

POLICY BRIEF

African Americans in the Greater DC Area: 1930 to the Present

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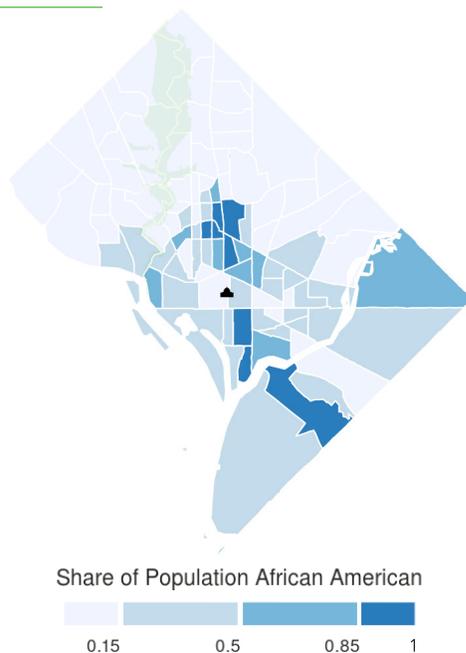
AFRICAN AMERICANS IN THE GREATER DC AREA: 1930 TO THE PRESENT

By Leah Brooks and Caitlyn Valadez

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In the 1930s the Washington, DC African American community was concentrated in the heart of the city.

MAP 1: DC, 1930



During the second half of the 20th century DC's African American population migrated rapidly eastward, including beyond the city's boundaries into Maryland. Now, eight decades later, the African American population lives farther east, centered in southeast DC and western Prince George's County. The distribution of African Americans across the region has changed sharply from the checkerboard pattern in the early half of the 1900s to the geographic concentration of today.

We discuss three time periods characterized by different residential locations of the African American population:

The Wake of the New Deal from 1930-1950, *The Rise of Chocolate City and Urban Growth* from 1950-1990, and *White Flight Reversal* from 1990-2010.

Key Dates:

- 1926:** The Supreme Court upholds the legality of racial covenants, contracts that prohibit a property from being leased or owned by a specific population
- 1948:** The Supreme Court overturns previous decision, finding racially restricted housing covenants illegal
- 1954:** The Supreme Court finds racially segregated schools in the District of Columbia unconstitutional
- 1964:** Remaining Jim Crow Laws overruled by the passage of the Civil Rights Act of 1964
- 1974:** Home Rule Act enacted by Congress and ratified by District voters, expanding power of local government
- 1994:** First African American elected as Prince George's County Executive
- 2011:** Washington, DC, is no longer an African American majority city

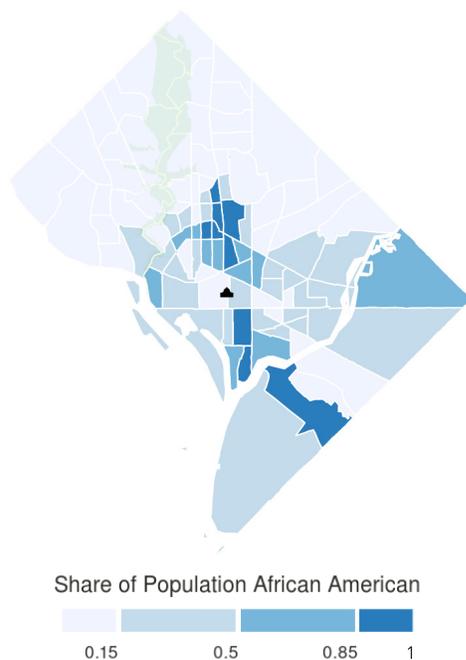
The Wake of New Deal: 1930-1950

Before World War II, the 1930 African American community is concentrated in the three primary areas of the city: U Street, Columbia Heights, Shaw, Southwest/Navy Yard, and Barry Farms/Anacostia (Map 1 1930). From 1930 to 1950, as the proportion of African Americans living in Georgetown decreases, the proportion of African Americans living in the greater U Street area is on the rise. It is in this era that the U Street area becomes the epicenter of DC's African American culture (Mouldin and Squires, 2012).

In contrast, Georgetown, the population of which was about one-quarter African American in 1930, sees an influx of mainly white federal workers drawn to DC as part of President Franklin D. Roosevelt's New Deal (Gale, 1987). This influx of federal workers leads to a decrease in the proportion of African Americans living in Georgetown, from 25 percent in Georgetown's most heavily African American community in 1930 to 16 percent by 1950.

Mechanically, a decrease in the share of African Americans can occur because the African American population declines, or because the total population increases without a proportionate increase in African Americans. In both Georgetown and U Street, population declined only slightly, so that changes in the share of African Americans are due to absolute changes in the number of African Americans.

MAP 2: DC, 1940

