damaging effects on the black community. Black Americans, who at the time were predominantly urban, became more segregated, more isolated, and increasingly poor (Wilson 1987). The sociology of black neighborhoods, with contributions from both critics and sympathizers, became a literature preoccupied with this post-industrial plight.

I propose shifting the analytic gaze, this time spatially, to observe black social life in the suburbs. A brief review of the evolution of black neighborhood research and a discussion of recent findings reveals that the social experiences of black suburbanites is understudied in the literature on neighborhood- and racial-inequality.\(^10\) I argue that understanding how black suburbanites in Shaker experience and perceive community social life will inform the literature

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\(^9\) The Chicago School, given its focus on human ecology, was the first to place race relations at the center of its research agenda (e.g. Liebow 1967; Park et al 1925). The Chicago School also emphasized the use of mixed-methods (including the ethnographic case study) to understand urban processes (see Emerson 2001, pgs. 9-17). Given these two impulses, as well as the high-status and geography of the University, the Chicago School was able to produce a body of literature on race and neighborhoods that still informs much of what we know (and think) contemporarily.

\(^10\) Recently, there have been several studies focusing on black youth and suburban schools (Lewis-McCoy 2014, 2017). In fact, the children in Shaker Heights’ school district were the focus of Ogbu’s (2003) book on the black achievement gap. To date, we know much less about interactions between and experiences of adults in suburbs like Shaker. See Lacy (2007) as one exception.
on residential diversity—how we understand it, how we practice it, and its overall significance in supporting *equitable community race relations*.\(^{11}\)

*Blacks living in segregated urban neighborhoods.* Twentieth century social science research has shown that the neighborhood context for the average Black American is markedly worse than that of other racial groups (Massey and Denton 1993; Wilson 1987, 1996). This research on African Americans living in the city (not suburbs), has contributed much to our understanding of the black neighborhood experience. The effort by sociologists to understand black neighborhoods, or blacks living in urban neighborhoods, has allowed us to gain detailed insight into how race and place shape life chances. First, we were able to understand and assess the situation of hypersegregated, poor urban communities thanks to our voluminous research on the subject; and, second, thanks to a reflexive and recent turn away from our focus on the urban underclass, we expanded our analytic scope beyond this subgroup to include the black middle-class (Haynes 2001; Lacy 2007; Pattillo-McCoy 1999).

What we know of the black neighborhood experience is mostly an account of the black urban (and more specifically poor, inner-city) experience. The research on blacks living in predominantly black urban neighborhoods largely focuses either on the social and economic experiences of the black urban poor (Anderson 1999; Goffman 2014; Harding; Sharkey 2013; Venkatesh 2006; Wilson 1996) or on the black middle class (Haynes 2004; Pattillo-McCoy 1999, 2005; Wilson 1987). In many ways, these two areas of inquiry represent the extreme poles of “privilege and peril” (Pattillo-McCoy 1999) that encompass what is known about black people’s experience with neighborhood inequality.

\(^{11}\) Expanding on the preceding definition, *equitable community race relations* refers to both equal representation and equal standing (*connections* to and *feelings* toward), and equal treatment of (*behavior* toward) members of different races within a community.
Some research on poor black neighborhoods has been focused on more deviant aspects of urban life—by documenting or focusing analytical effort on criminality, violence, teenage (and premarital) births, and male joblessness (Anderson 1999; Harding 2010; Goffman 2014; Venkatesh 2006). Other work has been more nuanced—as in Stack’s (1974) seminal work on network ties and family practices of the urban poor. The myriad research conclusions promote the narrative that black neighborhoods and the black people in them are disadvantaged, yet their social selves (and the web of social networks they weave) show signs of resilience. Given the litany of work on inner-city neighborhoods, this narrative precludes the possibility that blacks also have suburban social experiences—even if the iconic ghetto follows them there (Anderson 2012).

Although blacks who live in poor segregated urban neighborhoods are statistically in the minority and have been for some time, research on these neighborhoods prevails in the contemporary urban literature. A more recent, yet less predominant, line of research on the black middle class has added some much needed nuance and complexity to our understanding of the black neighborhood experience (Haynes 2001; Lacy 2004, 2007; Pattillo-McCoy 1999; Pattillo 2005). Although historically blacks as a group have been involuntarily segregated (Haynes and Hutchison 2008), today they are more upwardly mobile than ever and many are moving to less segregated neighborhoods (Frey 2011). The studies on the black middle class are some of the first to assess these trends. Relative to historical urban realities these trends look promising, but there is a need to learn more about black people living in integrated neighborhood contexts as well as a need to move, spatially, beyond research in city neighborhoods.

**Blacks living in integrated urban neighborhoods.** Given the steadily declining levels of segregation in the 21st century (Massey and Denton 1993; Frey 2011, 2015), there is ample

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12 Pattillo (2005) estimates that less than 20% of Blacks live in these neighborhoods.
reason to believe that racially integrated\textsuperscript{13} neighborhoods will become more common over time, even for African Americans. These changes are likely to affect the intensity and types of interaction between groups and within social networks (Brower 1996; Haynes and Hernandez 2016; Jacobs 1989; Putnam 2000). Cross-group interactions at the neighborhood-level can be conduits of network resources in the form of social and cultural capital (Florida 2003; Frazer et al. 2013; Hartman and Squires 2010; Jacobs 1989). Some research suggests that social contact in diverse spaces can create a buffer against racial prejudice (Anderson 2011; Grasmuck 2005; Oliver 2010), while other studies show some counties that experienced contemporary increases in racial diversity also score higher on indices of racial segregation (Pinto-Coelho and Zuberi 2015).

Given the nascence of rising neighborhood diversity (Frey 2015), there are some methodological limitations to what we know about social life in multiethnic spaces. Demographic forecasts confirm that neighborhood diversity is increasing nationwide, but we don’t know what this means for social life in diverse communities. Commenting on the limitations of quantitative research for understanding racial integration as an interactional measure, Ellen (1998) says “it is virtually impossible to consider social interaction in a study that extends to a large number of neighborhoods” (p. 29). Ellen goes on to say,

The two most stable types of neighborhoods are largely black and black and other, suggesting that whites avoid largely minority areas and that blacks and other minorities appear to be fairly comfortable sharing communities (emphasis added).

The inability of demographic and survey research (Krysan 2002) to explain these apparent levels of social avoidance (or interaction) creates a gap in the literature. There is an emerging body of qualitative research focusing on multiethnic urban spaces (Berrey 2015; Burke 2013; Grasmuck

\textsuperscript{13} Statistical integration occurs when the racial composition of a neighborhood is representative of the racial composition of its host county (Massey and Denton 1993). It does not necessarily denote a 50-50 (white-black) neighborhood.
However, the black experience has been peripheral in these analyses.\textsuperscript{14} The experience of African Americans living in diverse (and specifically suburban) neighborhoods represents a gap in the literature that needs to be filled to better understand the relationship between social proximity and race relations.

\textit{The black suburban experience}. Despite the persistence of residential segregation in our nation’s cities, and the academic debates surrounding them, a somewhat optimistic forecast abounds: neighborhood integration (or diversity) is increasing nationwide (Frey 2015). Across the nation, our metropolises are undergoing a wave of migration and the suburbs are experiencing a rapid “diversity explosion” (Frey 2015). Racial minorities began to suburbanize after the passage of the Fair Housing Act (1968), the Home Mortgage Disclosure Act (1975), and the Community Reinvestment Act (1977), which outlawed discrimination in housing and mortgage lending markets, and encouraged lending in low-income neighborhoods, respectively. Of course, this increase in minority suburbanization did not happen overnight. Asians and Latinos became majority suburban between 1980 and 2000, and by 2010 that the majority of Blacks lived in suburban neighborhoods (Logan and Alba 1993; Frey 2015). Nevertheless, the majority of Americans today, regardless of race, live in a suburban neighborhood.

Racial diversity used to be a residential rarity, but it is now becoming more of a norm even for blacks, and even in suburban neighborhoods. According to a Brooking’s “State of Metropolitan America” report of recent census trends (Frey 2011), many suburbs are growing faster than cities and this growth is being driven primarily by minority migration patterns. The rate of suburban migration for African Americans was higher than any other racial group in Cleveland, OH and 13 other metropolitan areas particularly including Atlanta and Memphis (Frey 2011, pp. 4-5). Even in metropolitan areas with lower proportion of black residents,

\textsuperscript{14} See Woldoff 2011 as one exception
suburbs are still rapidly diversifying.\textsuperscript{15} Researchers of neighborhood race relations may find useful insights from research on social life in what Frey calls “melting pot” suburbs—diverse suburbs with over 35% of non-white residents.

Given the history of suburbs as high status neighborhoods\textsuperscript{16} and the black preference for integration, the recent demographic trends may seem ideal. If more minorities than ever are living in and moving to the suburbs, it may be the case that the average neighborhood condition for blacks is improving. However, analogous to patterns of inequality found in city neighborhoods, research has found racial inequality to be prevalent in the suburban landscape (Charles 2003; Hanlon 2010; Haynes 2001; Kruse and Sugrue 2006; Massey and Denton 1993). Statistically, many suburbs remain racially homogenous or home to residents of predominantly one race—and dominant spatial assimilation models in sociology do not seem to delineate the black experience (Timberlake and Iceland 2007). Regardless, we should not ignore the fact that suburbs across the nation are becoming increasingly (statistically) integrated and, thus, research on suburban race relations is worthy of study.

Lacy’s (2004, 2007) qualitative work on black suburbanites stands out as one example of the type of research needed in urban sociology given the recent diversity explosion in U.S. suburbs. From 1997-1998, Lacy (2007) interviewed black residents living in Prince George’s and Fairfax—suburban counties of Washington, DC. Lacy explored the black experience, specifically social integration, in three neighborhood contexts that sociologists seldom study—one predominantly white and two predominantly black middle class suburbs. Lacy (2007) uncovered a novel process of social integration, or \textit{strategic assimilation}, which is described as a

\textsuperscript{15} Frey (2011) shows that most suburbs are growing, but the white population in these areas has not grown at the same pace, “suggesting the central role that Hispanics and other minorities played in driving overall suburban gains” (p. 8).

balancing act of racial and class status in various social settings. By focusing on relatively affluent blacks living in relatively affluent neighborhoods, she contributed much to our understanding of the black middle class and how they negotiate class and race in the suburbs.

Lacy’s work provides important insights to suburban race relations broadly, and the black suburban experience specifically, but there is still much work to be done regarding social interaction in suburban neighborhoods. Because of the rising diversity occurring in many U.S. suburbs, there is a reason to believe that diverse suburban neighborhoods may become more common. Lacy shows us life on the two poles of navigating racialized spaces—predominantly minority or predominantly white neighborhoods. How do black suburbanites’ assimilation strategies work when they live in and navigate interactions in a diverse setting? Lacy’s study also informs much of our understanding of the black middle class, including its many variations, but we have yet to hear from poor and working class black suburbanites. Black people living in suburbs are not all middle class. Do lower- and working class blacks experience suburbia and community diversity in the same way as their middle class counterparts? An ethnographic study limited to one racially and economically diverse suburban community, and the black population within it, may provide an answer.

In theory, the rising diversity in U.S. suburbs will either lead to replicated segregation patterns (Kye 2018; Schelling 1971) or, in cases where rising diversity does not lead to residential turnover, become the new frontier of racial equity (Frey 2015). There is a need to explore how “stably diverse” (Ellen 1998) neighborhoods shape the lived experience of black residents and other historically underrepresented groups. Given the spatial-methodological gap in urban research, we cannot say how these types of neighborhoods influence the lived experience
for people of color or the quality of community race relations broadly. My research on black social life in a multiracial suburb, discussed in more detail below, can help fill this gap.

**Research Questions**

My research focuses on social relations in one racially diverse suburb of Cleveland: Shaker Heights. Shaker is interesting both as a container for the social interactions inside it, but also as a place, with meanings and functions ascribed to it which extend beyond the residents. Shaker Heights is touted in urban history (Keating 1994; Nelson forthcoming) and the popular press (Mason 2004; Ng 2017; Wilkerson 1991) for its pioneering role in integration, yet we know little about the lived experience of African Americans in Shaker Heights today. My principal research questions center on how black adults experience suburban life, specifically statistically integrated (or diverse) suburban life. I want to know what blacks say and think about their social life in Shaker Heights and how the racial composition of the neighborhood shapes these perceptions. The following questions guide my inquiry:

1. Where do black people spend their time while in Shaker Heights?
   a. What do they do in these (public/private) neighborhood spaces?
   b. Who are the other people who occupy the spaces in Shaker Heights where black congregate?

2. What do black adults in Shaker Heights think about the neighborhood spaces they frequent, specifically the:
   a. Racial diversity of neighborhood spaces;
   b. People they encounter in these spaces; and
   c. Overall quality of intra-community interactions.
Inside Shaker

Shaker Heights is an inner-ring, “streetcar suburb” (Warner 1962) on the east side of Cleveland. Shaker Heights feels walkable but it is not a small suburb to survey. Geographically, it covers approximately 6.5 square miles, about five times the area of New York’s Central Park. Shaker is large enough to have nine officially recognized neighborhoods: Boulevard, Fernway, Lomond, Ludlow, Malvern, Mercer, Moreland, Onaway, and Sussex (see Figure 1.1). These neighborhoods were named for the nine original elementary schools in Shaker.

![Figure 1.1: Nine Neighborhoods of Shaker Heights](image)

Most of the streets in Shaker Heights are curvilinear and lined with green lawns and lush trees. If any color comes to mind when I think of Shaker, it would be green. The architectural styles, mostly French and Dutch colonial, change from house to house and block to block creating a beautiful assortment of homes ranging in size from pre-World War II bungalows to mansions. The side streets in Shaker are almost exclusively residential—a mix of many homeowners and few renters. A string of businesses and apartment buildings along the main thoroughfares give

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17 Inner-ring suburbs are also called First-Suburbs (Puentes and Warren 2006) & First Suburbs Development Council, first suburbs “were built or mostly built, near central cities before 1960.”
18 There is evidence of economic clustering, or housing segregation, in Shaker’s neighborhoods and so it is uncommon to find a bungalow next door to a mansion.
Shaker its more urban appeal. From the outside looking in, Shaker seems to be a nice place. If you consider that Shaker Heights is also one of the first predominantly white American suburbs to integrate, it adds to this allure of nicety.

A Brief History of Integration Efforts in Shaker Heights

Shaker has a storied history of successful racial integration in housing and education. It is one of the few suburban communities in the country where white and black families have lived side by side for over 50 years.\(^1\) According to urban historian Dennis Keating (1994), Shaker Heights stands out as one of the few suburbs in the United States that “voluntarily adopted pro-integrative policies and maintained them” (p.76). What would cause an affluent, and historically exclusive, suburb to embrace progressive policies in the 1950s? And how does this early history help us make sense of Shaker Heights today?

In terms of the timing of integration, of both schools and housing, Shaker Heights is progressive. However, there are some unique features of the community that allowed Shaker to lead the charge for integration. In terms of schooling, the boundary lines of the Shaker Heights school district spills over into the Cleveland neighborhoods of Shaker Square-Buckeye and Larchmere. Anyone living in these neighborhoods, though outside of Shaker proper, is eligible to enroll their children in Shaker Schools. As upwardly mobile black families moved to these fringe urban neighborhoods on Cleveland’s east side in the Post-War years, black students began entering Shaker schools. Hence, this integration of the schools preceded the 1954 Brown v. Board decision.

In terms of housing, early integration efforts were not institutionalized policy in Shaker Heights until several years after the first black family moved in. According to local history, the very first black residents in Shaker were domestic workers who worked in the mansions in the Northern part of town. The first black homeowners settled in Ludlow in the 1950s. The first black families to move within Shaker were not welcomed equally across the community. In fact, some of them were not even welcomed to own homes at all. Shaker Heights, like many suburban communities across the nation has racially restrictive covenants listed in every deed. These original restrictions forbid the sale of homes to black and Jewish families. Prior to the progressive reputation in enjoys today, Shaker Heights was an exclusive community.

In Ludlow, and Moreland, there are stories of black homeowners who had to use subversive means to gain access to homeownership in Shaker (Richter 1999; Stokes-Hammond 2011). One historian (Stokes-Hammond 2011) describes instances where white friends would participate in the early stages of home-seeking and, on the day of signing over the deed, the real buyers who were black would show up. One can only imagine how contentious this would have been, and thus the early black integrators were typically seen as deviant.

Shaker’s progressive reputation comes from one famously reported instance of integration, what the popular press has since dubbed The Ludlow “experiment” (Mason 2004). In Ludlow, white residents joined with incoming black neighbors in support of conflict-free integration. Paul Mason, who works as an executive at the ABC television network and is the son of one of the first black families to move to Ludlow, describes a general process of how Ludlow became integrated (from promotional materials for Mason’s documentary film *The Reunion*.

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20 There is some evidence that Moreland had black residents before Ludlow (Dawson 2017).
A group of well-educated black families began to seek a high-quality public education for their children. My parents led the charge, when they became the first black couple to obtain property and build a home in the Ludlow community. In November 1955, a month before a seamstress named Rosa Parks refused to give up her seat on a bus in Montgomery, Ala., we moved in our new home.

While Mason’s description is generally true, it is perhaps overly benign. The Cleveland Historical Society describes Ludlow’s early integration as follows,

In 1956, an explosion disturbed the usually quiet suburban neighborhood of Ludlow. Someone had planted a bomb in the garage of John G. Pegg, an African American lawyer who was building a new house on Corby Road. The racial attack sparked a biracial movement in this pastoral corner of Cleveland and was one of the first incidents that brought the neighborhood together to support integration.

As the above quote indicates, housing integration in Shaker was not conflict-free. After witnessing the violent racial conflicts locally and nationally, a group of black and white residents in Ludlow developed a policy to prevent the Ludlow neighborhood from experiencing conflicts happening elsewhere. Essentially, the logic of the times indicated that the best method for saving a community was preventing racial turnover, also called white flight. The goal of stabilizing their community, specifically their home values, caused residents of Ludlow Community Association to host open houses and other programs to attract white home buyers. Additionally, residents agreed on a racial balance initiative that involved selling your home to a same-race neighbor. For example, if you are black and want to sell your home, you should sell it to a black family, the opposite if you are white. This approach was intended to keep the current racial composition from “tipping” over (Schelling 1971). This approach was controversial—the NAACP was one outspoken critic. As time went on, however, the rest of Shaker—and communities around the country (Keating 1994)—looked to Ludlow as a model for stable integration.

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While overall, Shaker has maintained its status as racially integrated for almost six decades, the “pro-integration” policies it is celebrated for were actually policies designed to prevent white flight. Today, Ludlow is over 80% black. So, what went wrong? Ludlow, in the more affordable section of town, never had issues attracting black residents. As African Americans experienced upward class mobility, Ludlow and other parts of Shaker remained popular destinations (Michney 2017). Furthermore, the original efforts of the LCA and other neighborhoods in Shaker mostly warded off panic and disinvestment, but were less successful at recruiting successive generations of white in-movers. Shaker Heights is still “integrated,” but this label reflects the aggregate demographics more so than a block-by-block mix.

Who Lives in Shaker Today?

Shaker has a population of about 28,500. Like many first-ring suburbs in Midwestern cities, the white population has been declining but whites are still in the majority (Hanlon 2010; Hart 2003). Approximately 53 percent of residents are white. Among the rest, black residents total about 35 percent of the population, seven percent are Asian, about two and a half percent are Hispanic, and three percent identify as two or more races (see Figure 1.2).

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23 About 40% of diverse suburbs in the US share the distinction of racial stability since 1980 (Orfield and Luce 2013).
24 The trend of white flight has been discussed elsewhere (Kye 2018; Woldoff 2011). See also Ellen (1998) for a discussion on the dynamics of turnover (and stability) in integrated neighborhoods.
The primary goal of this study was to understand the social experiences of black people in a suburban community with relatively high levels of racial and socioeconomic diversity. To achieve this end I moved to Shaker Heights to conduct ethnography. Using ethnographic inquiry, I investigated black people’s perceptions of Shaker and documented their social behavior. A qualitative approach is required in order to understand how social relations, specifically along the lines of race, operate in various neighborhood settings. Specifically, qualitative data can add depth and nuance that county-level or municipality-level data on segregation misses. This study provides a ground-up view.

My central research question was: does diversity in a neighborhood lead to a diverse social life for African Americans? I was also interested in finding out how black suburbanites construct and maintain community-based social ties. During my time in the field, I asked black...
people I met about their perceptions of racial diversity and about their social encounters and relationships inside and outside of Shaker Heights. I collected observational data on the social interactions I witnessed (and sometimes participated in) as well as on the racial composition of various neighborhood spaces. Below, I discuss more about the field site, the sample of participants, and the research methods I employed for data collection and analysis.

Data Collection

During my time in the field, I collected data on the spaces within Shaker that African Americans patronize, visit, and reside in (Appendix). Through first-hand observation and interviews, I collected information about the social affiliations, places of employment, places of leisure and recreation, and places of residence for black people. In each interview, I collected additional information on daily routines, encounters or relationships with others, and perceptions about racial diversity in Shaker Heights.

Shaker Heights has nine officially recognized neighborhoods and I surveyed each of these communities to gather data on such features as the block layout, the architectural styles of buildings, the racial composition of pedestrians (or visible residents), and the ratio of public to private space. I spent a good deal of time in the Moreland neighborhood—at the public library where I worked part-time for 10 months between July 2016 and April 2017, shopping at the Lee-Chagrin Plaza, visiting my aunt and uncle who own a home on Ashby Road, attending events at the Stephanie Tubbs Jones community building,²⁵ and recharging in the coffee shop. I also frequented the bar noted above, “A Touch of Italy,” and attended several community events at a business incubator called “The Dealership.” I also spent a significant amount of time in the Ludlow and Onaway neighborhoods, mostly while on dog walks and bike rides. Finally, I spent many hours just outside of Shaker—in the Shaker Square Historic District—buying produce at

²⁵ Stephanie Tubbs Jones was the first African American woman elected to the U.S. Senate.
the Saturday morning farmer’s market, drinking margaritas with friends on the patio of a Mexican restaurant, and getting coffee with interviewees at the nearby cafe.

After spending about three months in the field (as a resident, employee and visitor), I began to identify key informants and members of various neighborhood institutions (e.g., schools, churches, government offices, and community associations). I conducted 40 tape-recorded interviews, in addition to a large number of informal conversations with people I met. In total, I spent time with over 100 individuals—including people with whom I had recurring contact and conversations (e.g., at the library, community events, or cafés), as well as informants with whom I conducted formal interviews.26

My final sample of adult interview participants includes black visitors, black employees, and black patrons—whether or not they are residents. I am interested in the social reality constructed by and among the different type of people that converge in diverse neighborhoods. As I spent time in Shaker, I realized that there are many non-resident adults in the community—people who work in or visit Shaker regularly. My findings reflect this emergent recognition. Although I considered the role of residents and visitors throughout, each chapter includes data from a slightly different sample of participants. The sample size and other characteristics of the participants included are noted in each chapter as appropriate.

Unless noted otherwise, the names of residents that appear in this text are pseudonyms. During the consent process of formal interviews, I gave participants the option to use their real name or a pseudonym. In the end, only three individuals elected for their real name to be used. One individual told me that using a pseudonym was the only way they could speak honestly. For fear that using of a few real names would negate the use of pseudonyms for those who wished to remain anonymous, I elected to use pseudonyms throughout. In contrast, I use the real names of 26 Thirty-five of the thirty-eight interviewees (92%) are African American.
streets, stores, and other named entities described herein. Shaker Heights is a real place with a well-documented history, and I hope that in some way, even without the use of real names, my reporting may add to that history.

Data Analysis

I analyzed the data from my interviews and observational field notes using systematic methods of coding and comparison. The themes that guided my inquiry were broad at the outset, but followed an inductive logic, ultimately narrowing the scope. With this approach, I identified conceptual categories as they emerged from field notes and interview transcripts, as well as from predetermined categories. I coded data iteratively throughout the collection process, enabling me to identify emergent research themes. My aim was to find the most salient patterns in the emergent themes and to determine their “social ground and import” (Geertz 2001, p. 60) specifically in shaping the lived experience of black people in Shaker Heights. I asked respondents about the local places they visit. Sometimes I would verify these accounts after running into them in a store or at an event. Additionally, I intentionally visited stores and public places weekly, if not daily, throughout my two-year tenure in Shaker. Each place I visited, I took a note of the racial composition of visitors. Respondents verified my first hand observations in formal and informal interviews. Formal interviews also included questions regarding perceptions of diversity, neighborhood change, and housing histories (Appendix 2).

A Note on Rapport and Reflexivity

The lived experience of black suburbanites is not only something I am studying—it is something I embody. I grew up in a diverse suburb, Cleveland Heights, and much of my interest in this project stems from my curiosity about my own lived experience. The diverse suburb I grew up in was been special in terms of forging an affirmative sense of self and positive
sentiments toward blacks and non-blacks. However, segregated living has become central to my experience as an adult. I realize now, mostly in retrospect, that some of my most diverse childhood experiences were not race-neutral. I remember feeling frustrated that my mother would say things like “be careful with the white girls, their dad may not like them talking to you.” Or, “you cannot be around your buddies from the lacrosse team if they are hanging out in the park after hours.” These warnings were signs that my mother, although having decided to raise her black children in a diverse suburb, recognized that racial barriers existed.

I chose not to analyze Cleveland Heights as a case study for fear that nostalgia or close personal ties would cloud my analytical thoughts on the sociology of that place. Shaker Heights is a perfect supplement—it is adjacent to Cleveland Heights to the south and shares a similar history. Although not all demographic characteristics are identical (today, Shaker is on average more affluent) both suburbs have a comparable racial composition. The fact that Shaker is close to home, but not home, had at least two major implications for rapport and recruitment. The first was a challenge: because few people know me personally, I had to work harder to gain their trust and therefore had to work to embed myself as a member of the Shaker community. In addition to building rapport with individuals I encountered one by one, I also chose to take a part-time position at the local library. For twenty hours on most weeks, I encountered hundreds of people who visited the library. I believe my position with the library helped me become a member of the official community.²⁷ I do not know what people thought of me, but I do think that people who knew me as the library attendant were friendlier when I attended community events and seemed more open when I attempted to recruit them as interviewees.

²⁷ Official community describes the people who are in Shaker in a formal or official capacity. For example, as resident, employee, or employer. Visitors and guests are members of what I refer to as the unofficial community.
The second implication of being close to home is that I am only one or two degrees of separation from most people in Shaker. I have not measured this in a systematic way, but I am acquainted with several people who know people in Shaker. I assumed that this would make recruitment efforts a bit easier. Although I had the opportunity to snowball sample from my own acquaintances, I ended up only conducting four interviews with members of my personal network. This included an initial pilot interview with my aunt and uncle who live in Shaker and a trip to Touch of Italy with two of my fraternity brothers (mentioned at the outset of the chapter). Shaker is not home for me, but knowing people in Shaker and knowing that they may read my findings, pushed me to be sensitive in the way I formed and ended my research relationships. My final reporting, I hope, is both accurate and fair.

Outline of Dissertation

The first findings chapter (Chapter 2), engages with the literature on activity spaces as I ask whether living together (or nearby) leads to interracial social life in non-residential locations. Chapter 3 engages with neighborhood integration studies and specifically interrogates the role of the “diversity ideology” in Shaker Heights. Chapter 4 digs deeper in to the black neighborhood experience. Updating what we know about residential mobility, racial identity, and experiences with racism among black suburbanites. This chapter challenges the notions of a “disintegrated” black community. In Chapter 5, I offer a brief summary of my main findings, include recommendations for community race relations, and suggest directions for future research on diverse living.
CHAPTER 2: BLACK ACTIVITY SPACES IN SHAKER HEIGHTS

There are areas in Shaker that are not that diverse… [Shaker is diverse] as a whole, but there are still the pockets and there are still areas, like the Moreland community, that I feel today, and I’ve seen it happen over time, where the Moreland community is now considered the quote “black area of Shaker.” So, even though we have white residents as well, but I guess it’s just the numbers. —Val

Introduction

As I discussed in Chapter 1, Shaker Heights, Ohio is often celebrated for being a leader in successful racial integration in housing and education. The efforts of the Ludlow Community Association, and eventually the City of Shaker, were distinctly progressive in the 1950s—occurring at least a decade prior to federal fair housing legislation and a few decades before the massive suburbanization of people of color (Frey 2015). However, as others have noted, much of Shaker’s inclusive reputation, masks its exclusive past.\(^{28}\) I wanted to examine the lived reality for African Americans in Shaker Heights today and to understand the organization and quality of social interactions among community members.

In order to understand the experiences of African Americans in Shaker, I moved to an apartment that sits on the border of Shaker Heights and Shaker Square in the summer of 2016. I spent the next two years participating in community life in Shaker Heights. For the first 10 months, between July 2016 and April 2017, I took a job as a desk attendant in the Main Library’s computer lab located in the Moreland Neighborhood (see Figure 2.1). The library is in Shaker’s downtown—where the Fernway and Moreland neighborhoods meet—on a four-way intersection divided by a streetcar median. The library sits behind the Stephanie Tubbs Jones\(^{29}\) community

\(^{28}\) For historical and empirical studies on Shaker Heights see Hart 2003; Ogbu 2003; Richter 1999; and Stokes-Hammond 2011.

\(^{29}\) Stephanie Tubbs Jones, a Cleveland, was the first African American woman elected to the U.S. Senate.
building in a parking lot on a main intersection that hosts, on each of the respective corners, City Hall, a shopping center, and the Shaker Heights Police Department.

Figure 2.1: Approximate location of two shopping plazas in Shaker, Lee-Chagrin (left) and Van Aken (right).

For twenty hours per week, working in the computer lab, I was able to see some of the daily activity in the public library. My commute home, often by bike, allowed me to get a first-hand view of public life in the Southwest corner of Shaker Heights. I quickly became familiar with the layout of commercial areas in Shaker. Across the street from the library, on what is called the Lee-Chagrin corridor, is a strip-mall style shopping district (the “Lee-Chagrin Plaza”). I was able to buy groceries, dog food, auto supplies, household items, whiskey and wine, and sit-down or carryout dinner all in this one-block plaza. I also frequented A Touch of Italy and attended several community events at a business incubator called “The Dealership.” Finally, I walked my dog and rode my bike in the Ludlow and Onaway neighborhoods.

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30 The Van Aken plaza, Shaker’s second strip-mall, was undergoing a renovation during my time in the field. During renovations, select stores were still open including a pharmacy, fast-food chains, and a couple restaurants. I did spent time near the Van Aken plaza. However, the construction and re-routed traffic was unwelcoming to foot traffic making it difficult to observe adult social life.
The city of Shaker Heights has celebrated the accomplishment of racial integration for almost six decades. However, one of the earliest findings that emerged in my analysis is that the famously integrated suburb of Shaker Heights remains segregated at the neighborhood level, both residually and in terms of where residents and visitors spend their time. There are places where exposure racially diverse social interactions is low. This is evident in census data and in my first-hand observations of social life in public neighborhood spaces. The lack of diversity in Shaker was also discussed in interviews with current and former residents and visitors. The epigraph to this chapter from Val, a long-term Moreland resident, is a good representation of this.

This chapter assesses the residential segregation patterns and activity spaces of African Americans in Shaker Heights, Ohio. Activity spaces are the locations outside of the home where people spend their time (Browning et al 2017; Johns and Pebley 2014; Johnston 1972; Krivo et al. 2013). The concept of activity spaces moves us beyond static measures of segregation that focus primarily on places of residence, work, and education. In Shaker, the black people who comprise the daily pulse of the community include a combination of residents and visitors (employees, entrepreneurs, and shoppers). My analysis—including a combination of formal interviews (n=33), informal conversations with over 100 people, and observations of informal public life and formal gatherings—suggests that black social life occurs in spaces that are

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31 About 40% of diverse suburbs in the US share the distinction of racial stability since 1980 (Orfield and Luce 2013). While Shaker as a whole has not undergone a dramatic turnover, from a predominantly white to a predominantly black suburb, the racial composition of some of the neighborhoods in Shaker look very different than they did in 1980 (Keating 1994).

32 In research on activity space it is common to select a sample of people and track their movements across a metropolitan area. For example, using a network analysis of data collected in Los Angeles (L.A.FANS), Krivo and colleagues (2013) were able to compare spatial activity of individuals who share the same home neighborhood. They found that “home neighborhood disadvantage is positively associated with disadvantage in individuals’ nonhome activity locations” (p.159). This trend was especially pronounced for African Americans and Latinx Americans. For most black visitors in my sample, Shaker is actually a more socioeconomically advantaged neighborhood.
disproportionately black compared to Shaker’s overall racial composition. In Shaker, racial residential segregation persists. Additionally, the activity spaces, and thus the social lives, of black residents and visitors are concentrated in the southwest section of town, in what I call Black Shaker. I believe that understanding the racial composition of activity spaces can help explain why residential proximity and diversity fails to produce social integration.

*Where You Live vs. Where You Go*

This is the paradox: many social scientists agree that segregation is bad—for business, civic life, education, employment, and the list goes on. However, we have yet to fully unpack what happens inside of segregated (and integrated) communities in terms of social interactions. Some research suggests that social contact in diverse spaces can create a buffer against racial prejudice (Anderson 2011; Grasmuck 2005; Oliver 2010), while other studies show that places that experiencing growth in racial diversity also score higher on indices of segregation (Pinto-Coelho and Zuberi 2015). The role of residential diversity in promoting integration in the social lives of adults is especially elusive. Part of the problem is methodological, because surveys and secondary data can only tell us so much. Even in-depth interviews are limited on their own. However, my interviews coupled with immersive fieldwork uncovered new evidence that supports a more critical view of diversity (Berrey 2015; Mayorga-Gallo 2014, 2018; Pinto-Coelho and Zuberi 2015).35

One of the main contributions of the present study of racial segregation includes a focus on activity spaces. I approached the question of activity spaces in two ways. First, I focused on

33 See Chapter 1.
34 Sociologists Lewis, Diamond, and Forman (2015) have probed this same question in a racially diverse school setting. They concluded that diversity alone is not a sufficient condition to ensure equality
35 I refer to these as critical diversity studies because they do not assume a priori that diversity is a progressive solution to the racialized social structure in the United States. Furthermore, findings from these studies show the limits or shortcomings of diversity as a determinant of racial equity.
my sample of respondents and tracked where they went on a daily basis via a set of interview questions. In each interview, I collected additional information on daily routines, encounters or relationships with others, and perceptions about racial diversity in Shaker Heights. Second, I sampled a set of places within Shaker city limits and observed who flowed in and out of them. During my time in the field, I collected data on the spaces within Shaker that African Americans patronize, visit, and reside in (see Appendix 3). Through first-hand observation and interviews, I collected information about the social affiliations, places of employment, places of leisure and recreation, and places of residence for black people.

My analysis suggests that, in Black Shaker, residents and visitors may periodically see and interact with non-black people in passing. For example, the majority of the librarians are white and several of the stores clerks in the Lee-Chagrin Plaza (e.g., at the hardware or pet store) are non-black. However, due to the micro-segregation patterns in Shaker Heights, black residents and visitors are unlikely to have intense, intimate, or extended interactions with non-black people. I did not interview many non-black residents, but their absence in these spaces as visitors suggests that they seldom frequent this part of town. The potential for social interactions in Black Shaker is thus primarily intraracial.

In Shaker Heights, adult residents from different racial and ethnic backgrounds live relatively close together in proximity, but social separation persists. It would be naive to assume that spatial integration is the primary determinant of equitable community race relations. But if living apart, or residential segregation, precipitates inequality between races, a good argument is needed to understand why living together does not mitigate inequality. In Shaker, not only does

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36 The grocery store, Heinen’s, and the circulation counter at the Main Library are some exceptions. Even in these places, however, the racial composition is usually close to 60/40, black/white.
racial residential segregation persist, but the spatial activity, and thus the social lives, of black residents and visitors are concentrated in *Black Shaker*.

The chapter is organized as follows. In the first section, I report quantitative and geographic evidence that suggests residential segregation persists at the micro (tract) level. Additionally, I include quotes from interview respondents that confirm that black residents accurately describe these segregation patterns. That is, segregation seems to influence residents’ perceptions of the neighborhood’s (lack of) *representational diversity*. In the second section, I assess the role of black activity space as a contributor to racial separation, focusing specifically on activity space patterns in the public library and the Lee-Chagrin Plaza. Moreover, I present evidence of the government’s role in (dis)investing in Black Shaker. I discuss the implications of these findings in the concluding section. The findings in this chapter have two primary implications: establishing Shaker Heights as a micro-segregated suburban community and highlighting how the lives of black residents and black visitors converge given this reality.

**Black Shaker and Perceptions of Micro-segregation**

Shaker Heights is racially diverse statistically, but there is a predominantly black part of town clustered in the southwestern corner of the suburb. Franklin Astor Sr. (Frank), a former council member and current homeowner in the Moreland neighborhood, calls this area “lower Shaker.” Below is an excerpt from my interview with Frank where he discusses the racial composition of Shaker when he first arrived in the 1980s.

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37 I use *representational diversity* to describe the racial composition you would expect to find if activity spaces within the neighborhood were as diverse as the entire suburb. In Shaker, a representationally diverse activity space would be approximately 34% black and 53% white.
AG: What was Shaker like when you first moved [to Shaker] in ‘84?

Frank: Shaker was a good, inclusive community on Menlo, which is a street we lived on, which I say is basically the first street in Shaker, Lower Shaker. We had many whites as well as blacks that lived on the street. [My kids] had many white friends on the street as well as in the school. The former mayor, Judy Rawson, who then lived in what I call Upper Shaker, across from us… [She] would bring her son down to our neighborhood at that time to play with [my son], and [he] would go to their neighborhood to play as well.

In this conversation, Frank identified “lower Shaker” as a racially diverse neighborhood.

Although there are African American families living in all corners of Shaker Heights today, the southwestern corner of Shaker is no longer racially diverse. Lower Shaker is overwhelmingly home to black residents.

The slogan for the Moreland community association is “A Gateway to Shaker.” This metaphor captures the spatial and social role of Moreland and the rest of Black Shaker.

Geographically, for people entering Shaker from the city of Cleveland, Moreland is the first stop. Similarly, for many black families who first integrated Shaker decades ago, Ludlow and Moreland were the first neighborhood destinations (Michney 2017).

Val, whose quote appears at the beginning of this chapter, is an active community member and has been a resident since the early 1990s. Her mom and brother first moved to Shaker in the early 1980s and Val relocated once her mom became ill. Her mom fell in love with the two-family homes in Moreland and her brother liked that Shaker was diverse and, specifically, that Moreland was “not a predominantly white area of Shaker.” Echoing Al’s sentiment, Val said that when she first moved to Shaker, Moreland was noticeably diverse (black and white), but over time, the neighborhood became predominantly black.
The lack of diversity in Moreland is noticeable when looking at census estimates or a map of racial composition in Shaker Heights (see Figure 2.2). Moreland was predominantly white in 1960, but black residents increased from 10% to 40% by 1970, and by 1980 African Americans were in the majority in Moreland (Hart 2003). Today, over 90% of residents living in Moreland are black suggesting both a history of white flight and a persistent white avoidance.

What I refer to here as Black Shaker also extends to the Lomond and Ludlow neighborhoods. According to 2012 Census estimates, for example, 75% of the residents living in “lower Shaker” are black (Table 2.1). In Moreland, this percentage grows to 92% and in the adjacent neighborhoods of Lomond and Ludlow, black families are still in the majority (68% and 79%, respectively). In every other neighborhood in Shaker Heights, African Americans make up no more than 15% of residents.

Figure 2.2: Percent African American by Census Tract in Shaker Heights, 2016 ACS
Table 2.1: Percent Black residing in Selected Tracts

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>1834.02 (Ludlow)</th>
<th>1836.04 ; 1836.06 (Lomond)</th>
<th>1836.03 (Moreland)</th>
<th>Total selected tracts</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2010</td>
<td>76.7%</td>
<td>65.8%</td>
<td>90.3%</td>
<td>73.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2012 ACS</td>
<td>79.6%</td>
<td>68.7%</td>
<td>92.1%</td>
<td>75.0%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The local level of segregation was one of the first things I noted in my observations and it was among the first answers shared in response to the research question of “is Shaker a diverse neighborhood?” Dee and James have lived in the Moreland neighborhood for almost a decade. They reside in a house located just south of Van Aken Boulevard. Van Aken is a main road with one of the two streetcar, or “rapid,” lines in Shaker (see Figure 2.3). Dee recalled that when she and her husband purchased their home they knew little about segregation patterns in Shaker. Dee told me that, shortly after moving in, though, she realized that they live in the black part of Shaker.

We literally live on the wrong side of the tracks! Our neighbors are mostly black, there are more vacant lots, and more rental houses south of Van Aken. If you cross the tracks (on Van Aken), you will see the whiter, richer, and better-kept part of town.

Lisa, a former Lomond homeowner currently living in a condominium in Sussex, reported similar thoughts about Black Shaker. “Shaker has its, it has it’s uh, neighborhoods within neighborhoods, trust me. If you on the right side of the tracks, you know, like if you go over in the… where the high school is located, up in that area you only find a lot of whites.” Frank, who was quoted above, also mentioned this micro-level pattern of segregation between “lower” and “upper” Shaker.
I initially thought that Dee’s claim about living on “the wrong side of the tracks” was caused by resentment for her immediate neighbors (who are mostly black), but after talking a while longer I realized that her statement was more of a critique of the city than any one group of residents. Dee said, “It takes forever to fix things over here. The city will fine us for the smallest property violation, but will not fix the cracked sidewalks.” Other residents I spoke with reported similar grievances about Shaker city services. Miss Jackie, a well-known resident who has lived in Moreland for over 40 years, complained at a community meeting that “they need better lighting [in Moreland]. I was walking down the street and a young man whistled at me from his car. I’m old enough to be his grandmother. But you can’t see when it’s dark.” The group gathered for the meeting had a laugh, but others who wanted to see improved city services (e.g., mail delivery) and swifter repairs to the blocks in lower Shaker echoed Miss Jackie’s complaint and concern.

The City of Shaker Heights—which boasted a median home value of $211,515 in 2013—has much variation in terms of housing and demographics at the neighborhood level. In fact, much of Shaker’s zoning practices create class segregation. Designed in the original planning of

![Figure 2.3: The Streetcar Route that Divides “Lower” and “Upper” Shaker](Source: Google Maps)
Shaker, the houses and lots to the north are much larger. Moving south, lot sizes decrease and rental housing and commercial development is more common. In Malvern, the median household income is $212,321 compared to $91,726 in Fernway, and $47,571 in Lomond.\footnote{38 ACS 2012 5 year estimates, based on census tracts 1832, 1835.02, and 1836.04, respectively.} In my conversation with Al, he treated the differences between lower and upper Shaker as a class or socioeconomic distinction. In 1984, this may have been the best distinction to draw. Today, this class divide has become a racial one.\footnote{39 Similar to resident testimony, Dawson’s (2013) history of the Moreland neighborhood gives evidence that at one point all neighborhoods in Shaker, including Moreland, were home to a majority of white residents. However, Moreland and the rest of Black Shaker have experienced racial turnover and white flight in the last two or three decades (Hart 2003).}

**Beyond the Home: Black Shaker as a Racially Segregated Activity Space**

Census figures only give a snapshot of *residential* diversity. In addition to the residential demographics, however, Black Shaker is host to businesses and many city facilities (a shopping center, the main library, and a community building to name a few). The main commercial district and “downtown” are in lower Shaker, in the Moreland neighborhood. There are more than 30 businesses on the Lee Road-Chagrin Boulevard commercial corridor, a main thoroughfare that splits the Moreland and Lomond neighborhoods. Because the majority of employees, patrons, and visitors are also black, you can begin to imagine how disproportionately black this side of town feels. According to Eric, a Ludlow resident and active community member, “Shaker is like a gymnasium. Everyone is here, but they are sitting in different corners of the gym.”

While residents may have a greater stake in neighborhood activities, they are by no means the only ones responsible for shaping the daily pulse of a community (Anderson 2011; Duneier 1992; Grasmuck 2005). Today, Moreland remains a popular destination for black businesses and black visitors alike. From my observations and informal conversations with black
visitors in Shaker (including employees, entrepreneurs, and patrons), it seems that black visitors are more likely to use spaces where black people are in the majority. Some of the non-residential black spaces in “lower Shaker” include the computer lab in the Main Library and the Lee-Chagrin Shopping Plaza (which hosts four hair salons geared toward black clients, a café, and a restaurant-bar).

Black Shaker also borders the predominantly black Cleveland neighborhoods of Buckeye and Mt. Pleasant. Due to its location and the types of businesses, the commercial facilities and public institutions in Black Shaker bring many visitors to the neighborhood, such as employees, entrepreneurs, and patrons. If you shop in this part of town, you are likely to see only a few white people and occasionally a Latinx or Asian person. Similar to the residential dynamics, the majority of “visitors” to this part of Shaker are black. Black residents live here and black people from outside of Shaker visit, by car or rail, in order to work, socialize, and shop.

The public library, in Moreland, stands out as a representative example of segregation in non-residential activity spaces. As Putnam and Feldstein write, “people may go to the library looking mainly for information, but they find each other there.”40 In the library in Shaker, visitors are unlikely to encounter a racially diverse group of “others.”

*The Computer Lab as a Black Activity Space*

The computer lab is a large room on the second floor of the Shaker Heights Public Library. A half-dozen 10-feet tall windows run along the walls. Giant shades pulled over the windows provide ample shade from the glaring summer sun, but enough natural light to balance the fluorescent-lit ceiling. The walls in the lab are the color of the Double Mint gum packaging. The bright, yet subtle, green is simultaneously energizing and calming. The dynamics of the computer lab share this quality. There are ebbs and flows in activity and noisiness.

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40 From *Better Together: Restoring the American Community*, by Robert Putnam (2003, p. 49).
In the main area there are 25 computers. The center aisle way splits up the room so that there are two computers next to each other at each desk. In the back of the room there are two printers and a Xerox machine. Behind the printing station, in an enclosed room, is the “training lab.” When not in use for class, the training lab has 12 additional computers available for public use. A group of five to six black teens typically arrived daily to play video games on the computers. On days when the lab is empty, these teens turn the room into a Gaming Center. One seventeen year old boy, Devin, regularly played the computer game Roblox from the time we opened (9:00a) until we closed (9:00 pm), sometimes even skipping school to do so.

The Computer Lab is mostly quiet, but not always. There are twin brothers in their mid-twenties who came in almost every day. The twins are busybodies, and often storm in and out of the lab in a fury, sometimes with their shirts halfway off, exposing their skinny but chiseled torsos. Sometimes these twins only come in, quickly look around and leave—without ever sitting down to use a computer. Even when they sit at the computer desks, they fidget in their seats, they sing under their breath but loud enough to carry throughout the computer lab, and they chat with whomever happens to be in the computer lab that day.

Occasionally, I would encounter someone who behaved rudely toward the library staff. On my very first shift, a Tuesday night in June, a man was listening to his music at a distracting volume, but he got defensive and aggressive with the staff when we asked him to lower the volume. After he refused several requests, we shut off his computer remotely and planned to call security to have him escorted out. I learned that this is the standard policy when someone has violated the computer lab policies. Before we called security, he stormed out of the training lab yelling, “How y’all gon’ shut off my computer I was still working on that!”

He stood at the staff desk with his arms to his side slightly curled and his fists balled tight. My supervisor,

41 The italicized quote was recreated from jotted field notes of the event.
Lori—a middle-aged white woman who works in Shaker, but lives in a nearby suburb—told my co-worker to call 9-1-1. Typically, we call library security before escalating to an emergency call, but on this day, Lori seemed especially threatened.

When I started working, I was worried that this kind of behavior would typify my daily encounters. After spending a few weeks working in the lab, however, I realized that the majority of patrons are “regulars.” If, on an average day, there are people sitting at all 37 computers in the lab, at least 20 seats are occupied by regulars. The regulars are not necessarily more polite or kind to staff than the irregulars, but over time I was able to recognize their normal disposition—the average in the range of behavior I observed directly. The man mentioned above, who had an outburst, actually returned within two weeks and, for the remainder of the year I worked in the lab, never gave us another problem. His outburst could quite reasonably have been “a bad day” and we might have pushed the wrong button.

With the exception of the five to six “gamers,” the lab is an adult activity space. On an average day, there seems to be a pretty even distribution of people ages 15 to 30 and 30 to 45. There are some older adults, aged 45 to 60, and there are very few seniors. A majority of the daily computer lab patrons are black and the remaining non-black visitors are mostly white. There are two East Asian men who regularly come to the computer lab—my coworkers called one of the Asian men “Karate” because he dresses like he just left the set of the 1979 movie The Warriors. “Karate” always ties his long hair back with a thin band and wears fingerless leather gloves.

One Monday night in the Main Library computer lab, I had a conversation with a regular visitor named Michelle. Michelle always wears her long locks tied up in colorful, African patterned wraps. I would describe Michelle as a long-term neighborhood visitor. Michelle comes
to the lab weekly, if not daily, but she is not a resident of Shaker Heights. She told me she has been visiting the library for over five years. I asked Michelle if she lived close to Shaker, and she said “No. I live on Lake Shore [In Cleveland, about 19 miles north of Shaker]. I used to live in Warrensville Heights [a neighboring suburb], but I moved.” I wondered why she spent so much time in Shaker—Lake Shore Boulevard is at least 25 minutes across town, north of Shaker.

AG: “You come all the way to Shaker, just for the library?”

Michelle: “Yea. I like it here. Well, my son brings me here on his way to work. I live with my son.”

AG: “If you don’t mind me asking, why the Shaker library and not one closer—isn’t there a branch near Lake Shore?”

I learned that Michelle prefers the Shaker library because it is close to what she calls “home.” That is, the library is close to her friends and family who still live in Warrensville Heights. She also said that she feels a sense of community and belonging here. Michelle used to meet with a group of women weekly for a book club (their organization dissolved in 2016). I asked if her reading group was “predominantly black.” Michelle said “yes,” and immediately upon describing her group, she looked around the room and noted that computer center, too, was a mostly black space, “I guess I never paid it [the racial composition] that much attention.”

Michelle’s experience is similar to that of other black visitors I met—just because Shaker is diverse, does not mean a person will automatically experience diversity when visiting the neighborhood spaces. That Michelle and other visitors do not actively seek out racially diverse spaces in Shaker suggests that perhaps, as Berrey (2015) writes in her article in *Salon*, “diversity is for white people.”

*Activity spaces and exposure to diverse social interactions.* The neighborhood spaces that black visitors use, although not extremely diverse in terms of race, do provide increased
exposure/proximity to black people from a wide range of class backgrounds. For example, in the computer lab at the Main Library it is common to see Mike, a college professor, sitting next to Joel, a jobless millennial. Joe, a homeless man with holes in his tennis shoes, who is often the last person to leave, can often be found sitting next to Diane McIntyre, a nationally-recognized dancer and choreographer. A retired surgeon, who I call “Doc,” would come in regularly to check stocks and work on a business plan for a soda company. Doc may sit next to Nikki, a single mother of two who works on a flier for her home-cleaning service. I do not argue that, in these moments, Mike and Joel or Diane and Joe become intimately acquainted. However, exposure to difference (or diversity) can happen on many fronts. In this snapshot of library computer lab users, racial diversity is low but socioeconomic diversity is high.

Cross-group interactions at the neighborhood level have the potential to channel resources in the form of social and cultural capital (Florida 2003; Frazer et al. 2013; Hartman and Squires 2010; Jacobs 1989). Based on my interviews and observations, black people with varying levels of socioeconomic status do not avoid other black people in these shared neighborhood spaces. This fact is evident in two main ways. First, many black residents and entrepreneurs are personally responsible for inviting some black outsiders into the neighborhood. Second, my respondents have said that they do not fear or hate black people and their actions are demonstrative of this sentiment.

Clarence Tate, a former chef and small business owner, lives in a large house in Fernway with his wife, mother-in-law, college-aged daughter, and a nephew. His mother-in-law and his adult nephew did not grow up in Shaker and are not involved in the official community. Donald and his wife, two upwardly mobile and highly educated entrepreneurs, are the type of black people Shaker is proud to claim. The Tates’ relatives, who often visit when Clarence fires up the
grill for a cookout, are “outsiders.” They are from Cleveland, where Clarence himself grew up and spent much of his adult life. Although both black and non-black residents I spoke with mentioned “transients” when describing neighborhood change and decline, many black residents use their status and position to invite others in their familial, professional, and social networks into Shaker Heights.42

Two black entrepreneurs, a Moreland-area barber at “Studio Lofts,” Dre, and a local realtor, Langston, both described their client base as predominantly African American and predominantly outsiders. Dre said that all of the stylists at Studio Lofts are black and 90% of their customers come from outside of Shaker Heights. Interestingly, Studio Lofts is a “chain” beauty salon—there are many locations throughout the Cleveland area, but the location in racially diverse Shaker is almost exclusively black. He said he does not know how or why the plaza became a predominantly black space, but he is content with his location. Dre said “This is always going to be a good place to do business.”

Langston, a regular at the computer lab and the co-owner of one of Shaker’s oldest realty companies, echoed the same sentiment. In an interview, he told me that he and his family have been selling homes for over 40 years and primarily serve black people. Langston said his real-estate business is not targeted to black people, but “if it ain’t broke, don’t fix it.” So, even though Langston is a widely accepted member of the business community, he spends most of his time and resources helping black people find homes outside (sometimes right on the border) of Shaker Heights.

Will lives in a neighboring suburb and exemplifies someone who visits Black Shaker as a result of network ties to black residents. As I noted in Chapter 1, Will is a long-time visitor to the Moreland bar-restaurant “A Touch of Italy,” which sits in a strip mall on Chagrin Boulevard.42

More on neighborhood mobility in Chapter 4.
directly across the street from the Lee-Chagrin plaza. The people who frequent the restaurant are both from Shaker and neighboring communities in Cleveland and surrounding suburbs. Most of the patrons are black—the restaurant never had more than five non-black patrons on any of my visits. It seems like a bar for an older, mature crowd, but it is a lively social space. Each time I visited, mainly in the evening, hip-hop music was playing loudly, but it did not deter patrons from mingling. One-half of the space is sit-down style dining, and the other half has a newly renovated bar with large flat screen TVs. If the Cleveland Cavaliers basketball game is being played on the flat screen TVs, the joint is packed.

Will joins his family and friends for happy hour at Touch of Italy several times a month. He told me that whenever he is in Shaker, Touch of Italy is the place he frequents most often. During my time in the field, Touch of Italy was managed by a former Shaker Heights High School football standout, Franklin Astor Jr., who happens to be Will’s oldest childhood friend. The first time I was invited to hang out with Will, his friend Patrick met us at the bar. In total, I visited Touch of Italy four times with Will, and each time he introduced me to new people. On a Tuesday night in March, Will invited me to Touch of Italy to have drinks. When I arrived, he was sitting with his sister, brother-in-law, and two best friends at the bar. His sister and brother-in-law live south of Shaker in the Lee-Miles Cleveland neighborhood. His best friend, D-Man, is a Shaker resident and successful photographer in the Cleveland area. D-Man said that during a recent gig at a political rally he overheard two white Cleveland politicians talking about a riot at a suburban mall and the politicians referred to the black teenagers involved in the riot as ‘animals.’ As a photographer and paid contractor, D-Man said he felt obligated to hold his tongue, but he was visibly angry when sharing the story with us. Will was angry too and queried, “That’s how they think of us?” while shaking his head. Will is typically a laid-back guy, but this
evening he was visibly bothered by the depiction of African Americans as animals. He pursed his lips and shook his head and, referring to the riot at the local mall, he said “I mean… I don’t always like what we do. But I don’t hate black people.”

On spatial stigma. In my interviews with adults and from my observations in the neighborhood, I learned that some people in Shaker view Moreland, and specifically the library, as unsafe. One respondent, Dee, reported an incident when her son was in high school, and a white classmate’s father refused to let the kids work on a class project at the main library. When I shared that story with Val, she explained why people are scared to send their kids to the library.

Because of things that have happened there. But at the same time, you’ll hear the support of that Main Library by many of the white residents here, you know? They want that library there, but there have been things that happen there. Kids unsupervised. You know, just brawling. Those have happened in the library. It has happened. You know, so I understand those fears, but it’s not something that’s constant or continual.

An older black woman, who needed my help to send a fax at the library, said she takes the transit line to come to the Shaker library even though the Harvey Rice Cleveland Library branch is only a 7 minute walk from her house. She said, “we’re deep in the hood and people act loud and inconsiderate at [Harvey Rice]. I don’t care if there are police officers.” She mainly complained that people talk loudly on their phones. To her, Shaker is a nice library—an upgrade from the one in the “hood.” To my co-worker, Mona, the Computer Lab in Shaker fits the same description as the Harvey Rice branch. “People say they like it here, but I don’t know why. It’s not quiet. Soon as you walk in the door it’s loud.” Compared to a university library, for example, it would be hard to describe the library in Shaker as quiet. The computer lab is definitely livelier than the stacks of a research library. However, I did not observe incessant noise and violent outbursts. As Val said, although disruptions have happened on other occasions, they do not typify a normal day at the Shaker library.
I asked all respondents about the notion that Black Shaker is ‘dangerous and stigmatized.’ Everyone agreed that a spatial stigma existed, but the black people I spoke with were adamant that the fear is overblown, at least, and unsubstantiated, at most. I asked Meg, a millennial and recent Shaker High School alum, whether she feels unsafe shopping or walking around Moreland. Meg laughed and said “No. I’m black. I’m not afraid of my own people.” Marty, the community relations officer, responded in the negative to my question of whether Moreland was dangerous in terms of public safety. Marty said, despite the stereotypes, crime is at an all-time low in Shaker, and he reported that petty crimes (e.g. stealing a bike) and property crimes (as opposed to violent crimes) are most common in Shaker, but crime is much lower than people think.43

Discussing the crime, safety, and teenagers in the Lee-Chagrin Shopping Plaza, Dre the barber said,

They’re not committing crimes. They do what we did. You’re irritating the businesses because you’re in a group. But they’re just walking through—going home for the most part... [I feel like] people feel safe coming to Shaker. The majority of blacks who live in border neighborhoods feel like this is a great place to [visit] because you get everything. Black visitors are able to access desirable goods and services in Black Shaker. They are even able to socialize in a space that feels safe and comfortable. However, the lack of racially diverse activity spaces in this part of town means that black visitors cannot possibly “get everything.” Or, maybe they have exactly what they want—access to accessible, clean, and safe commercial and social spaces. Maybe having access to interracial social interactions is not everything.

43 That the black people I spoke with were unbothered by the potential for crime and victimization in Shaker is consistent with findings on the racial and ethnic threat hypothesis. Chiricos et al. (1997) and others have documented the fact that as the percentage of minority residents increase (especially true if black), white residents perceptions of crime and lack of safety also increase. While, in general, members of minority groups are capable of stereotyping minority spaces as unsafe, I did not find this to be the case in Black Shaker.
Defending and Diluting Black Shaker

By spending time in Shaker for two years, I was able to meet many members of the black community, to learn about their perceptions of Shaker, and to document their social and spatial behavior. I began to notice some tension as I spent more time observing public life in Black Shaker. The city of Shaker Heights—both the official representatives of the city and the existing policies that structure their behavior—plays a peculiar and often conflicting role in the maintenance and promotion of racial diversity.\(^{44}\) I discuss this diversity conflict in more detail in Chapter 3. I reference Shaker and its city representatives here in order to highlight the gap between the perceived benefit of having a racially diverse community and the actions taken by a municipality to achieve it.

There is evidence that the city would like to see Black Shaker become more representationally diverse. When you look at the efforts of the city, you begin to see that the vision of Shaker Heights as a racially diverse community does not sensitively address the standing segregation patterns or the concerns of black adults. Hence, the city of Shaker Heights is struggling to align the goal of racial diversity with the reality of current racial segregation patterns in housing and activity spaces. One egregious example is that the city is renovating and rebranding its shopping plaza on the Eastern part of town, where the Fernway, Malvern, Mercer and Sussex neighborhoods meet. This plaza, *The Van Aken District*, has been branded as “downtown” (see Figure 2.4). As I mentioned earlier, “downtown Shaker” is in Moreland. Like most municipalities, Shaker’s downtown is home to major city buildings and one of the town’s oldest shopping centers. With the goal of expanding commerce and condominium housing, the city is giving a face-lift to its second plaza. Although they are happy to see new development,

\(^{44}\) Entire theses have been written on the functioning of the city, its political-economic activity, and the impact on racial integration (Hart 2003; Richter 1999).
many long-time Moreland residents feel that this move is symbolic of abandoning the black side of town.

![Image](image_url)

**Figure 2.4: An invitation to an event at the new Van Aken District. The logo names this plaza “Downtown Shaker Heights.”**

In an interview about the plaza, I asked the Director of Economic Development, Cheron, how much of the push for a “new” plaza is driven by a desire to make the wealthier residents in Shaker “feel safe” in public spaces. “Oh, a lot of it has to do with that.” This answer speaks volumes about the ethos held by some residents in Shaker that “lower Shaker” is unsafe or unwelcoming. The Director of Neighborhood Revitalization, Beatrice, who often works in tandem with Economic Development, said that the branding of the new plaza was an innocent mistake that is being addressed now that residents have brought it to their attention.

I guess you might not have been at that Neighbor Night where [Miss Jackie] raised the conversation [about the new downtown?]. Residents felt very comfortable raising it and we had a very [good discussion], I was in that one. It was a very eclectic, interesting series of perspectives on it. And again she wanted to be sure as a resident in this area that this wasn’t about dissing one area over the other. And you know it was very instructive. I came back to the city and gave that messaging saying here’s a way we hadn’t thought that
somebody might see it. We were simply… you have the marketing company out there doing its marketing and that’s how they’ve decided to market it. Nowhere in their thoughts was it as an either/or. And again we’re so small, I mean we all shop at these two places. I mean, you know, but it was important to hear that that was her perspective. And that’s the value of those, those discussions and having forums where people feel a sense of trust and an ability to have those conversations.

I attended the community event in 2016 where Miss Jackie and others complained about the branding of the Van Aken plaza. On Wednesday, November 29, 2017, I received an invitation in the mail to an event at the new Van Aken District for families and neighbors (see Figure 2.4). Although the Director of Neighborhood Revitalization said that the city was addressing the branding issue, I noticed that the advertisement still references “Downtown Shaker Heights” in the logo and branding of the Van Aken District. On this particular flier, in small cursive text it says “in the heart of downtown Shaker Heights” which, according to precedent and the collective memory of residents, is false.

There are some conflicting details in the way the city envisions the newly renovated plaza. From my observations and conversations with people, there is little evidence that “we all shop at these two places.” The racial composition of the commercial area in Black Shaker is largely a result of a lack of patronage by non-black residents and visitors. Moreover, as I discuss further in Chapter 3, the forums that the city thinks establish trust and open communication, are not always seen as “authentic” opportunities for inclusion by black people in Shaker. It is hard for a black Shaker resident to feel included when the city has funded a commercial project that will take visitors and resources away from Black Shaker.

Having more than one shopping plaza in a suburb five times the size of New York’s Central Park, especially if economically viable, seems rational. However, there is something symbolic about branding a second “downtown” that reveals the devaluation of black spaces.
Long before Moreland, or Lomond, or even Ludlow became home to black residents, downtown Shaker Heights has been located on Lee Road, straddling the border of “lower Shaker” and “upper Shaker.” Because lower Shaker—including the Lee-Chagrin Plaza—is home to a majority of black residents, the relocation of the second downtown provokes insecure thoughts and negative sentiments.

To be fair, the city is not technically ignoring Black Shaker. In the two years of my fieldwork, the departments of Economic Development and Neighborhood Revitalization have been extremely active in Moreland. Specifically, they have been promoting events geared to bring residents from other parts of Shaker and visiting entrepreneurs into Moreland. Like the historic racial balance in housing programs that made national headlines, the current “community engagement” initiatives seem to be focused in Black Shaker.\textsuperscript{45}

Conclusions

By selecting a racially diverse suburb as a case study and by focusing my attention solely on the spatial activity of African Americans, I was able to capture a snapshot of how statistical integration translates to social life in specific neighborhood activity spaces. Shaker Heights may be on the cutting edge of achieving diversity in housing and education, but if people from different backgrounds continue to move through space in different directions, the achievement of statistical integration will continually fail to incentivize diversity in the social lives of adults.

Racial segregation at the micro-level affects where social contact or exposure to diversity can occur. It shortens the list of available spaces where a person might like to spend time and structures where people are likely to encounter one another. Although Shaker Heights, as a whole, has maintained its white majority, the numbers of white residents have been declining as

\textsuperscript{45} I explore this trend in more details in Chapter 3.
the numbers of people of color increase, with African Americans the closest to a 50% share and slight majority. Based on survey research of neighborhood preferences (Adelman 2005; Krysan 2002), this breakdown of racial composition is not likely to be the most attractive destination for non-black residents or visitors. So, while many Americans support diversity rhetorically (Berrey 2015), the level of diversity that is tolerable or attainable for each individual adult is unclear.

I believe that having conversations and forming interracial relationships with others of different races is an important step in improving American race relations. My concern is that, most of the time, people talk (and walk) past each other in their activity spaces. Perhaps more impactful, white and black people rarely converge in the same activity spaces. Every black person who enters the suburb of Shaker Heights, depending on the persons standing in the official or unofficial community, experiences a varying amount of diversity in social interactions. Through my interviews and participation in community life from 2016 and 2018, I learned that black people in Shaker Heights live, move, and shop in predominantly black neighborhood spaces. Journalists, social scientists, and urban historians may venerate the city of Shaker as a model of successful integration, but to be a black adult in Shaker does not always feel cosmopolitan or look diverse on the ground.

Even though black residents and visitors expressed some critiques about the Main Library, the Lee-Chagrin Plaza, or parks in the Moreland area, what is clear from the qualitative evidence I gathered is that black people move and feel comfortable in the predominantly black spaces in Shaker. Black people said that they use the shops and spaces in Moreland, for example,

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46 Most Americans, regardless of race, idealize a diverse neighborhood where their own group is in the majority (Charles 2003)
47 While these spaces are not racially diverse, my findings highlight how class-diverse black spaces are (Pattillo 2005)
for the proximity and amenities. Some visitors, like Will and Michelle, will travel from across town to spend time in Shaker. Because many non-black people do not move in these activity spaces, these become sites for cross-class interactions among black adults.

On one hand, spending time in a statistically integrated suburb suggests that black people have a higher chance of seeing and even interacting with non-blacks compared with someone who lives in a more segregated neighborhood. For example, many of the librarians in Shaker are white and there are a few Indian store clerks in the Lee-Chagrin plaza. On the other hand, racially segregated activity spaces reduce the opportunities for people to stumble in to a diverse setting. Cross-group interactions are not the default for residents and are uncommon for visitors. Because black and non-black residents also live in different neighborhoods on average, residents’ diverse encounters are limited to formal institutions (e.g. the school system or community associations) or to intentionally diverse community events. This is partially a result of the longstanding residential segregation patterns, but it also serves to reproduce these patterns.

Throughout the years, The City of Shaker Heights has tried different approaches to maintain “integration” in the southwest neighborhoods of Lomond, Ludlow, and Moreland. However, these efforts have mostly included incentives to encourage white homeownership and patronage and disincentives for businesses that attract black social life (Hart 2003). Today, the city’s racial integration efforts are less direct (more coded). Neighbor Night is one formal community activity that attracts a diverse crowd of residents and a few visitors with business interests in the Moreland neighborhood. Black visitors to Shaker, including shoppers and patrons of various neighborhood institutions, do not attend this event and, thus, miss this opportunity for exposure to interracial diversity. Attendees are exposed to different people, but black residents claim the event is limited in its ability to forge meaningful connections or to reverse the stigma
of the region. In short, black residents in Shaker do have opportunities to interact, even if in discrete instances, with non-black people. Black visitors, who account for a large proportion of the daily pulse of activity in lower Shaker, do not have exposure to even this kind of event-specific diversity.

In the following chapter, I discuss how black and non-black people in Shaker Heights have misaligned definitions of diversity. Black residents say that they value diversity, but are critical of the current way diversity is “practiced” in Black Shaker. City officials also claim to value diversity, but the community development investments in “Black Shaker” reveal intent to curb further racial turnover, i.e., to prevent the area from becoming too black. Chapter 3 explores the way these divergent standpoints create barriers to improving race relations through neighborhood social interactions.
CHAPTER 3: DIVERSITY IN PRACTICE

[Shaker] makes me think of the Ray Charles song called *You Don’t Know Me*. In the song he talks about basically the two ships in the night passing. Even though we see each other and we interact, we have to have the courage to get beyond that. —Robin

Introduction

Racial diversity is a defining feature of America’s cultural identity. Although our country is diverse as a whole, interracial social contact is not compulsory. In the nation’s largest metropolises, segregated neighborhoods assure that we will not be forced, against our own choosing, to cross over racial boundaries. Some neighborhoods, however, stand out for their racial diversity (or statistical integration). Scholars have shown that while integrated neighborhoods stand out as a progressive alternative to racial segregation, social interactions in these settings can reproduce old patterns of racial inequality. So, while residents express the value of diversity, interactions among adults operate in a way that reify racial boundaries (Berrey 2015; Mayorga-Gallo 2014). While these studies do not specifically focus on the black experience, the insight they provide highlights the need for black voices in the literature.

My research asks: what does diversity mean to black adults living in Shaker Heights? Given Shaker’s status as a statistically integrated suburb, it serves as a good site to examine theories of neighborhood race relations. Black people in Shaker are much more likely to live and shop among same-race neighbors and visitors. Although progressives routinely frame living apart as divisive, I approached the issue of residential segregation in Shaker with as open a mind as possible. Just living in different neighborhoods within the suburb, I thought, may not preclude opportunities for interracial (diverse) interactions. Robin’s description of “ships passing in the night” echoes a sentiment shared by many of the people I met during the two years I spent...
participating in community events in the Moreland neighborhood, one of the three neighborhoods that comprise Black Shaker. Metaphors such as the one Robin deployed are useful in describing how black adults understand diversity in Shaker Heights.

In this chapter, I present details from my observational and interview data from adult residents (n=37) who engage in the Moreland community. The main research questions that guide my analysis are: (1) are there instances of racially diverse social interactions among adult neighbors in Black Shaker; and (2) what do black residents think about opportunities to practice diversity? Although Shaker Heights is racially segregated at the micro-level, do adults ever have an opportunity to interact in multiracial community settings? If and when they do interact across racial lines, how do black residents perceive these interactions?

One of the main benefits to studying social life in Shaker Heights is that black and non-black residents are comparable in terms of socioeconomic status. As is true in most cities, there is a slight disparity between white and black residents in terms of place of residence and wealth. However, relative to other qualitative studies examining race relations (Anderson 1990; Mayorga-Gallo 2014), the adults living in Shaker Heights are similar in socioeconomic status. As I mentioned in Chapter 2, black visitors are less likely to have diverse encounters in Shaker. Black residents, on the other hand, often participate in community organizations and events that are representationally diverse.

The black residents that I spoke with do not exclusively shop and socialize locally, but the majority of them engage in organized efforts to improve their neighborhoods. In Lomond, Ludlow, and Moreland, black residents engage in formal, public institutions (i.e., the school, the

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48 During my participation in community events, I met and spoke with approximately 55 people that regularly attend meetings in Moreland. In this sample, I only include individuals who I met more than once and spoke with (either privately or in a group) about neighborhood diversity. I conducted 31 formal interviews; four of those interviews were with couples.
library, and community associations). If black residents connect with their non-black neighbors it is mostly in these formal capacities. Sometimes these interracial interactions take place outside of Black Shaker. During my time in the field, however, increased opportunities to practice diversity landed in Black Shaker.

In the Moreland neighborhood, there is a city-sponsored monthly event, called Neighbor Night, where black and non-black residents routinely interact. I highlight Neighbor Night, and the conversations and events that sprout from it, as a representation of the type of community-building opportunity that occurs in Black Shaker. Both black and non-black residents participate in Neighbor Night and the conversations presented below reflect this. After participating in group discussions, I followed up with several black attendees to ask how they interpreted these conversations. I argue that community events in Black Shaker are discrete and formal instances of diversity within a micro-segregated neighborhood. Although, on the surface, events like Neighbor Night epitomized diversity in practice, my interviews with black participants highlight a more nuanced interpretation. I end this chapter with a discussion of cultural tourism, a critique levied by several respondents. According to some black residents, the city’s activity in Moreland is an attempt to re-integrate white residents to this side of town. Again, like Neighbor Night, these activities do not bridge the gap between residents from diverse racial backgrounds and, instead, serve to heighten the already-brewing resentment and cultural divide.

**Diversity in Practice: Moreland Neighbor Night**

Neighbor Night is a monthly community event sponsored by the city’s neighborhood revitalization initiative “Moreland Rising.” Moreland Rising events are intended to promote community engagement in the Moreland neighborhood. Neighbor Night is held the last Tuesday
of each month in the Stephanie Tubbs Jones Community Center on Lee Road in Moreland. The Community Center building is a large, red brick, square structure with white shutters on the windows. There are private meeting rooms and a large, partitioning auditorium on the first floor and the Neighborhood Revitalization Department on the second floor. The building shares a large parking lot with the Main Library, a community playground, a senior-only apartment building, and a dependent living/memory-care facility. The Community Center sits directly across from the Lee-Chagrin Shopping Plaza.

Glossy wooden floors and bright, yellowish lights gave the main room of the Community Center the feel of a middle school gym. When I arrived, the room smelled like the best Mediterranean food you could imagine—they ordered shawarmas, falafel, and salad from Aladdin’s Greek and Lebanese Restaurant. When I walked into the event, a few people were standing near a table with nametags, a sign-in sheet, and an event flier. Tom, a Jewish man in his early 60s, was sitting at the registration table. Beatrice, an Afro-Caribbean woman in her forties, also greeted me. (I later learned that Beatrice runs the neighborhood revitalization and community development programs in Shaker.) I signed the registration form and proceeded to join the community event.

In the main room, there was a large half-circle of approximately 20 chairs. As more people arrived, the meeting organizers and volunteers brought over more chairs. The diameter of the half-circle was along a wall where various people stood throughout the night, speaking to the group, and facilitating different segments of the program. The first Neighbor Night crowd I saw was multiethnic, but predominantly black. Including myself, 22 people in total attended the event and 14 of those people were black.
Neighbor Night is a structured program, where Beatrice and others who volunteer lead guests through three activity segments geared toward making “community connections.” The first thing we did once the event started was introduce ourselves. I learned that everyone present was a resident, business owner or stakeholder—no outsiders or visitors accidentally stumbled in. I introduced myself as a graduate student living on Van Aken near Shaker Square and said that I worked at the library. I did not mention my researcher status initially.49

After introductions, we went around the circle and each shared something “good and new.” Some people shared very personal details—one woman had recently finished chemo treatments. Others shared more light-hearted, but sweet sentiments in response to the icebreaker question *what is good and new*, responding, “I am here connecting with you all.” When my turn came, I shared that I recently paid off my car loan. Ms. Jackie, an elderly black woman with endless charisma and wit, asked me, “what about them student loans?” I responded matter-of-factly, “No, not those yet.” The group laughed a little and I sat back in my chair grinning, wondering how Ms. Jackie knew I had student loan debt.

The community event also included four breakout sessions, where groups of four to five people propose group discussions on topics ranging from the upcoming holiday party to social life in the community. I did not propose the social life topic, but naturally, I joined that breakout group. I met two of my interview participants as a follow-up to this breakout session. At the time, however, I did not want to disclose my dissertation research plans to study social life in Shaker. I wanted to observe this conversation unobtrusively, so this first Neighbor Night was not recorded. Luckily, nothing specifically about race relations was mentioned. From my jotted field notes of the session, I did learn that the way these engaged residents, both black and white, speak

49 Later that night, I divulged my status as a researcher participant.
about social life in Shaker does not include the needs (or perhaps the voice) of non-resident visitors.50

After the breakout sessions, we dispersed, mingled, and engaged in small talk with one another. I introduced myself to several other residents, registered to volunteer for an upcoming youth project, and accepted an invitation to “Chrismahanakwanzika” (a multiethnic holiday party discussed more below). As I spoke with each resident individually, I gave them my business card and disclosed my project objectives.

Moreland Neighbor Night is similar to other community association meetings in that residents lead the meetings and are most likely to attend. However, in addition to input from residents, the city’s Department of Economic Development and Department of Neighborhood Revitalization are co-sponsors. As such, many visitors who have business interests in Moreland are also welcome (and sometimes invited) to attend the meeting. At a typical meeting, around 30 people attend, though I have seen over 50 on special occasions. Usually, about 20 of the 30 people in attendance are residents of Moreland, but I have also seen Shaker Heights police officers, members of city council, the director of Economic Development, business owners in Moreland, and various organization representatives who are looking to advertise programs or services in Shaker Heights broadly and Moreland specifically. I kept count of the turnout at each meeting and noted the racial, age, and gender composition of attendees. Typically, there was a slight black majority (65%), making Neighbor Night one of the more racially diverse activity spaces in Moreland.

My initial perception of Neighbor Night was positive. Before attending Neighbor Night, I was beginning to think that diverse groups of people rarely interact with each other in Black Shaker. After the event, I had a different take. Here is a diverse group: black, white, Indian,

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50 See Chapter 2 for more on visitors.
Jewish, Christian, owners, renters, middle class, working class, etc. Not only did attendees share semi-intimate details with each other, we interacted for an extended period (two hours) and were given a formal opportunity to make connections all as a part of the event. For me, these connections led to research interviews. In general, there seems to be potential for these connections to yield other benefits as well.

Many activities and community events sprout from Neighbor Night discussions. These range in size from activities that attract a small group to events for the entire neighborhood. For example, starting or maintaining a garden was a popular topic in the winter months. As a result, in summer 2017, residents in Moreland formed the “Garden Buddies” club—which offers neighbors a chance to trade seeds and gardening tips. There is also a communal or social aspect to Garden Buddies—the entire group, on alternate weeks, will visit someone’s house to tackle the garden until everyone in the group has had their garden collectively cultivated. Neighbors also started a walking club, for people who need peer-support to get fit and active, and a book club that travels to a different neighbor’s house each month. Neighbors also organized a “Chrismahanakwanzika” holiday celebration and a summer Movie Night at Chelton, the local park in Moreland. The list of spinoff groups and projects goes on. After reflecting on my observations at Neighbor Night and these derivative events, I discerned that Neighbor Night was a good example of diversity in practice. Attending the Chrismahanakwanzika holiday celebration in Moreland reinforced this thinking.

Celebrating Diversity: “Chrismahanakwanzika”

Instead of hosting a December 2016 Neighbor Night meeting, residents decided to celebrate the end-of-year holidays by hosting a potluck-style dinner party. In the spirit of religious inclusion and diversity, the residents named the celebration “Chrismahanakwanzika.”
Like Neighbor Night, Chrismahanakwanza celebration was held at the Stephanie Tubbs Jones Community Center on a Tuesday night. When I entered, a wonderful assortment of aromas, decorations, and faces filled the room. Spanning the length of the room, there was a food table with variety of dishes ranging from collard greens to latkes. On the flier advertising the event, residents were encouraged to “bring your own dish that represents your holiday tradition.” New to this holiday extravaganza, I invited a guest and we brought store-bought eggnog and pumpkin pie. I felt embarrassed setting it next to Robin’s homemade sweet potato pie.

The layout of the room was also reflective of this being a diverse event. In addition to the five rectangular tables where people were sitting and eating food, there was a dreidel-making table, a table for making the Kwanza Kinara, and a drum circle with African drums, claves (wooden sticks), maracas, and other noisemakers. There was also one activity table where kids frosted and sprinkled holiday-themed sugar cookies.

The event was lively. Compared to a typical Neighbor Night, this holiday event attracted almost twice the crowd. I estimated that there were over 50 attendees. Although there was a loose schedule of events, Chrismahanakwanza was not formally organized. At about an hour in, Brad—a white librarian who helps plan community events like this—banged the two claves (wooden sticks) to unofficially call the ‘meeting to order.’ Brad introduced Vanessa—a taller black woman with long, black wavy hair who agreed to read a poem written for and titled after the holiday party. As soon as I heard Vanessa’s introduction and contemplated the content of her poem, I decided to record the monologue on my phone. Below is an excerpt of the poem as it was performed that night. Vanessa later gave me permission to reprint it here (emphases mine).

51 During an interview with Vanessa, she said I could reference the poem in my paper but admitted that she was hesitant because it had not yet been published. The poem has since been edited, but is still unpublished. What appears above is a transcript of the original live reading. I claim no ownership to this piece of art.
It’s that time of year again to share our joyous faith in another way. 
It’s that time of year for Christmas, Hanukkah, and Kwanza we embrace here today. 
It’s that time of year again for community culture and our lives to reflect. 
It’s that time of year to embrace freedom, equality, and justice we affect. 
Joyous Kwanzaa. 
It’s that time of year to rejoice for eight days and nights did the oil burn. 
It’s that time of year again. Spin the Dreidel and everyone take a turn. 
Happy Hanukkah. 
The menorah gleams bright throughout the night. 
The child in the manger is a wondrous sight. 
The Kinara is lit, seven principles we do share. 
Peace, faith and love is everywhere. 
**Yet, let us all rejoice in how different we are.** 
**Christmas-Hanu-Kwanzaa is just a tad too far.** 
Let’s embrace our neighbors with holiday cheer. 
It’s not just Christmas that comes once a year. 

The room was filled with light chatter and kids playing in the background while Vanessa was reading. However, the reading ended with a loud applause and several ‘awes’ from crowd. 
Despite the distractions, all of the neighbors seemed to have been listening. I think people, myself included, were very impressed at Vanessa’s creativity and ability to weave these diverse ethnic celebrations into such lovely poetry. It was hard not to like her composition given the feel-good ethos of the holidays and of the occasion. After the applause settled, Vanessa quickly added some closing remarks. Vanessa said, “Thank you. I want to wish you all a Merry Christmas, Happy Hanukkah, and Joyous Kwanzaa. And remember... We all sleep under the same sky, but we all celebrate a different light.” 

Vanessa’s closing statement and the final four stanzas of the poem reveal an interesting take on diversity. The line, “let’s embrace how different we are” suggests that Vanessa is simultaneously pro-diversity and critical of a melting pot version of diversity. As I learned later, many black residents share this view of diversity. Although black residents helped organize the
holiday event, and seemed to support the general sentiment of inclusion, for many, the mash-up of Chrismahanakwanzika seems “a tad too far.”

After Vanessa’s poem the program moved on to a drum circle. After the drum circle, a group of young, black children sang the song *Put a Little Love In Your Heart* and the adults in the audience joined in.

Kids: “And the world…”

Adults: “And the world…”

Kids: “Will be a better place.” [...] “For you... and me... Just wait... and see.”

After attending Neighbor Night and the Chrismahanakwanzika holiday event, I began to rethink my views about (the lack of) diversity in Black Shaker. Maybe visitors do not get it, but the residents know exactly how to practice diversity. As I continued to immerse myself in the neighborhood, including attending more events and interviewing residents, I learned that the *Kumbaya* or “happy talk” (Bell and Hartman 2007) moments like Chrismahanakwanzika relied on an uncritical type of diversity. These events may celebrate/promote exposure and representation, but are not necessarily anti-racist.

*Representative diversity vs. critical diversity.* After a few months of attending these Neighbor Night events in Moreland, I was able to interview Robin. Robin is a tall, brown-skinned woman with broad shoulders. She is a military veteran with a soft, deep voice and a warm, commanding presence. When I met her at Neighbor Night, I learned that she was the co-president of the Moreland neighborhood association. Later on, I learned that she also sits on the library’s board of trustees. We met for an interview at the Gimme Java coffee shop across the street from the Stephanie Tubbs Jones community building. We chatted for over an hour, but
Robin changed my view of Neighbor Night within the first few minutes. She said, “Diversity is important… True, authentic diversity.” She paused as if to choose her next words carefully:

A diverse community allows for diverse thought and approach in all things. In our community, the easiest most frequent opportunities for diversity are public forums… I would almost call it neutral grounds interactions.

Robin said that public forums like Neighbor Night seem to be a central place for people to interact with each other. I was thinking that these were her examples of authentic diversity, but I was wrong. Robin continued, “But when I say authentic diversity… Like genuine interactions... Those things I described, to me, are very superficial. They’re structured. They are within a perfect environment and it doesn’t lend for the opportunity for people to really get to know each other.”

Robin’s experience with diversity, from what she described to me, is complex. She expressed an optimism about Shaker’s potential for equitable community race relations, but she was not slow to identify areas in need of improvement. The statement that “a diverse community leads to diverse thought and approach in all things” is an endorsement for racially diverse neighborhoods. For Robin, having diversity in the approach to all things is a benefit. Robin grew up in East Cleveland, a predominantly black, but impoverished, suburb. She expressed her belief that, unlike East Cleveland, Shaker has the potential for “authentic” diversity because “all of the players are here.” However, to Robin, Shaker will only achieve authentic diversity when residents start to have difficult conversations pertaining to race. In her mind, until people are comfortable having difficult conversations, Shaker’s diversity will remain “very superficial.”

Sharing food, music, and art are a type of race relations deemed progressive by some (Anderson 2011). In historically segregated places, the achievement of this type of cosmopolitanism may be remarkable. Perhaps, in some places, a cosmopolitan canopy (Anderson
characterized by civility in interactions and cross-cultural exposure, is the highest ceiling for equitable community race relations. In Shaker Heights, civility is common and adults can find exposure to difference in discrete events like Neighbor Night. Additionally, in the spirit of Tatum’s (1997, 2017) recommendations for improving race relations in her popular *Why Are All the Black Kids Sitting Together in the Cafeteria*, adults participating in Neighbor Night have also openly discussed diversity. To be fair, Neighbor Night is designed to “improve community engagement in Moreland,” as opposed to being geared toward solving racial inequality. Nevertheless, events like the holiday party and conversations like the one discussed below, are useful for observing theoretically interesting phenomena such as a racially diverse group of community members having reflective discussions about diversity. Ultimately, and perhaps surprisingly, these conversations highlight a gap between residents’ perceptions of the current and the ideal impact of diversity in Shaker.

**Discussing Diversity: Neighbor Night Break-Out Session**

It has been over 60 years since the first black families moved to Shaker. While that achievement was indeed progressive, Black residents who live in Shaker Heights today desire more than civility and exposure. Black residents want equitable community race relations. When I began attending Neighbor Night, I was impressed with the relative amount of representational diversity. Surprisingly, I observed a general willingness of Neighbor Night participants to discuss issues that sometimes revolve around diversity. Perhaps, I thought, these discussions represented the authentic diversity Robin and others were seeking.

At Neighbor Night, there is a twenty-minute section of the program devoted to small-group discussions. Anyone in attendance can propose a topic to discuss, as long as it draws general interest and is framed as a question. For example, one night someone asked ‘can
someone show me how to garden?’ This is a question, but it is too personal and specific. Moderators might revise the question to be ‘‘Are there any neighbors who might want to share gardening tips or seeds?’’ Typically, there are no more than five break-out discussions at any one meeting. If there are more than four or five suggestions, the moderators try to merge groups, which is what occurred when I proposed a topic during a Neighbor Night meeting in 2017.

After a few months of attending Neighbor Night, I decided to propose my own topic. I asked the group ‘‘What does diversity do for adults in Shaker?’’ Another attendee, Melanie, proposed to discuss improving diversity at the upcoming Father’s Day marathon (Dad’s Day Run). The moderators paired Melanie and me because our two proposed conversations were similar. I was a bit nervous to see who joined our conversation, but twelve residents (seven of whom were black) joined our break-out group. In addition to Melanie and me, the main contributors included Robin, Tom, and Miss Jackie from Moreland; Cheron from Boulevard; Eric from Ludlow, a white councilman named Dennis; a white woman who is newer to Shaker named Anna; and one black visitor/entrepreneur named Deonna. Kim, the co-creator of Neighbor Night and a Shaker alumna, also sat in our circle and offered some input. Below are excerpts from this conversation.\(^{52}\)

As the co-moderator, I began the discussion by prompting the group with the question ‘‘What does diversity in Shaker do for adults?’’ Deonna, a visitor whom I only met once, was first to jump in.\(^ {53}\) She said, ‘‘diversity in Shaker presents innovative and equitable opportunities... By expanding beyond my cultural experiences, it provides opportunities.”

\(^{52}\) Quotes have been edited for clarity (including deleting redundancies, pauses, and other minor gestures), but remain in their original conversational sequence or chronology.

\(^{53}\) I attempted to meet Deonna for an interview. After a few emails back and forth, Deonna stopped responding and never met with me.
Seeming to disagree slightly, Eric said, “I’m going to jump in, but I understand what you’re saying. If you know Shaker, you know that this is a very diverse community, but there still happens to be multiple Shakers. I just heard somebody say that diversity is more like… being invited to the dance, but then when you get there someone actually asking you to dance. There’s a lot of people who come into Shaker to go to the dance. […] So, we’re diverse but we’re not dancing.”

Robin said, “Well, I like that analogy. So, being asked to dance is one thing, but I think the other challenge might be is that, to some degree, maybe people aren’t dancing because you don’t need anyone to dance if your jam comes on. Maybe people go to the dance and they don’t hear their song.”

Miss Jackie’s view of Shaker seemed to more closely align with Deonna. She said “With diversity, if you decide to be accepting and less judgmental of other people, it broadens our horizons. I embraced many cultures [at home] in the food that I prepared. Now that [my children] are adults they could go anywhere in the world because they’re already familiar and have some idea about their music, what they eat, and how they talk. And that’s basically what we all have [food and language]. Even though we have this melting pot here, we all have the same subcultures.”

Tom said “[Shaker is not] a melting pot, nor should it be. It’s a salad. That’s what it should be. Each piece of the salad’s got its own flavor. When you put them in together and you put a little dressing on it, it makes for a remarkable salad. If you want to see diversity in action walk down Coventry.”

Coming to Miss Jackie’s defense, Cheron said “Right, but I mean that is a constant challenge. And living in Shaker Heights is hard work.”
Robin immediately retorted, “Any valuable relationship takes work.”

Robin then continued, “For me, one of the statements that just drives me up the wall, and I’ll hold it together right now, is when I hear people say, ‘I don’t see color.’ As if seeing it is wrong, as if acknowledging it is wrong.”

Turning to look at Dennis, she offered “if you’re Irish, there’s nothing you need to be ashamed about. I’m not knocking Shaker because I’m here by choice. I like it, but I think that the thing that would bind and strengthen our communities and really put some teeth behind that word diversity, is people not running from the real diverse community that we have.”

The perspectives and analogies the residents shared were illustrative. Mainly, I realized that adult residents in Shaker Heights, both black and non-black, have similar perceptions about where Shaker’s diversity falls short of achieving integration. Additionally, in the above conversations I noticed that there was a split in the way black residents spoke about their perceptions of diversity. Robin, who was quoted earlier, and Eric both used the analogies of a school dance to describe the current state of race relations in Shaker Heights. Deonna and Miss Jackie expressed a more idealistic view on diversity. While the original question was “what does diversity do for adults,” the responses included answers to questions ranging from “what does diversity mean to you?” and “what is diversity really like in Shaker?”

_Silly rabbit, diversity is for kids._ Again, one of the earliest findings that emerged from my research is that adults in Shaker do not seem to lead diverse lives. Kathleen, an older white woman and former Shaker Heights resident, gently criticized my conclusions when I shared that Shaker is failing to achieve equitable community race relations. Kathleen, whom I met through a local university, has a bi-racial son growing up in Shaker. She moved out a few years ago after a divorce and the son remained in Shaker with his dad. Intending, I think, to find support for her
own family’s experience, she asked, “have you looked at the schools?” This was one of many similar attempts of residents to prove to me that Shaker presents opportunities for diverse interactions. Many people pointed to the schools as irrefutable proof of equitable race relations. However, several residents—including some Shaker Schools alumni—said adults’ failure to practice diversity inevitably affects the children in Shaker.

Dennis said, “The schools do a great job of [promoting diversity]. When you get to college people go off into their world. We come back as adults and we lost some of that. As somebody who grew up and went to Shaker for K through 12 and I also send my son there, I think it’s very true that a lot of times even people who go to the Shaker schools can be ships passing in the night.”

Agreeing with Dennis, Lee said, “Very often as adults we end up stuck in our silos. We end up teaching our children. We may not mean to teach it to our children, but that’s what they learn.” Eric also agreed and said “I look at my son, whose best friend is a little white boy, and he comes from a different neighborhood. We come from the Ludlow area. His best friend comes from the other side of Shaker, north of Chagrin, east of Lee Road. So, it’s totally different areas. And I believe that the diversity is here. It’s us [adults] who have to start seizing on it.”

What prevents residents from “seizing on” diversity? Perhaps the benefits of diversity cannot be seized if we do not practice it. However, all of the residents in this conversation are practicing diversity. If showing up at the dance is not enough and dancing with each other is not enough, what is preventing this kind of diversity from improving race relations? This is where understanding perceptions are useful.

The Diversity Perception Gap. Two people can “experience” the same event, but interpret those experiences differently. This is true whether you consider two individuals who go for a ride
in a car or a financial disaster that devastates a nation’s economy. I was quite impressed with residents’ willingness to discuss diversity in a civil, yet critical way at Neighbor Nights. Race relations in Shaker Heights are relatively progressive in that adult neighbors seem comfortable having conversations about diversity in formal settings. However, in many instances, including the above conversation at Neighbor Night, there is a gap between what ideal diversity looks like for black and non-black residents. For example, Dennis said,

I think it’s a great idea to get the Sussex neighborhood to go out and do some new approach [for Dad’s Day Run], but there’s got to be other ways we can gather together people from all different ships that are passing in the night in Shaker. Events like [Neighbor Night], more of them. I think that’s the way you make strides.

During the same conversation, Anna, a white woman who moved to Shaker from California, suggested having a neighborhood dance party, “since we like to party, we could throw some grand dance parties, and maybe everybody’s jam doesn’t have to be in the same two hours.” Dennis’ and Anna’s suggestions about getting people together completely disregarded Eric’s view that everyone is at the dance “but we’re not dancing.” Sans the music, the dance party solution is no different from Neighbor Night or any of the spin-off events.

To some, a diverse community event like Neighbor Night may represent “authentic” diversity. However, for the black residents who call lower Shaker home, events like Neighbor Night only achieve diversity on a superficial level. For instance, Val said, “I fell in love [with Shaker] because of the diversity. That’s what I liked. I thought I could find that in Shaker, and to some degree, but having lived in a place like D.C., you know what it really looks like. Truly diverse communities. You know what that looks like. And Shaker has a long way to go to really get there.”

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54 Dennis used this expression after Robin, during the same group discussion.
What would *authentic* diversity look like in a place like Shaker Heights? Perhaps, as in Val’s recollection of her experiences in D.C., the multitudes of people move through and collide in public spaces. During the Neighbor Night conversation about diversity, several residents cited Coventry, a nearby commercial district in the bordering suburb of Cleveland Heights, as an example of the type of neighborhood diversity adults in Shaker desire.\(^{55}\) Residents, both black and non-black, consider Coventry to be a racial and economically diverse neighborhood where everyone feels welcome and interracial exposure is constant and balanced. Similar to Shaker Heights, Cleveland Heights is also multiethnic and micro-segregated. In this one neighborhood/shopping district, however, people from different backgrounds seem to coexist. Cheron, the Director of Economic Development in Shaker, agreed that Coventry is a special place but said this type of neighborhood diversity is “difficult” to achieve, and is often more difficult to maintain. Surprisingly, despite its perceived difficulty, I found evidence that this model of creating diverse commercial areas is a primary objective for the City of Shaker Heights.

**Increasing Diversity and the Threat of Cultural Tourism**

In Shaker Heights, there is a gap between the ideal state of race relations and the current reality as described by black and non-black residents. Residents idealizing a neighborhood that has more racially diverse public spaces, is only one example of a gap between the desired and the current state of affairs. The black residents I interviewed also were critical of the goals or initiatives currently in use to promote diversity in Moreland, specifically, and Black Shaker, broadly.

\(^{55}\) Coventry was also cited in a popular publication *The Great Inversion* (Ehrenhalt 2013) as the type of commercial district needed in inner-ring suburbs with aging housing stock and rising diversity.
Many residents felt that, prior to Neighbor Night, people from outside of Moreland rarely went out of their way to spend time in Black Shaker. Val, the Moreland Community Association co-president, said, “If you live next door, you’re in a community with people of color and you have your block parties, you have events, you’re going to interact, right? But outside of that, being purposeful to travel to Moreland to join their block party, that type of thing, there’s still a struggle.”

Enter Neighbor Night. As I mentioned above, Neighbor Night is a community engagement program co-sponsored by the city of Shaker Heights. A few months prior to my arrival in 2016, the city’s Neighborhood Revitalization Department began actively engaging in the Moreland neighborhood under the moniker “Moreland Rising.” According to the city’s website, Moreland Rising serves to: “catalyze entrepreneurship along the Chagrin-Lee corridor”; “explore new ways for neighbors to connect with neighbors”; “cultivate an environment that continues to inspire art and artists”; and to “encourage innovative housing designs that set the standard for years to come.” Some of the initiatives that were active during my time in the field include a small-business mixer targeted to shops on Lee Rd., a new housing construction competition in Moreland, a Moreland History project, and Neighbor Night.

All of the initiatives led by Moreland Rising rely on city resources. The main goal, it seems, is stabilizing the commercial and residential areas in Moreland. The city’s effort to stabilize this part of Shaker is partially driven by the goal of representational diversity. Diversity, in this case, given Moreland’s disproportionate racial composition, equates to encouraging non-black investment and visitation. Beatrice, who directs these initiatives for the city, said that an event like Neighbor Night “is about drawing people in… making sure that we have a balance. If you look at any city, it’s about ‘will it only be for one group?’”

Shaker Heights is a suburb that is openly committed to marketing its diversity. According to Beatrice, Shaker has to tell its own story.

We can’t rely on somebody else to tell our story. We have to control that messaging ourselves because [Shaker Hts.] is still such an unusual place in America. People are used to segregated communities and we can’t obviously control what realtors or anybody else says. So, we’re going to have to send our own message out.

Moreland does not quite fit the Shaker brand. Specifically, “southern Moreland” (census tract 1836.03) is too racially segregated to be marketed as diverse. It also seems to be a part of Shaker that is only for “one group.” As I mention in Chapter 2, African American residents and visitors seem comfortable using and interacting in this part of Shaker. Several black residents suggested Neighbor Night and other formal community events in Moreland are a type of safe tourism into the black part of town. One event in particular, Jane’s Walk, literally epitomized tourism.

According to their Instagram bio (@janeswalk), “Jane’s Walk is a global movement of free, locally-led walking tours inspire by Jane Jacobs.” In the spring of 2017, Jane’s Walk came to Moreland, a tour attended by several urbanists (planners, architects, and urban historians). This tour was not a part of the Moreland History or the House-Building Competition projects that were simultaneously underway in Shaker. When I arrived to Jane’s Walk, I was surprised that I was one of only a few black residents. I saw several familiar faces—including Beatrice and Kelly who led the tour. Chloe, a student-volunteer, was also present. I noticed that Chloe was not her usual chipper self this day. I hung back and chatted with her as the walking tour paraded from the shops on Lee Road to the residential part of the Moreland neighborhood.

Chloe is an active resident and a volunteer for the city. Chloe grew up and currently lives in the Lomond neighborhood with her parents. Chloe is a community organizer by passion and profession. Although she is almost always bubbling over with positive vibes, on this occasion
she mainly vented her frustrations to me. When I asked what she thought of the Jane’s Walk event in Moreland, she said “Let’s just say, this has been an interesting summer. Like, that’s my boss.” Chloe’s boss for the summer was a white woman who was giving a short presentation about the Moreland area with the help of Kelly, the local historian. The woman, Chloe’s boss, kept saying things like, ‘[Moreland] has a lot of assets that can attract new customers.’ Chloe’s face muscles, usually engaged by a large smile, gave away her discomfort. She told me she thinks that “the language [the city uses and the tour guide used] is highly problematic.” Chloe said that from her perspective working and living in Shaker Heights, the businesses in Black Shaker bring in plenty of money to the city. So, if revenue or economic activity is not a threat, then conversations about stabilizing the area and bringing in customers must be coded for something else.

Chloe also stated that the efforts to engage neighbors do not overlap with efforts to engage entrepreneurs on Lee Road. At times, initiatives designed to uplift Moreland end up pulling residents and businesses in different directions. For example, the same day and time of a summer Neighbor Night meeting at Chelton Park, the city also sponsored a business mixer at The Dealership (see Figure 3.1). These two events, both intended to promote engagement in the Moreland community, were less than 1000 ft. apart. I was at the Neighbor Night at Chelton when I learned about the business mixer. On my way home, I walked past The Dealership. As usual, Neighbor Night attracted a predominantly black crowd. Surprisingly, the crowd at The Dealership was predominantly white. Chloe told me, during our chat at Jane’s Walk a few weeks later, that she worked the business mixer and thought it was divisive not to combine events.
Suburbs across the nation are promoting the development of commerce in order to offset the weight of property taxes and to compete with gentrifying urban areas (Teaford 2008). Shaker Heights has notoriously high property taxes and two commercial districts (The Lee-Chagrin and Van Aken Plazas). The Moreland area, home to over 30 businesses on Lee-Chagrin, has the lowest median home values in all of Shaker. So, increasing commercial and business investment in Moreland makes sense. Inviting in new businesses, like an art studio and a high-end dog grooming store, also serves to increase statistical diversity of visitors. Moreland, through these initiative and investments, will become more, in Beatrice’s words, “for everyone.” However, increasing diversity in Moreland, a predominantly black neighborhood with economically viable black businesses, mirrors a similar process as gentrification. Bringing in high-end stores and architecture (in the form of new homes and rehabilitated store fronts) also brings in a new type of business, new customers, and eventually, if the city has their way, new residents. From this

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57 Freeman (2005) describes gentrification as “the process by which decline and disinvestments in inner-city neighborhoods are reversed […] by attracting middle-class residents and spurring investment” (p. 463).
perspective, it is easier to understand why these initiatives incite resentment among many residents in Black Shaker. These contentious dynamics, occurring in a suburb that is reflective and arguably paranoid about its reputation, beg the question of whether “for everyone” is attainable within one city.

**Conclusions**

Relative to racial and class differences that we see in many neighborhoods across America, Shakerites have a lot in common, i.e., a *hallowed kinship* (Shapiro 2017) based on shared residence, participation in the schools, and a collective interest in housing values and economic growth. Nevertheless, what may seem like *minor differences* (Freud 2010) between neighbors across Shaker, differences based on race, still create major barriers to social integration. In this chapter, I sought to examine how black suburbanites describe their experiences and interactions with their non-black neighbors to understand how the diversity perception gap plays out in community life. I find that *exposure* to diverse social encounters in public spaces, even if in small doses, is available for both black residents and visitors to Black Shaker. However, black residents have more opportunities for exposure to, and to practice, diversity through formal and informal community events and gatherings.

The monthly community meetings in the Moreland neighborhood stand out as the most recognizable example of representational diversity that exists for residents in Black Shaker. Compared to the alternative of never having racially diverse neighborhood activities, formal events in Moreland seem progressive. Black residents in Moreland, however, remain critical of these events and the interactions that occur as a result.
It is true, the way most Americans conceive of diversity and how we enact it in neighborhoods is “complicated” and “contradictory” (Berrey 2015). On one hand, it is important to have a team of like-minded adults who all agree that both exposure and inclusion are values worth pursuing. I would argue that the residents, politicians, educators (members of the “official” community) of Shaker do agree that diversity is worth pursuing—in the sense that racial diversity leads to community development and stability (social, economic, educational). This conforming requirement of suburbia (Whyte 1956), however, is antithetical to making sure different types of people are all at the table or at least have their interests represented.

In suburbs like Shaker, black and non-black residents unify around the values of good services, good schools, and good homes. This is what residential suburbs were designed to provide. If your values align with the three primary values, if we hold the three values constant, then, yes, there is room for your input in Shaker. If you value schools, good services, and a strong/stable housing stock, and you move to Shaker, then the variations in your racial, ethnic, and even class background seem to mean less. However, even though members who hold the three values of good services, good schools, and good homes seem more similar to each other than to “outsiders,” they are not equal in terms of their status and standing in the neighborhood. For example, the difference between the most and least black neighborhoods (Moreland and Mercer) reflects socioeconomic class segregation as much as a racial one.

Black families—from various socioeconomic backgrounds—live close by and converge in activity spaces in Black Shaker, but are they connected? In the following chapter, I focus my analysis on experiences of racial discrimination and the narratives of neighborhood mobility among black residents living in Black Shaker. I argue that these two interrelated phenomena are commonalities that unite black residents.
CHAPTER 4: INSIDE BLACK SHAKER

No matter how much money you have, no matter how famous you are... Being black in America is tough. —LeBron James

Introduction

21st century cities are undergoing a wave of minority suburbanization (Frey 2015).

Asian, Black, and Latino Americans are more likely to live in and move to the suburbs than urban neighborhoods. In many of these suburban destinations, Shaker Heights included, the influx of racial minorities results in the diversifying of historically white residential spaces. In this chapter, I ask whether the suburbanization of Black Americans in Shaker Heights has led to the disintegration of the black community (Robinson 2010). That is, as Black Americans move to suburbs, and have opportunities for interracial exposure, are they more or less likely to identify with a group identity based on race? Or, does life in a diverse suburb lead to cultural assimilation?

In general, contemporary Black Americans live in a variety of neighborhoods and have different lived experiences based on class, nationality, multiraciality, and other factors. These differences disrupt and undermine the meaning of a collective “Black America.” This is the main thesis of journalist Eugene Robinson’s (2010) Disintegration: The Splintering of Black America. Wilson (1987, 1993) identified a similar process when arguing that a wave of middle-class black out-migration compromised social stability in the black ghetto. Instead of solidifying

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59 Urban neighborhoods, regardless of race, are no longer the dominant residential form. Native Americans are not majority suburban, but are also majority non-urban.
60 In reference to individuals who are black and one or more race, but who identify or are raced as black.
61 Prominent social scientists such as Wilson (1978) have proposed similar arguments based on data from earlier times. The main logic, is that variations within the black community disrupt racial unity and make the label “black” useless as a sociopolitical term.
blackness, Wilson argues, black upward mobility disrupted the black community. For Wilson, as the legal, economic, and political racism that created the ghetto declined, it liberated those blacks who had higher socioeconomic statuses. Despite the optimistic and post-racial forecast by Wilson (and later Robinson), more recent evidence suggests that middle class blacks, despite escaping the ghetto, continue to experience high levels of residential segregation (Charles 2003, Pattillo 2005) and social stigma (Anderson 2012).

In the southwestern part of Shaker Heights, an area I refer to as Black Shaker (see Figure 4.1), intraracial differences seem muted. Indeed, there is variety in the type of black people who live and converge in Black Shaker—there are Afro-Caribbean and African immigrants, low-income African Americans, middle class and professional blacks, retired people who are low-income, and retirees that seem to do well for themselves, such as former judges and dentists. Through conversations with 32 black residents and two years of observing neighborhood life, I found considerable evidence that there are many moments where black lives converge creating what functions like a black canopy within the statistically integrated suburb of Shaker Heights.

![Figure 4.1: Map of Black Shaker](image)

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62 Borrowing from Anderson’s (2011) cosmopolitan canopies, a black canopy is a space or cluster of spaces where black culture is prominently displayed or can be readily sampled.
In Black Shaker, cultural institutions include black-owned- (e.g., Gimme Java coffee shop; barber shops/hair salons) and black-run- (e.g., The Touch of Italy Bar and Grill) businesses. These are spaces where visitors can view or sample black cultural expressions without necessarily having connections to black peoples or promoting equitable community race relations. As I argue in Chapter 2, Black Shaker does not attract many non-black visitors. While it would useful to understand non-blacks inactivity in Black Shaker, this chapter is devoted to understanding the black people who maintain the black canopy. I argue that, given the presence of predominantly black residential and commercial spaces in Black Shaker combined with sizable black populations in Fernway and Sussex, Shaker Heights functions like a black ethnoburb.

*Chocolate Cities and Ethnoburbs*

In order to understand the experiences of black adults living in Shaker and to understand the significance of their position within Shaker Heights, I rely on the conceptual framework of *ethnoburbs* (Lin and Robinson 2005) and *chocolate cities* (Hunter and Robinson 2018). While the concept of Black Shaker as a “black canopy” is helpful for understand the function black residential and commercial areas may have in terms of activity spaces and practicing diversity within Shaker, the *ethnoburbs* and *chocolate cities* frameworks help understand how these spaces may emerge within a suburban neighborhood. More specifically, these frameworks challenge the notion that residential mobility or suburbanization leads to cultural assimilation, or racial “disintegration” (Robinson 2010).

Ethnoburbs are suburban neighborhoods that have a distinct ethnic character (Lin and Robinson 2005). This may include the presence of multilingual signage, cultural institutions, and ethnic aesthetics in art and architecture. Ethnoburbs are the enclaves of suburbia, offering both
social support and economic opportunity for its residents. The existence of ethnoburbs challenges dominant spatial assimilation hypotheses. Specifically, ethnoburbs challenge the notion that as ethnic minorities achieve upward class mobility they will also experience residential migration out of the urban core into the suburbs. This process assumes that, minorities in the suburbs will be less segregated than their urban counterparts. Classic locational attainment models assumed that outward and upward migration typically involve assimilation, the melting phenomenon where foreigners become more like Americans. However, the emergence of ethnoburbs suggests that members of ethnoracial communities can follow overlapping mobility trajectories ultimately converging in residential spaces with members of their same ethnoracial group. In their study of a Chinese ethnoburb in Los Angeles, Lin and Robinson (2005) find that as successive waves of Chinese Americans settle in the Los Angeles region, they are more likely to settle in suburbs with a relatively high concentration of other Chinese Americans (and Chinese immigrants). These suburbs, through active and passive forces, retain their distinct ethnic character.

The Los Angeles Chinese ethnoburb commenced as an intentional real estate development project. Developers marketed the region as a Chinese Beverly Hills (Lin and Robinson 2005, 53). Shaker Heights was not intentionally designed to attract black residents. The original developers of Shaker excluded blacks through deed restrictions. Following the famous Ludlow “experiment” of the 1950s, the city enacted policies to prevent further racial turnover in Black Shaker (Stokes-Hammond 2011). Despite these efforts, decades of white flight (Galster 1990) and the corresponding waves of black suburbanization have created what today looks and functions like a black ethnoburb. In Shaker today, there are high levels of black

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63 Timberlake, Howell, and Staight (2011) also report that, while spatial mobility hypotheses fit the white and Asian American experience, disparities exist in the spatial mobility patterns for Black and Latino Americans.
residency, a clustering of black-owned and black-geared businesses, and black cultural expressions that are open for public consumption and promoted by the marketing arm of the city government.64

In Shaker Heights, people from diverse racial backgrounds live and shop relatively close to each other. However, residential and non-residential segregation persists. Black people in Shaker Heights are more likely to use public and commercial spaces in the southwestern part of town. In Black Shaker, there are thriving black businesses like barber shops and urban boutiques. There is a thriving neighborhood organization attended by mostly black residents. The Moreland neighborhood, the heart of Black Shaker, is an overwhelmingly black activity space that borders two predominantly black Cleveland neighborhoods (Mt. Pleasant to the west and Lee-Miles to the south). At a time when the black community is splintering, according to some accounts (Robinson 2010), there seems to be a stable black community in Shaker Heights.

It would be a mistake to conflate racial segregation with racial unity unless the evidence suggests otherwise. Black residents and black visitors share more than the public space and commercial institutions; they also share a collective experience of American blackness. The chocolate cities framework is useful here for its specific focus on the “Black American Experience” (Hunter and Robinson 2018, 4). The concept of chocolate cities is useful for understanding the black neighborhood experience, because Black Americans historically suburbanized from segregated ghettos65 as opposed to ethnic enclaves. While both ghettos and enclaves are statistically segregated, given their near homogenous ethnoracial composition, black

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64 During Black History Month in 2017, neighbors hosted a poetry slam where participants were asked to read the work of black poets. The event was hosted at the library in Moreland. Both the library and The Neighborhood Revitalization Department promoted this event via email and the library advertised the event on their website.

65 Even middle-class blacks who moved outside of the ghetto, tended to live in adjacent or nearby neighborhoods (Michney 2017; Pattillo 2005)
ghettos in America were always communities of *involuntary* segregation (Haynes and Hutchinson 2008).

The rise and fall (or dispersal) of the black ghetto is an important variation in the migration histories of people of color. Black ghettos, involuntarily segregated communities, emerged in cities across the United States in the 19th century (Du Bois 1899; Kusmer 1978). The typical historical narrative suggests that blacks left the south in a *Great Migration*; moved north in search of economic opportunity and equal rights; landed initially in integrated urban communities that became segregated over time; as black individuals and families gained socioeconomic status, left the ghetto for the urban fringes; and, most recently, arrived in the promise land of suburbia. According Hunter and Robinson (2018), black migration is (and has always been) cyclical, not a one-way pattern. Moreover, and more importantly, the migration histories of Black Americans resulted in the formation of nodes of black communities sprawling the continental United States; From Harlem to DC, from Detroit to Memphis. Chocolate maps—the plotted geography of these chocolate city nodes—helps explain how Black Americans managed to unite as a collective and form a “nation within a nation.”

During my two-year investigation of black social life in Shaker Heights, I identified two unifying forces (commonalities) that integrate, not splinter, Black Lives: (1) experiences of racial discrimination and (2) similar migration histories. Racial discrimination is a commonality recognized by all of my participants, and I provide examples below of discrimination that occur inside and outside of Shaker. Black residents were not necessarily aware of the second commonality, shared mobility histories. In the second findings section (Commonality 2), I present data in the following order: (a) I begin with a description of the overlaps in residential mobility; (b) next, I include a discussion of two variations in experiences of black residents

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Pendergrass (2013) and others are exploring the trend of black reverse migration to the American South.
(respectively, tenure and socioeconomic class standing); and (c) finally I explore a behavioral response (staying in place) that suggests black residents, despite their cynicism toward neighborhood turnover, act as brokers bringing other black people in to Shaker.

**Commonality 1: Racial Discrimination**

One of the experiences that serve to unify black adult residents in Shaker Heights, beyond residential segregation and shared activity spaces, is racism. The fact that black adults, despite their class and neighborhood standing, experience racial discrimination, has been established elsewhere (Anderson 2012; Feagin 1991; Lacy 2007). I argue that experiencing racism in individual interactions creates a unifying experience for the black residents of Shaker across lines of class and residential tenure. The fact that the experience of racial discrimination is a burden disproportionately carried by people of color illustrates a major factor as to why diverse communities may fail to foster equitable race relations.

All of the 32 black adult residents I spoke with during my two years in the field described at least one instance where they had to personally deal with racial discrimination. For these adults, experiences with discrimination or racism occurred both inside and outside of Shaker. Clarence Tate’s recounting of his family’s experience with negative race relations is a good representation of what many residents described to me. I present data from my interview with Clarence and his adult daughter here to represent other instances of racism that black adults experience. Clarence, a small-business owner, has lived in Shaker for 25 years. Since 2015, Clarence, his wife, six year old daughter, step-mother, and nephew have lived in a large home in the Fernway neighborhood. He also has two adult daughters. His middle daughter, Jasmine, is a
freshman in college and lives at home during winter and summer breaks. According to Clarence, he is one of the only black families on his street.\footnote{In the Fernway neighborhood (tracts 1835.01 and 1835.02), black people account for approximately 35\% of the residents (ACS 2012, 5-year estimates). Clarence’s statement reflects his perceptions based on prior interactions, but also do not extend beyond his street.}

I met Clarence at an event for entrepreneurs in Shaker. We spoke about my research for about a half-hour when we first met. One day in the summer of 2017, he invited me to his house for a more formal interview and we ended up spending more than four hours together. During this span of time, we rode to the liquor store together and drank a beer at his house as we talked. I was also able to meet his nephew, two daughters, and mother. His daughter Jasmine even joined the interview about half-way in. Both Clarence and Jasmine offered valuable insights about race relations and the black experience in Shaker Heights. Clarence moved to Shaker in the 90s as an adult, but Jasmine has lived in Shaker her entire life. As a college freshman, Jasmine has also been able to experience life outside of Shaker. Below, I have included excerpts of my conversations with the Tates. Some of these statements have been edited for readability, but the data come from verbatim transcriptions of our recorded conversation.

Clarence used to live in a house in the Lomond neighborhood, in Black Shaker on the border of Moreland and Lomond. His new residence in Fernway is more diverse (statistically integrated) than the neighborhoods in Black Shaker. Although his move from Lomond to Fernway may exemplify upward mobility, Clarence does not seem pleased with his new neighborhood or his new neighbors. He said,

I don’t care for this street no more. These folks are not genuine. What goes on in Shaker right now—they think they’re slick though, which you have to be an intelligent black person to know. They can laugh and grin in your face. It makes you feel comfortable, without any diversion or any detection that they could care less about you.
Clarence was not particularly pleased with his relationship with his neighbors in Fernway. He said, when his family first arrived in 2015, only two families, both white, came to greet them—an immediate neighbor and a neighbor from down the street. Since the time of their arrival, they have been the only two households on the block that actually seem interested in involving the Tates in the social life of the neighborhood. Despite his immediate neighbors, longer-term Fernway residents, who share news about local happenings, Clarence said that he does not always feel welcome at these events.

What’s interesting with me, with white people over here, is that they will stick out their hand, welcome you to the neighborhood and then they’ll see you the next, “oh how’s it going? Everything is okay? Sure, we have a wine social coming up pretty soon, we’ll shoot you an email and you guys are more than welcome to come.” My thought is that my neighbor over here tells me that, but the person who is giving [the party] is not you, it’s somebody down there. And I’m trying to figure out why didn’t that person contact me or why didn’t that person shoot me an email to let me know I could come to their house?

Clarence described these instances as racial “microaggressions” from white neighbors in Fernway. Neighbors are civil; they will speak to Clarence and smile. Neighbors even express concern when things happen at the Tates’ house. For instance, neighbors have asked Clarence about the state of his mother’s health. His mother-in-law has a terminal illness. The Tates have never shared this openly with his neighbors. However, someone spread word around the neighborhood. He said his mother-in-law took offense to this because she is a private person. He took offense, too, because he never told any of the women who asked. He said that his neighbors are “nosy.”

If [neighbors] don’t know who you are, I’m telling you, they research you. That’s what they do, they research you. People will be way down the street, they walk their dog and talk to their neighbor across the street, who’s moving over there? Find out who that is. I’m telling you.

68 Sue (2010) defines racial micro-aggressions as “the everyday verbal, nonverbal, and environmental slights, snubs, or insults, whether intentional or unintentional, that communicate hostile, derogatory, or negative messages to target persons based solely upon their marginalized group membership” (p. 3).
Clarence said he feels like people only recognize him and his family because of their blackness. He said, “[My neighbors] very seldom speak. It’s like they know you because you’re black. Had it been a white resident they might confuse me, but every time I step out and walk over down this street they know who I am.” Clarence thought the fact that his white neighbors get information about him and his family, without “knowing” them, is invasive. It also reinforces his perceptions that his neighbors do not want to know him, but instead wish to monitor his presence in the neighborhood.

Although some neighbors seem to avoid interacting with the Tates entirely, a few neighbors do speak. However, even the people who speak to Clarence and his family at the school bus stop in the mornings, for example, do not interact beyond that. Clarence loves to cook. He said that whenever he grills he has an open door policy. Despite inviting several neighbors over to his house on different occasions, only the wife of his immediate neighbor has visited. Additionally, Clarence admitted that he is rarely invited to gatherings and parties at his neighbors’ houses.

[One of the neighborhood women] had a gathering at her house and didn’t invite us. Had a shindig going on, had wine or whatever. I always invite them for Christmas, I just want to see if they’re going to come over here. I invited her over for my mother-in-law’s birthday party. She said “you know what, I’d love to come see your mother-in-law.” Then told my daughter, “Tell your dad we have something to do, I just forgot.”

Although not all non-black residents in Shaker are equally responsible for wielding racial microaggressions toward their black neighbors, the impact of discrimination experiences deteriorates trust between black and non-black neighbors. Clarence Tate, like many black adults living in diverse neighborhoods, may be a little guarded. Even if neighbors’ failure to socialize with him has more to do with personality type, neighborhood tenure, age, class, gender, or other unknown factors, he views these limited interactions as a racial microaggression (Sue 2010).
In addition to the microaggressions experienced within the neighborhood, the Tate family, and other the black residents in Shaker, described the world outside of Shaker as racially hostile to blacks (Feagin 1991). This may account for a large portion of Clarence’s interpretations of his neighbors’ (in)actions as racist. That is, if one person treats you in a racist manner once, each subsequent interracial encounter may be viewed through the same lens.

During my afternoon with the Tates, Clarence and his daughter, Jasmine, shared a story of their recent family vacation. During a camping trip in Southeastern Ohio, a white man used racial slurs to antagonize the Tate family. Clarence recounted the story and Jasmine confirmed the details,

Last year we went to Logan [a town in Southeastern, OH] for a cabin, and it was all of us were – everybody who was in this house - it was three carloads of us. We went to the nice cabin and we’d gone up this road, so [my nephew] was in behind, so we say where’s [he] at? We said we’re going to wait until he catches up. A white guy, he had some kids, some teenage kids in his truck. He drove up in a blue old raggedy truck. He said “why don’t you niggers go back the other way, you’re blocking the damn road, go back the other way.” We were just like, what? Yeah, so he got mad and he rolled around and he came back. By that time when he came back he was hollering at [my nephew]. He drove to the end of the road to holler at us again. He said “why don’t you niggers go back where you belong, get the fuck out of here.” All of my kids heard it. He was so angry.

Clarence described this situation as an eye-opener, and a much-needed reality check, for Jasmine. He said,

My middle daughter here [referring to Jasmine], I said racism exists, baby. I said it really do. She said, “I don’t know why you got a problem with that. I don’t see racism.” I am glad that she got a chance to experience some of that. She was like “why you always talk about race all the time? You’re a prejudice.” I said, but it’s so real, you’ve got to understand it’s so real.

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69 See Steele and Aronson (1995). The stereotype threat hypothesis describes how performance is disrupted in settings where negative stereotypes are present regarding a specific group. I argue that, in integrated neighborhood settings where black residents are pioneers, negative stereotypes surrounding race may cause black residents to interpret social awkwardness as avoidance, condescension, or racism.
Jasmine has lived in Shaker her whole life. At the time of our interview, she had recently come home for summer vacation from college. Jasmine said that the camping trip in Southeastern, Ohio and the 2016 presidential election, along with other experiences at college, have shaken her views on race relations.

AG: So, Shaker kind of insulated you from the real world a little bit?

Jasmine: Yeah, and it’s not like I was oblivious to it, but it’s like I didn’t see it [race]. When you’re exposed to different stuff, you certainly see things come out. When we went on that [camping] trip and that guy said “you niggers go back the other way,” I was just like wow. […] Yeah, it’s just crazy. And not even just that experience, but like different stuff. Like when I went in the store and the lady was watching me. I’m like, I never stole anything in my life, why are you following me? It’s just so wrong.

There are obviously variations—black people’s experiences with racism range in severity, but the experience of racial microaggressions appears to be a common one. Chloe, another Shaker Heights alumnus, described a shift in her racial views after leaving Shaker and experiencing racial microaggressions as a young adult. When she first moved to Shaker Heights from Atlanta as a middle-schooler, Chloe said that she was eager to explore her racial identity. Chloe recounted this story during an interview,

I was honestly ready for a change in environment [when my family moved from Atlanta]. I hate to say it, but I think truthfully I was struggling with blackness. I think I was struggling with what that meant for me. Like, I grew up in a super afro-centric environment and I think I was in some ways pondering-- not resisting against that, because it was like ingrained and I’m so grateful for all of how I was raised and the culture or aspects of that. But I think I was like in some ways looking to kind of-- I don’t want to use the word explore, but I think test the environment that I was now in and how I perceived it. [In Shaker], although we give this illusion of harmony, there’s still, especially as people are exploring life and growing in this community, it’s still very [segregated]. You can’t ignore what is, you know?

Even in diverse neighborhoods, individuals act collectively to create and police the boundaries of race in terms of identity, behavior, and social contact (Ogbu 2003; Mayorga-Gallo 2018). Young Chloe, eager to practice diversity in her new school and neighborhood, was met
with these constraints early on. Despite facing resistance from her peers and broader society, however, Chloe ended up having a relatively diverse, yet mostly black, friend group by the end of high school. Chloe even chose to attend a predominantly white university in Central Ohio where she was the only black student in her dormitory and in most classes. Chloe said that she continued to seek out culturally diverse experiences into early adulthood, but found these efforts to be “exhausting.”

When Chloe moved home from college, her interest in community development led her to join several young professional groups and actively participate in their events. According to Chloe, many of the men and women she encountered were young, liberal, white people. While Chloe was excited to find a group who shared her passion for community green spaces and urban farming, for example, she found making friends with these new colleague more difficult than she anticipated. Chloe described her recent experiences to me during an interview at a coffee shop in Shaker Square.

Chloe: In order to continue to exist, I need a space that I have some control over, honestly. It was the most exhausting thing in my life recently moving back. People I was friends with, five white-identified people, moved to Buckeye, Shaker Square neighborhood, moved here, right. Got some from Dayton, Collinwood, so they feel like they’ve lived in the urban environment, okay? Yeah, context. So they moved here [to Shaker Square-Buckeye]. I started to embrace them ‘cause it seemed like we have the same, they were doing this intentional community and all these different things were happening. So, I was like “yo, let me see what’s happening.” I just moved back [from college].

AG: They seemed like they had similar interests?

Chloe: Yeah they seemed conscious. They had all the typical posters up and all the different signals of, like, okay maybe this is a space that I can exist in. So that space, it was the time that I probably, besides the time I was living in my experience in the homestead in [college] where I was only person of color living there and it was a really interesting experience in itself. But now coming back in adulthood, still living in [near] Shaker, and the type of responses from them like “oh you live in Shaker? Why aren’t you in Cleveland?” This is coming from people who moved into this community, who have now taken ownership of it and claim of it, and then now...
AG: They Columbused it.

Chloe: They Columbused it all the way! I mean, they’re the only white residents on this street. They’re bringing in a community garden. They’re like “well you need to live in Cleveland. No more living in Shaker.” Then they’re coming at me all types of ways. Like, “why would your parents move you to Shaker Heights?” Granted [one woman] went to Hathaway Brown [a private school in Shaker], okay? She was like “I live [in Shaker Square], but I don’t like Shaker.” Like this is among other things. Like, them singing Negro spirituals. I can’t make this up, Alan. [laughs] That was the time most recently when I’m like, alright let’s try this third space thing out. Nope. This is one situation, but I tried it out. It was so exhausting. Like, it’s not enough I’m constantly unpacking my identity in Shaker, in the world. On top of that, there are people who are claiming neighborhoods and now telling me that, one, they think they’re more black than me. Like their savior mentality, all these things. I started running into some of them again and one of them was like “oh yeah, I miss you.” I was like yeah, okay, take care. We can’t, in that third space, can’t interact from that level anymore. I literally almost lost my mind because it was exhausting.

Chloe admitted to me that she still enjoys diverse interactions in public community spaces, but said “Shaker can both be inclusive and, and exclusive in the same respects.” In Chloe’s case, she has more recently decided to exclude non-blacks from her personal space, because of past interracial encounters where white people center themselves in discussions pertaining to blackness.

Racially diverse living presents a conundrum: With whom might you (and should you) interact? Are you likely to be more similar to your same-race neighbors or racial outsiders? Several respondents, including Dee, a black woman married to a white man named James, discussed this dilemma. Dee expressed feeling socially isolated as a newcomer to Shaker Heights when she moved to Shaker in 2009, because she did not immediately identify with her black neighbors. She also expressed a hesitance to interact with white people because of past

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70 Chloe is a volunteer for the city and, although she lives in Sussex on the eastern part of Shaker, she helps coordinate the monthly Neighbor Night meetings in Moreland.
71 This phenomenon is referred to colloquially as “whitesplaining.”
72 This feeling may have changed slightly in the decade since Dee arrived. During my time in the field Dee and James were very involved in Black Shaker, mainly at community events. Dee and James are regular participants at
encounters with racial microaggressions. Dee said, sometimes she feels like she does not exactly
“fit in either space [black or white]. You know?” She went on to explain,

I think a piece is finding that common ground. This was my thing in high school. I remember one time asking if I could turn the basement into like a game room and mom was like “if you bring home some black friends” and I’m going “I don’t have anything in common with the other black kids in my school.” [Laughter] Like I don’t, I don’t listen to rap music, I’m not all about the fancy clothes, I don’t understand Tyler Perry movies, like I don’t get the humor. Like, I don’t fit there. I don’t fit in this other group of like really white people either, because I’m brown. I don’t. And, you know, I ended up with this quirky motley crew with a lot of first-generation [immigrant] friends [...] but if I hang out from people from work, I’m hanging out with them, not them and their other friends. I’m like the only person of color and [to them] I’m the “but you’re not really black.” I’m that person. [loud sigh]

Dee grew up in a predominantly white, small town about an hour west of Cleveland. Growing up, she managed to find a diverse group of friends. Although she admits to not having much in common with “the other black kids,” she also said that she does not feel entirely comfortable in all-white third places. For example, one of her best friends, a Turkish-American woman, invited Dee and James to a bonfire in another small town on the outskirts of Cleveland. Dee said that she declined the invitation because she does not know how the other guests will treat her.

Your husband’s got a crossbow, which is awesome! I would totally be down with like going to the shooting range with you. Like, I trust him, but I don’t know that I would be okay hanging out with them all in a crowd of their friends. Like, I’m not anti-government, I’m not anti-military--I’m pro all of these things. I just don’t wanna die. [laughs] I just don’t trust the other people there.

The role of discrimination in solidifying racial identity has been well-documented in historical records (Kusmer 1978) and social science research (Hunter and Robinson 2018; Lin and Robinson 2005). Obviously, the experience of racial microaggressions did not prevent my

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73 Oldenburg (2001) uses the term third places to describe the places where people can gather and interact. Third places are in contrast to the home (first places) and work (second places). These include, but are not limited to, cafes, coffee shops, bookstores, bars, and hair salons. Third places are typically inexpensive.
respondents from moving to or staying in Shaker Heights, a 53% white suburb. However, these encounters have skewed their perspectives towards cynicism and, for many, led them to retreat to predominantly black third places. I argue that racial discrimination, specifically racial microaggressions, can unite black adults from disparate backgrounds under the umbrella of a Black American Experience (Hunter and Robinson 2018).

**Commonality 2: Neighborhood Mobility Histories**

One of the overlaps between residents living in both ethnoburbs and chocolate cities is a shared history of residential mobility. During interviews with residents, I gathered information about participants’ date of arrival in Shaker, their previous residence, and the amount (and location) of moves during adulthood. What emerged in the data is overlapping migration trajectories among black families. I argue that residential mobility is another unifying experience (or commonality) for the black residents in Shaker Heights. Similar patterns of mobility, despite variations, have solidified individual black people as members of the black community.

Scholars, myself included, typically discuss residential mobility as a collective phenomenon. However, the timing and pattern of mobility varies for each family and individual. The black people who demographers count as participants in *The Great Migration*, for example, did not necessarily identify with such a collective experience. Historian Kenneth Kusmer (1978) describes how the Black Ghetto in Cleveland, a widely agreed-upon geographical region, developed slowly as white immigrants were replaced by southern black migrants. The original black residents, many the sons and daughters of free blacks, did not necessarily share a lot in common—in terms of tastes and preferences (Pattillo 2007)—with the newer southern arrivals.
However, as European immigrants poured into industrial cities and negative racial sentiments calcified, blackness as a group identity began to matter more.74

The majority of black residents I interviewed migrated from an east-side Cleveland neighborhood to Shaker Heights proper. Many have moved once or twice after arriving in Shaker. Even the individuals who grew up in small towns (n=3) lived in urban neighborhoods as adults prior to moving to Shaker. Additionally, a few residents in my sample migrated to Cleveland from The South. For instance, Chloe’s family migrated from Atlanta to Lomond during the early 2000s. Miss Jackie, who has lived in Moreland for nearly 40 years, first migrated to Cleveland from Memphis, Tennessee.

These overlaps in the history of black migration to Cleveland (and Shaker Heights) mirror the patterns discussed elsewhere (Hunter and Robinson 2018; Keating 1994; Michney 2017; Stokes-Hammond 2011). At the most general level, these migratory patterns fit the framework of chocolate cities. As Hunter and Robinson note, each city—every node on the chocolate map of Black American mobility—has unique tendencies. The history of black migration to Cleveland and Milwaukee, for example, may look slightly different, despite both Midwestern cities being former industrial hubs. In addition to variations in the local political economies of each city, each chocolate city varies in terms of where black migrants originally came from, the timing of migration waves, and how the migration patterns operate within the metropolitan boundaries. I am primarily considering the latter, the similarities in how black residents in Shaker Heights have moved throughout their tenure in Cleveland.

Historian Todd Michney (2017) found that black upward mobility within the Cleveland metropolitan area generally follows an eastbound trajectory. The original black ghetto in

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74 Institutional discrimination in housing (e.g., redlining) turned racist sentiments into real, invisible barriers to black residential choice and the opportunity for upward spatial mobility in the 20th century.
Cleveland was centrally located a few blocks east of the city center (Kusmer 1978). Between 1900 and 1980, the residence of black Clevelanders began to expand outside of the ghetto to the eastern neighborhoods like Collinwood, Lee-Miles, and Mt. Pleasant. To a Clevelander today, these three neighborhoods epitomize urban decay and disinvestment. Yet, from their days of glory to today, these three neighborhoods have been important links in the suburban migration chain. Affluent and professional blacks, the first families to leave the ghetto, first took residence in these adjacent neighborhoods. As one former Clevelander, Phillip Richards (2011), recounts in his memoir, *An Integrated Boyhood*, his upwardly mobile family, desiring a better quality of life for their children, moved to Mt. Pleasant. From Mt. Pleasant, they eventually took residence in Cleveland Heights and sent Richards to private school in Shaker. Moving from the inner-city ghetto, to a Mt. Pleasant or Collinwood, to one of the inner-ring suburbs like Shaker Heights, characterizes the story of black upward (or perhaps outward) mobility in Cleveland. It also provides some context for the longstanding east-west segregation pattern in the Cleveland metro region (Keating 1994, p. 20; Timberlake and Howell 2012).

Not surprisingly, the overwhelming majority of black residents I interviewed have similar histories. Franklin Astor Sr. (“Frank”), a long-time resident and former Shaker Heights councilman, moved to Moreland after experiencing upward mobility in his adulthood. His children were born in the Cleveland neighborhood of Mt. Pleasant, but raised in Shaker. His namesake, Franklin Jr., recently began renting his childhood home in Moreland when Frank Sr. and his wife moved to a further-out suburb. Frank Jr.’s “starter” home is his childhood home in Shaker Heights, although his family migrated from Mt. Pleasant.

Val, a Moreland resident since the 1990s, was born and raised in a predominantly black neighborhood in Cleveland. Her parents eventually relocated to Shaker Heights and Val left
Cleveland for Washington D.C. as a young adult. When her parents’ health began to decline, Val moved to Shaker to be closer to family. Val was born in Cleveland, left as a young adult, and now calls Black Shaker home. Val, and her parents, followed a residential mobility trajectory similar to other residents with whom I spoke.

Gwen Williams, a long-term resident and professor at a local university, moved to Moreland from Cleveland’s Mt. Pleasant neighborhood over 30 years ago. Gwen’s sister still lives in their childhood home. The sisters visit in Shaker weekly. Gwen has two adult children, and two grandchildren, who both live in Shaker Heights. One is an educator who teaches and has children in the Shaker School system. The grandchildren are third-generation Shakerites, but become connected to the experiences of their elders. Describing her grandson’s innocence, Gwen said, “[my grandson] always asks, ‘why do you always talk about race, Grandma?’ I told him that one day he will understand. I am just amazed at the experiences he has [by living in Shaker and attending the schools]. But I will remind him, ‘you are a black boy.’”

Eric, the co-president of the Ludlow Community Association, lives in the Cleveland part of Black Shaker. Due to an agreement between developers and city leaders in the early 1900s, prior to the integration of the Ludlow, the school district boundaries extend west of Shaker into Cleveland (Stokes-Hammond 2011). According to a local historian, Kelly,

[Shaker has] this mismatch between the school district and the city district. But, it meant that the housing values were lower in the Cleveland section, which means they were more affordable. So, African American families who were professionals, teachers, librarians, dentists were moving out of central Cleveland to Mount Pleasant which is some of these near eastside neighborhoods. Then, from there, into the [Shaker] school district.

Eric was born and raised in Cleveland and his wife is from Shaker. Eric said, “I grew up in a totally black neighborhood. Even though I moved around a little bit, the neighborhood that I’m primarily from was ninety-nine percent African American.” Eric admitted that he initially
was opposed to living in Shaker Heights due to its reputation as exclusive. So, he and his wife compromised with the—half-Cleveland, half-Shaker—Ludlow neighborhood. This presented them an opportunity to send their children to nice schools while maintaining their (Eric’s) roots (connection to the black community) in Cleveland. Although the first black families moved to Ludlow in the 1950s, Eric and his family have followed a similar trajectory motivated by similar factors—from Cleveland proper to Ludlow in search of quality public education.

Even black residents who currently live outside of the three neighborhoods that comprise Black Shaker (Ludlow, Lomond and Moreland) have similar migration stories. Clarence Tate, who I introduced above, lives in the Fernway neighborhood. Clarence and his wife both grew up in the city of Cleveland. They rented their first Shaker Heights home in the Lomond area, then purchased a home down the street a few years later, and eventually sold that home and purchased another one in Fernway in 2015. Clarence has three daughters; the oldest was born in Cleveland but graduated from Shaker Heights High School. His two younger daughters, 19 and 6, have lived in Shaker their entire lives. His middle daughter, Jasmine, grew up in Lomond and was already a high school senior when they left Black Shaker for Fernway. His youngest daughter, age 6, is too young to remember the former residences.

Toni, a single mother of a high schooler, also came to Shaker as an adult. She and her former husband owned a home in the Lee-Miles neighborhood of Cleveland, which shares a border with Shaker to the south. When their daughter was born, looking for better schools, they literally moved across the street (which is also the city border) to a home off Scottsdale, the most southern street in Shaker Heights. After a divorce, Lisa and her daughter left their home in Black Shaker and moved to an apartment on Van Aken Boulevard (on the border of Sussex and
Fernway). Similar to the Tates’ experience, Lisa lives in the relatively diverse part of Shaker but does not think that her residential mobility has led to increased diversity in her social life.

I’m not anti-white. I have a couple of white friends that I can reach out to more and just you know have a friendship. [...] I just like the people who I have a lot in common with. It’s like I don’t have a lot in common with regular white folks. I just don’t. You know? I really don’t have a confidence with white people in my life that can understand [what I am going through] [...] I had more of an affinity with my neighbors in Cleveland than I did with the ones in Shaker.

Residents in Black Shaker and black people living in the other neighborhoods have overlapping trajectories of mobility. This means that black adults, even those living in the more affluent sections of Shaker, have a history of migration that extends outside of the multiracial suburb. For many, this shared history includes living in predominantly black neighborhoods prior to their arrival. However, despite these overlaps, not all black adults recognize these within-group similarities. Some of the black people I spoke with expressed judgement toward their neighbors. Specifically, several old-timers in Black Shaker seem particularly judgmental toward incoming residents.

*Old-timers vs. Newcomers*

For most of the black adults I met, living in Shaker Heights represents a form of upward residential mobility. However, one of the primary variations in the mobility histories of black residents is timing—both the year and generation status of arrival. Timing variations occur in nearly every neighborhood. In a snapshot of neighborhood change, there are always two groups: long-term residents and newer residents. However, as time passes, newcomers eventually become the old-timers. Although I use these distinctions as they existed during my fieldwork, I recognize the fluidity of these labels and the variations among the people under them.\textsuperscript{75}

\textsuperscript{75} For examples of this from empirical studies of residential tenure see Brown-Saracino (2009) and Woldoff (2011). For examples from urban history see Kusmer (1978).
Variations in date of arrival may also coincide with socioeconomic class variations. A black family moving to Cleveland’s Mt. Pleasant neighborhood in 1970, for example, is very different from one moving to Mt. Pleasant today, since it has declined economically and is no longer a popular middle-class destination (Michney 2017). Similarly, growing up in Mt. Pleasant and moving to Shaker Heights, as an adult, is different from being born in Shaker Heights. For some of the adult residents in Black Shaker, living in Shaker Heights is a stop on the trip of upward residential mobility. For others, living in Shaker Heights is a final destination.

The differences in mobility histories are myriad, but most notably the date of arrival (and tenure) shapes the perceptions of the arrival and departures of others. These include differences in tastes and preferences as well as judgmental class-based sentiments. For example, during an outdoor event at Chelton Park in Moreland, I saw Gerald, a tall grey-haired man wearing a baseball cap and glasses walk his Yorkie. Prior to this event, which evolved from a conversation at Neighbor Night, I had never encountered Gerald, so I immediately wanted to get to know him. Gerald was initially standoffish. When I introduced myself, he looked over me as he shook my hand, as if to monitor the park like a guard in a watchtower. I gave him space to mingle before striking up a conversation about my research. I found out that Gerald is a talker and had a lot on his mind. Gerald was standing at the food table. I went over to chat about my study and with very little probing, Gerald said “People act like Shaker is perfect, there are no problems. I’m 60 and these niggas got all sorts of problems in Shaker.”

Gerald did not make much eye contact with me and he spoke with a ball of chewed food in one cheek as he fixed his gaze on people at the event. “A lot of these people don’t even live here. I just noticed that” he said. This was about 40 minutes into the program. In addition to black residents, and a few black visitors (mostly teens), the Mayor of Shaker Heights also
stopped by. He was accompanied by a group of four police officers, a group of four white men (two in suits and two uniformed) who were apparently in town to conduct an annual review of the Shaker Heights Police Department. The mayor and officers stayed for only 15 minutes. Each talked with a few residents and then left before the meeting started.

The mayor came to the food table to talk sports with Gerald, who I learned is a retired physical education teacher. In his short conversation with the mayor, Gerald was complaining about how trashed the youth football team leaves the field. The mayor said the youth group is a privately run club, but Shaker lets them use the fields. Gerald said that six years ago he confronted the coaches to tell them that they need a permit if they want to practice in Shaker. Gerald said, “I pay too much tax money to let someone who’s not in Shaker use the field in Shaker.” He complained about how the park was capped in terms of space and asked the mayor when they were going to expand the park. He said he wants to see Chelton look good because he lives here and this is his park. The mayor gave a vague political response like ‘I believe we are working on something.’ Once the conversation moved from sports to Moreland politics, the Mayor did his best to end the discussion. He was eventually pulled away as the group of officers needed to move on.

Gerald captures an interesting dynamic among residents in Black Shaker. He is an outspoken critic of outsiders coming in. Gerald himself actually grew up and went to school in Cleveland’s Collinwood neighborhood. He told me that he spent some of his adult life in East Cleveland before moving the Shaker Heights 21 years ago. Perhaps he does not want people to get for free what he worked hard to achieve (e.g., access to community resources in Shaker Heights). I only saw Gerald on one other occasion after this first encounter. The second time we met, also in Chelton Park, he was going off about something else. I found out that he has a
reputation as the local curmudgeon. I also learned that many residents actually support the youth football team’s activity in Moreland.

Eric, the Ludlow resident mentioned above, is partially responsible for bringing the youth sports team to Black Shaker. The football team, a full-contact youth team, is coached by a man named Coach T. Coach T and Eric have attended many events together. One of the community meetings they attended was to advocate for more access to sports for Cleveland youth. Eric said that, although Cleveland kids in Ludlow and Shaker Square are able to go to Shaker schools, there are many youth in bordering neighborhoods that do not have a Shaker Schools ID card and, therefore, cannot access neighborhood programs reserved for the local youth. Through an agreement with the city, where Coach T’s youth league pays to rent the field, the football team was granted “access” to Shaker Heights. So, Gerald was right. Coach T and his players do not live in Shaker and do not pay property taxes. However, they have been sponsored by several residents who see football, and sports generally, as a positive outlet for black youth who are otherwise at-risk.

In addition to complaining about the tidiness of visitors (a form of tastes/preferences), a few long-time residents also complained that low-income families are beginning to move to Moreland. Miss Jackie, Clarence, Gerald, and a few others specifically used the term Section 8 to describe neighborhood undesirables. I asked Frank, the former councilman, about this trend.

AG: Do you think people are going to grow more defensive and be like, I don’t want these new Section 8 people in Shaker. Do you think people are going to be more guarded as we go forward?

Frank: People are guarded now. I remember so many people, blacks, would ask me, how can we prevent these Section 8 people from moving into Shaker Heights? We can’t. The law says that Section 8 landlords have the right to rent to whomever they want to rent to.
While some residents explicitly point to Section 8, others used “Cleveland” as a similar label. For instance, Shaker Heights High alumni, Meg, said that Shaker schools have been inundated with black “families from Cleveland public schools.” According to Eric, these newcomers struggle to adjust. Eric said, “If you have a kid from the hood that’s moving into Shaker, they view Shaker as being an affluent neighborhood. And so when they come there they want people to remember they’re from the ‘hood.” According to Chloe, also a Shaker Heights graduate, the new arrivals are viewed as a cultural benefit, as “black students growing up in Shaker who grew up middle or upper-middle class, [get] an interesting experience in connecting with black students of different socio-economic statuses.” Dre, the barber, said “Shaker has the best of both worlds, the bougie (bourgeoisie) and the hood.”

*On Intraracial Conflict*

The group conflicts that can arise between black neighbors was a central finding in Pattillo’s (2007) *Black on the Block.* Similar to Pattillo, I find that shared experiences—in terms of activity space and residential segregation in Black Shaker—do not always preclude internal group conflict. Although I did not interview any notably affluent blacks, what Robinson (2010) would call “the transcendent,” from the black plastic surgeons to the Oprahs of America, I did interview black residents from a variety of socioeconomic backgrounds. I find that class variations between residents in Black Shaker do not splinter the ethnoracial community. Even the ostensibly classist sentiments held by some members of the black middle class do not seem to result in a wholesale aversion to black people. I do not maintain that social life in Black Shaker epitomizes neighborliness (collective efficacy) in the absence of group conflict. As I mention, I also found evidence of some intraracial dilemmas.
Some residents express views about others based in stereotype. Several residents have negative or critical stereotypes about southern or lower-income (i.e., Section 8) blacks migrating to Shaker. The thought is that low-income blacks (urban or southern) bring with them behaviors, tastes, and preferences that do not fit the current community culture (however it exists in their minds). Ironically, some of the most vocal critics themselves followed similar migratory and mobility pathways.

Miss Jackie: I’ve never regretted living [In Moreland] but I gotta say, that right now, I’m beginning to think maybe I don’t like it so much no more, because it’s going down a lot. The city doesn’t do what they supposed to do and, see, a lot of the people who in that neighborhood migrated from the south. So, there’s that. It’s that mentality that goes along with coming out of Jim Crow and then to a diverse suburb and they easily assume that they at city hall supposed to take care of everything...

AG: Are the people who move from down south are these--are we talking about middle class families or maybe they’re disadvantaged?

Miss Jackie: Not necessarily. They could have been [poor] and then [did] like we did. You know? We got it moving into Shaker, that’s moving up. But that way of thinking was still there.

Miss Jackie moved from Tennessee to Cleveland as a 19 year old. She first lived in Cuyahoga Metropolitan Housing Authority (CMHA) housing. CMHA is the agency responsible for managing Cleveland’s housing projects and Section 8 voucher programs. Miss Jackie, after her first marriage, was able to leave the projects for an eastside Cleveland neighborhood. After a divorce, she ended up back in public housing. It was her second marriage, to a recipient of the G.I. Bill, which allowed her family to move to Moreland, where she has lived for over 40 years. When probed, Miss Jackie seemed to recognize the dissonance in her judgmental perspectives about low-income residents (“They could have been poor and then like we did”).
On Kinship Networks

In addition to tenure variations, another result of the overlapping migration patterns is that black adults are members of similar social networks in terms of race and residence (Hunter and Robinson 2018; Pattillo 2005). Many relatives and friends of black Shakerites still live in segregated, predominantly black neighborhoods. These include both suburbs and urban neighborhoods in Cleveland. For some, black friends and relatives live in smaller, more rural towns. For a smaller few, kinship networks extend to countries in Africa or the Caribbean.

As I mentioned, there is a perception that low-income (Section 8) black people are invading Black Shaker. If this is true, where are these new arrivals coming from? Who are they tied to? In short, black residents are responsible for bringing some new people into the fold of Black Shaker. Even someone like Miss Jackie, despite being outspoken about her frustrations with neighborhood change, has participated in this process. Miss Jackie’s daughter is a low-income renter living on the outskirts of Shaker Heights. Her daughter, and grandchildren, routinely visit Moreland. Miss Jackie may be critical of others moving in but, like many residents in Black Shaker, she is dedicated to being a broker (Pattillo 2007) for the low-income members of her own family. I argue that this phenomenon, of bridging networks, is made possible by the desire of black residents to stay in place.

Staying in Place

An old man going a lone highway,
Came, at the evening cold and gray,
To a chasm vast and deep and wide.
Through which was flowing a sullen tide
The old man crossed in the twilight dim,
The sullen stream had no fear for him;
But he turned when safe on the other side
And built a bridge to span the tide.76

76 An excerpt from W. Dromgoole’s The Bridge Builder
The original integrators of Shaker Heights, both the progressive white residents and members of the black middle class, literally opened the floodgates for African Americans to settle in the southwestern parts of Shaker. Certainly, white animus toward blacks is responsible for creating many housing vacancies. Without the out-migration of individual white families who owned homes in South Shaker, the successive waves of Black migration could not have occurred on such a profound scale. Residential segregation, often captured as a snapshot, always involves successive waves of in- and out-migration. People move in, people move out, and some people choose to stay in place. The black people who move to Shaker and choose to stay represent another important link in the chain of black residential mobility. During my conversations with black adult residents, many of them expressed an intent or desire to stay rooted in Shaker Heights. While the first black families to move to Ludlow and Moreland were integration pioneers, the old-timers of today, who have lived through decades of racial turnover, are more akin to bridge builders.

Frustrated with her neighbors’ cynicism to neighborhood change in Moreland, Val said, “I wish people would like step back for a moment and understand that when they walk away they’re giving away their power. They’re clearing the path to allow more [bad] activity to go on because they’re not there to be a deterrent.” Val said that, despite her frustrations with some things in Shaker, she has no intention of leaving. She felt that people who care about the neighborhood and have the education and means to advocate on behalf of Black Shaker, should stay in place to help stabilize and attract resources to the region. Chloe, a millennial who lives with her parents in Sussex, also said she plans to stay in place:

I have more respect and admiration for [The Shaker] community now [more] than ever before. One, I worked in community development for some years and now also living in different communities. […] [My family] lived in an apartment or condo on Van Aken for three years and then we moved to our current house in 2008. Which is another reason I
continue to stay rooted here ‘cause I want to keep the land in the family and keep the house especially since that was my parents’ first house that they bought. My Dad wanted to go back to Georgia, but I think he’s embraced [Shaker] now he realizes that me and my mom are actually are rooted here. […] So I really want to keep the house, you know, in my family’s name. […] And now thinking of the future, like where would I want to have a house and all the things like where can I see myself raising a family?

Echoing others, Val and Chloe both said that Shaker is beginning to change demographically. As I mentioned above, there is a narrative that black people from poor, high-crime, urban neighborhoods are moving in more than ever before. Some middle-class residents, like Val and Chloe, believe that they can help ease the transition. Their community-building efforts are both an attempt to protect their own interests and to help uplift the “truly disadvantaged” (Wilson 1987), whom other long-term residents perceive to be apathetic toward or uninvolved in community life.

A couple of people from Moreland complained about apathy among their new neighbors. Frank, Miss Jackie, and Val said that their neighbors do not attend enough meetings to advocate for local interests. This critique also seems to be based in stereotypes and misperceptions. Lisa, who was active with the PTO in Lomond for almost a decade, has not been involved in any neighborhood activities or organizations. Dee did not actively engage in community life when she first arrived to Shaker in 2009, but has been a routine participant in Moreland events since 2016. Each resident’s decision to engage in the community varies. Surely, socioeconomics plays a role: if you work two jobs just to make ends meet, then you are probably less available and inclined to volunteer, for instance, at Neighbor Night. Low-income families may not join Neighbor Night events or attend Council meetings, but it may have more to do with schedule conflicts (and other structural constraints) than disinterest, ignorance, or indifference.

As new people relocate to Shaker, it will certainly change the fabric of the community. Residents like Val and Chloe plan to stay in place. Primarily, they hope to benefit from the
current assets of the community (e.g., the schools and their property values) and both feel that staying in place with help ease the transition of newcomers. Some of these newcomers will be first-generation suburbanites, like Miss Jackie, Frank, and Clarence once were. Others, some millennials like Franklin Jr. and Baby Boomers like Mike, will be returning to Shaker after a hiatus. Franklin Jr. left Shaker for college, but returned in his early 30s. Mike, a former Ludlow resident and daily library user, said that he is in the process of purchasing a home in Shaker with the goal of retiring in a “walkable” and “safe” community.

Black residents’ decision to stay in place also impacts the revolving door of residents and visitors. The decision of black residents to stay in place, despite the fluctuation of neighborhood demographic changes, means that when an interracial couple like Dee and James relocate to Moreland, they can insulate their family from (potential) racial discrimination while slowly establishing a foothold in their new community. It also means that while younger residents, like Chloe, can leave Shaker to explore opportunities to practice diversity, they can always return home where Black Shaker provides refuge from the noise.

Black residents’ decision to stay rooted and to participate in community life in Black Shaker also means that visitors will enter a space that has characteristics of a black ethnoburb and a chocolate city. The presence of black-owned businesses (i.e., hair salons) and black residents, as well as Shaker’s reputation as a “nice” place, is supportive of additional black in-migration. Mainly, this is due to non-blacks’ tendency to avoid predominantly black spaces and to black people’s tendency to consider racial hostility in addition to commonly “desired” community features (i.e., good schools, nice houses, safety, etc.).
Conclusions

From the early industrial cities, like Philadelphia (Du Bois 1899), to contemporary cities across the nation (Hunter and Robinson 2018), the black neighborhood experience in American cities has been marked by disadvantage, disinvestment, and discrimination. Throughout the 20th century and up to today, African Americans were most likely to live in predominantly black, urban, segregated neighborhoods (Charles 2003; Massey and Denton 1993; Pattillo 2005). Today, Black Americans participating (or caught up) in the sifting and sorting processes of urban change are more likely to be suburban than urban (Frey 2015). This chapter explored the connections, in terms of shared experiences, between black people who find themselves as neighbors.

In addition to residential segregation and shared activity space, Black adults in Shaker Heights are united through a racialized Black American experience. Racial discrimination (in interactions and institutions) is a defining feature of our nation. Perhaps, it comes as no surprise that so many of the black people I met had some personal encounter with racial microaggressions inside and outside of Shaker. These experiences with interpersonal racism have left all of the victimized cynical, and some remain guarded. This type of attitudinal and behavioral response presents a major barrier to creating multiracial relationships in Shaker Heights. Residents living in diverse neighborhoods will always be in an uphill battle against racism that exists in the outside world. So, even if neighborhood race relations were harmonious in Shaker Heights—which they do not appear to be (see Chapter 3)—anti-black racism in this country will permeate community life.

In addition to commonalities with discrimination, I argue that Black Americans are united through a shared history of residential mobility. I argue that a shared history of mobility, despite intraracial conflict that can ensue, inspires a commitment to the black community.

77 See Chapter 2.
broadly, and Black Shaker specifically. This commitment is characterized by a desire to stay in place and an intentional engagement with issues that pertain to the local community (Pattillo 2007, pg. 302).

Paradoxically, Black Shaker can be both supportive and restrictive. Supportive, in that a critical mass of black houses, businesses, and bodies creates a space that says ‘black people are welcomed and well-represented here’ (Hunter and Robinson 2018). However, this enclave-type benefit may prove to be a barrier to cultural and spatial assimilation in the traditional sense. But what if assimilation is not the desired goal? Black neighborhood spaces are supportive for minorities and allow outsiders to sample differences (Anderson 2011), but critical issues of racism, social inequality generally, and power imbalances go unaddressed. However, black residents do not seem to mind that these are not sites of antiracist community organizing. As Chloe mentioned, black places may best serve as a protective. Because we cannot end U.S. racial inequality through interpersonal social contact or dialogue alone (Lewis et al. 2015), maybe black adults choose to bypass interracial interactions for comfort and respite from racism.
CHAPTER 5: CONCLUSIONS

I think we, we gotta stop saying that we’re “One Shaker,” we’re one. No, no, we’re different, we’re living all different lived experiences and I think we have to be real about that. —Chloe

On Wednesday June 22, 2016, nearly one million spectators from various racial, ethnic, and neighborhood backgrounds converged on the streets of downtown Cleveland, Ohio. They gathered to watch a parade in celebration of the 2016 National Basketball Association Champions, the Cleveland Cavaliers. This gathering was exceptional, in part because the city of Cleveland had not won a professional sports championship title since 1964. Even more, it was exceptional to see people from such a wide variety of backgrounds coming together. Racially diverse crowds stood for several hours in the hot summer sun, intermingling and celebrating together on street corners in downtown Cleveland.

Unfortunately, moments like these are fleeting. Cleveland, like many other major metropolitan areas, is hypersegregated by race. So, when the championship parade ended, people returned to their neighborhoods and arose the next day to social worlds that differed markedly in racial composition from that of the cosmopolitan parade in the city center. Some places stand out as exceptions to this reality, e.g., urban and suburban neighborhoods that are statistically integrated. These are the communities where people live side-by-side and, as is often assumed, more readily forge interracial connections.

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78 Quoted during an interview at a coffee shop in Shaker Square in 2017.
80 Technically, The Cleveland Crunch—indoor soccer expansion team—won the league title in the 1990s. But in the “big three” sports of professional men’s baseball, basketball, and football Cleveland has had a 52-year drought.
81 See Anderson (2012).
82 See Massey and Denton (1993).
My study investigates how race relations operate in the multiracial and economically diverse suburban context of Shaker Heights, Ohio. Most research on the topic of diverse suburbs (Farrell and Lee 2011; Frey 2015; Kye 2018) is limited to quantitative research designs that cannot fully ascertain the quality of race relations in this changing landscape. Qualitative studies on neighborhood diversity (Berrey 2015; Burke 2013; Mayorga-Gallo 2014; Perry 2017), although informative, tell us little about the experiences and perspectives of African Americans. I fill this gap by focusing on the black experience, specifically, the lived experience of those living and spending time outside of poor-hypersegregated-urban black neighborhoods (Robinson 2010; Wilson 1987).83

This study fills a spatial and methodological gap in the literature. First, following recent demographic trends, I realign the analytic scope spatially from city to suburban neighborhoods. Second, instead of asking a set of more macro and structural research questions focusing on determinants of individual status and neighborhood and community outcomes, my research follows the tradition of ethnographic fieldwork by asking (and observing) how black people coordinate socially when they are living in a high-status, racially and economically diverse neighborhood.

Although suburbs are experiencing an upsurge in racial diversity (Frey 2015), these recent demographic shifts may not automatically lead to the formation of interracial coalitions or automatically resolve contentious race relations. Moreover, increasing exposure to differences does not, by itself, diminish or erase issues related to the devaluation of, disinvestment in, and discrimination toward black people and black spaces that characterizes much of U.S. urban history (Anderson 2012). So, what can the black experience in Shaker Heights—a suburb that

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83 Today, these “truly disadvantaged” neighborhoods (Wilson 1987), although routinely studied, represent a small portion (less than 20%) of black neighborhoods (Pattillo 2005).
has been racially diverse for decades—tell us about the limitations of and opportunities for improving community race relations?

**Summary of Main Findings**

I began this research from the perspective that black adults with access to housing and social life in a diverse suburb, like Shaker Heights, are especially elite. However, an analysis of neighborhood life for blacks showed the myth and “mystique of great advantage”\(^{84}\) that is sustained by outsiders who are overly impressed with the prospects for diverse suburban living. Much like Pattillo’s (1999) and Lacy’s (2007) ethnographic work, my research explored a somewhat privileged position for Black Americans. Instead of looking at middle-class blacks only, however, I examined the social life of black adults from all backgrounds who spend time in Shaker Heights, Ohio. The idea of Shaker Heights as a privileged place for black people, specifically as it relates to the ideal of social contact in multiethnic spaces\(^{85}\), breaks down upon close inspection. The findings presented in this dissertation yield insights into the ways in which diverse suburban spaces shape the social experiences of black people and, in turn, how black people shape the social life in these diverse spaces.

In Chapter 2 I investigated patterns of spatial segregation that exist in Shaker Heights. It is important to note that, even in a stably integrated suburb, residential segregation can exist at micro-levels, i.e., the tract- or block-level. Because I was interested in whether black people in Shaker can expect to benefit from the diverse racial demographics, I decided to look at non-residential activity spaces. I found that, in addition to residential segregation, black and non-black adults in Shaker move through space in different directions. Specifically, I found that large

\(^{84}\) See Katz (2001).

\(^{85}\) See Anderson (2010).
portions of the people who are present in public neighborhood spaces are actually black visitors who live outside of Shaker. So, black visitors are unlikely to be exposed to high levels of racial diversity just by entering the community. I found that black residents, on the other hand, are able to practice diversity through formal institutions and community events.

In Chapter 3 I explored perceptions of diversity among the black adult residents of Shaker. I focused on residents because they have opportunities to practice diversity. In Moreland—the center of Black Shaker—there are several community-based events that attract black and non-black participants. These events, such as Neighbor Night, are more cosmopolitan, or representationally diverse, than the residential and activity spaces in Moreland. However, after attending community programs for two years and interviewing residents, I discovered that black residents do not interpret these events as “authentic.” The ideal of equal access may have been the goal of early integrators. Black adults living in Shaker today want more out of these community forums and events than access and exposure. In Shaker, everyone is at the dance, but not everyone is dancing.

Finally, in Chapter 4 I looked deeper into the contours of the black community. Specifically, I ask whether black adults in Shaker are a unified or disintegrated racial group. Although this study does not specifically assess racial identity formation, I identify two processes that unite residents under the umbrella of a “Black American Experience.” These two unifying processes, or commonalities, are the experience of racial discrimination and the experience of residential mobility. I do not argue that black people are a homogenous group. On the contrary, there is much variation between black people in terms of class, time of arrival (or tenure), educational level, and family status. Despite these variations, almost every black family in Shaker has experienced discrimination and has a similar history of residential mobility.
Policy Implications

Black visitors, people who come to Shaker Heights to shop and socialize, are likely to see non-black people in passing. However, they are not likely to spend their time in representationally diverse settings. Black residents, who live close to non-blacks and who have the opportunity to interact during formal community events, remain critical of local race relations. These findings suggest that racial boundaries, both structural and interactional, shape the experiences of black adults within diverse neighborhoods.

For decades, social scientists have promoted equal representation (in housing, education, politics, and employment) along with civility (Anderson 2011) as a means to improve race relations. Shaker Heights is more diverse than most typical U.S. suburbs and community relations are certainly civil. Community race relations in Shaker today are not antagonistic, but they are far from equitable. Since Shaker Heights has long enjoyed its status as diverse and intentionally inclusive, it serves as a useful heuristic that can teach us about the potential and limits of equitable community race relations.

Before I continue with what I see as the most important implications of this research (in terms of practicality and viability), I must address the most obvious implication. The truth is, Shaker has failed to integrate its residents. Black and white people live on different sides of the tracks. The most statistically integrated neighborhoods are those that border (and buffer) “upper” and “lower” Shaker. If residential segregation causes inequality, the best solution would be to rearrange the way people live. Since this is nearly impossible, unless it were done a priori during planning and development, the next best solution would be to encourage integrated non-residential activity spaces.
People who value diversity may read the forecast I propose as hopeless or pessimistic. However, I think it is honest and critical to conclude that a single community or a committed group of neighbors cannot possibly tackle racism and racial inequality in America. The truth is, social structures, in this case racial segregation, are not easily changed. However, in the 1950s residents in Shaker Heights did something that history views as immensely progressive. My study suggests that the work is not finished. Once a community achieves the goal of equal access in housing, the next issue to tackle is unclear. Do we fight for social integration in non-residential spaces? Or, do we promote more community forums for discussing race? The solution will vary by community, but regardless any solution should be closely aligned with the needs and perspectives of everyone involved.

How do we end social segregation in Shaker? There is no easy solution. According to the findings from this study, a good starting point would be (1) to host diverse events that are inclusive of all community members and (2) to have critical conversations related to social issues during these events. This is not limited to conversations regarding race and racism. Americans must discuss difference or inequality in all axes. The goal, in my mind, is not assimilation—a forced or achieved sameness. Instead, I believe a goal of these conversations should be to help identify gaps that lead to conflict. Specifically, gaps between the ideal and the current state of social relations. Closing the gap is important because wherever a gap forms, resentment and conflict can result (Shapiro 2017).

The involved community members at Neighbor Night, for example, ended up doing some of the things I just suggested. So, what are they getting wrong? Before we write off the “difficult discussions” remedy (Tatum 2017) for improving race relations, I think it is important to

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86 Lewis et al. (2015) make the same conclusion from their research on a diverse school.
87 Again, not everyone will agree that social segregation is a negative.
distinguish between the conversations that are unintentional and intentional. Neighbor Night is a community forum; it provides a space and an open agenda that allows contentious topics to emerge. However, I have no evidence that members of the community attend Neighbor Nights with hopes that these events will address racial issues. Even if they did, I do not think anyone believes critical dialogue alone will automatically create equitable community race relations.

Due to the legacy of segregation, getting people together—in the same school, same neighborhood, same occupations—and on equitable terms has been the largest challenge of 21st century American race relations. Once people get together, in the same room, cafeteria (Tatum 2017), or community meeting, the next challenge, it seems, is to have people talk openly about difference. There is no evidence that difficult discussions will end inequality, but until Americans begin to have critical dialogue, we will be unable to inventory the remaining factors that create racial barriers. Statistically integrated places like Shaker Heights, despite the shortcomings documented herein, are the sites where we should look to find the next clue in the puzzle of racial equality.

**Future Research**

Diverse neighborhoods must wrestle with issues that extend beyond municipal boundaries. Future studies of community race relations should consider that every neighborhood is embedded in a larger web of institutions. While it may be in good faith to attempt to fix home before your fix the world, the outside world (structures and forces beyond reach) will always shape what can and needs to be done at home (within communities). Future studies should attempt to contextualize local race relations and outside forces. Widening the scope of study and increasing data collection are logical solutions. In this study, I relied on historical data, observations, and
resident testimony to contextualize Shaker Heights within the broader sociohistorical features of Cleveland, Ohio. It would be useful to also study surrounding communities (e.g., Cleveland Heights or Lee-Miles) and the population outside of Shaker Heights in order to understand how Shaker and other places fit with the larger urban story.

Future studies of community race relations should continue to incorporate the voices and experiences of people of color. The intention is not to essentialize racial differences, but instead to recognize that given the racial history of this country and the persistent racism of our institutions, people have varying experiences based on their racial background. It is long overdue that Americans exchange the melting pot for a multicultural framework—one in which racial diversity and equality is valued, but cultural distinctions are celebrated and not expected to diminish. Because cultural distinctions in America are strongly linked to structural inequalities, local efforts of civility and “happy talk diversity” that fail to address these larger issues will ultimately fail to improve community race relations and may unintentionally reinforce racial resentment.
REFERENCES


APPENDIX 1: RECRUITMENT STRATEGY AND DOCUMENTS

Recruitment Script (in person)\(^8\)

The interviewer will approach potential participants in public neighborhood spaces (See Appendix 3).

INTERVIEWER: Hello! My name is Alan Grigsby, I am a student in sociology at the University of Cincinnati. I am looking for people who live in or spend time in Shaker Heights who might want to participate in a research study. The purpose of this research study is to better understand community-based social networks in Shaker. I want to have a conversation with you about how you experience social life and social interactions in the neighborhood.

As part of this study, you and I will have a discussion that will last from 30 minutes to one hour. You will not be compensated for participating in this project. Do you think you might be interested in participating in this research study?

[If participant indicates NO] Okay! Thanks anyway for your time! Have a good day.

[If participant indicates YES] Great, I am happy you’re interested. Before enrolling you, I have to figure out if you qualify. If it’s okay, I’ll ask you some questions to determine if you can participate. Just to let you know, any personal information I get from you, including your name, a telephone contact number, and other information that identifies you will be kept strictly confidential. Your participation is voluntary. And again, you will not be compensated for participating.

INTERVIEWER: Can I ask you a preliminary question?

[If participant indicates YES] Great.

Question:
Do you currently:
  a) live in Shaker Heights?
  b) work in Shaker Heights?
  c) spend a significant amount of your time in Shaker Heights?
  d) none of the above.

(Interviewer record response)

Thanks for your answer.

\(^8\) The following recruitment strategy will be employed if I meet potential respondents during the course of my fieldwork.
[If participant does not meet requirements] Unfortunately, based on your answer, you don’t qualify for this research study. Thanks for your time.

[If participant meets requirements] Based on your answer, it looks like you do qualify for this research study. If you’d like to participate, then we can perform the interview right here. Or, if you don’t have time right now, we can set up a time and a place to do the interview based on your schedule. Which would you prefer?

(Interviewer record response)

[If participant wants to perform interview immediately] Great! Why don’t we find a seat somewhere and I’ll get the required paperwork together so you can formally decide if you want to participate. [Begin consent process].

[If participant wants to perform interview off-site] Great!

Where should we meet that would be convenient to you?

(Interviewer record response)

When would be a good time to meet you?

(Interviewer record response)

Can I have your name and phone number so that I can remind you about our meeting before it happens?

(Interviewer record response).

I’ll give you a phone call a few days before the meeting to remind you. Do you have any other questions?

(Interviewer will provide the participant with a business card with a phone number in case the participant wants to contact the PI.)

Thanks and have a great day!
Recruitment Script (via email)\textsuperscript{89}

Hello Mr./Ms. (fill in the blank),

My name is Alan Grigsby. I am a sociology PhD student at the University of Cincinnati and I am a resident of Shaker Heights. I am looking to connect with people who live/work/spend time in Shaker Heights who might want to participate in a research study. The purpose of this research study is to better understand community-based social networks. I want to have a conversation with you about how you experience social life and social interactions in Shaker Heights. Participation in this research is confidential and completely voluntary.

If you are interested in participating or learning more about this study, please reply directly to this message.

Sincerely,

Alan Grigsby

Recruitment (via flier)\textsuperscript{90}

In addition to in-person and email recruiting, I may incorporate recruiting residents via postcard. This method is contingent on available funding.

\textsuperscript{89} Similar introduction strategy used in Reich, “Emerging Breasts, Bellies, and Bodies of Knowledge” (page 47).

\textsuperscript{90} Similar recruitment strategy employed by Mayorga-Gallo (forthcoming).
APPENDIX 2: INTERVIEW GUIDE

Housing History/ Background
Shaker Hts. residents only. If non-resident skip to “L”
a. When did you first move to Shaker?
b. How old were you when you moved to Shaker? (What point in your life were you: child? adult?)
c. Have you always lived in this house? (where else have you lived within Shaker)
d. (if born in Shaker, skip)
Have you lived anywhere outside of Shaker in your adult life? If yes, where? (get as much information as possible: city name, state, zip code)
• What type of house did you live in? (no. of bedrooms, sq. footage if known, etc.)
• Who lived with you?
• Did you own or rent?
• What was that neighborhood like?
• How does it compare to Shaker?

Perceptions of the Neighborhood
If born in Shaker skip e and f
e. Can you tell me what Shaker was like when you first moved here?
  • Was there something you especially liked about the house/neighborhood?
  • Something you disliked?
  • Did these (mentioned) factors influence you moving to Shaker? In what ways?
f. (if “no” to e.3) What factors influenced you moving to Shaker?
[skip to “i”]

Born in Shaker only
g. What was Shaker like when you were growing up?
h. How would you describe Shaker now?
  • Is there something you especially like about your house/neighborhood?
  • Something you dislike?
  • Do these (mentioned) factors influence your decision to stay in Shaker? In what ways?
i. What is keeping you here?
(Continue with natives, old timers, and new arrivals)
j. If you had to guess, what is the current racial composition of Shaker Heights?
k. According to the U.S. Census, Shaker is considered a racially integrated neighborhood. Would you describe Shaker as a racially integrated neighborhood? Please explain your justification.
(Residents / Non-Residents)
l. When you [are in Shaker/spend time in the neighborhood]
   • Where do you go?
   • How frequently?
   • What do you do there?
   • How long do you stay?
   • Who else do you see there?
m. Are there places in Shaker that you always/never go?
n. How much of your time (on an average day/week) is spent in Shaker?
o. Would you spend more time in Shaker if you could? Please explain.
p. If you had to describe Shaker to an outsider what would you say about:
   • The neighborhoods?
   • The buildings?
   • The shops and businesses?
   • The public services (postmen, police officers, librarians, etc.)?
   • The people?

Neighbors and Networks
(Residents and Non-Residents)
I’d like to ask more about your perceptions of the people in Shaker.
q. Can you describe the type of people who:
   • Live in Shaker? (Be as general or specific as you’d like)
   • Work in Shaker?
   • Visit Shaker?
r. How many people in Shaker do you know?*
   (i.e. Know of, speak to, spend time with? This can include people who live here, work here,
or spend time here.)
   *For each person that is named, collect information on their gender, race, age, and SES
   (including residential-, professional-, and educational attainment status).
s. What is the nature of your relationship with person(s) listed in “r”? (friends, relatives,
colleagues, neighbors, strangers, etc.)
t. Have you made any lasting connections to anyone during your time in Shaker?
u. Do you think that lasting connections can be made in Shaker?
v. How does race influence people’s ability to connect with others in Shaker?

That completes our interview. Thank you for your time. Do you have any questions for me?
APPENDIX 3: LIST OF FIELD OBSERVATION SITES

The following table is a list of the places people work, visit, and reside. The table is populated with local sites (both public and private) where I conducted observations and recruitment. Black people who work in or visit Shaker were identified at the site. Residential field sites (where people live) were determined during interviews with residents. Public sites that are not relevant to the current study and site that I did not spend time in have been omitted. For instance, my research focuses on social networks of adults, so I did not conduct observations at sites where children are predominate (i.e. daycares, schools, and school playgrounds).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>List of Neighborhood Field Sites</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Work</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>The Public Library</td>
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<tr>
<td>Shopping centers</td>
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<tr>
<td>City hall</td>
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<tr>
<td>Cafés</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Visit</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Public Library</td>
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<tr>
<td>Chelton Park</td>
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<tr>
<td>Shopping centers</td>
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<tr>
<td>Cafés</td>
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<tr>
<td>Public Transit</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Reside</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Houses</td>
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<tr>
<td>Apartments</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

91 There are two shopping plazas in Shaker and one in Shaker Square. The Van Aken plaza was under construction during my time in the field. I conducted observations primarily at shops in the Lee-Chagrin plaza in Moreland.

92 I conducted observations at two coffee shops: Dewey’s and Gimme Java. Dewey’s is in the Shaker Square town plaza, but Gimme Java sits alone on the corner of Lee Rd. and Van Aken Blvd.

93 There are “nine public playgrounds for kids of all ages” in Shaker Heights. ([http://shakeronline.com/departments/recreation/horseshoe-lake-park](http://shakeronline.com/departments/recreation/horseshoe-lake-park)). However, this number includes elementary school playgrounds. I conducted observations at Chelton Park in Moreland. Chelton Park is not affiliated with any of the schools.

94 I documented information about the houses/apartments and the neighborhoods of my participants who reside in Shaker. I also walked/biked the neighborhood blocks to collect general observations on housing and social activity on residential streets.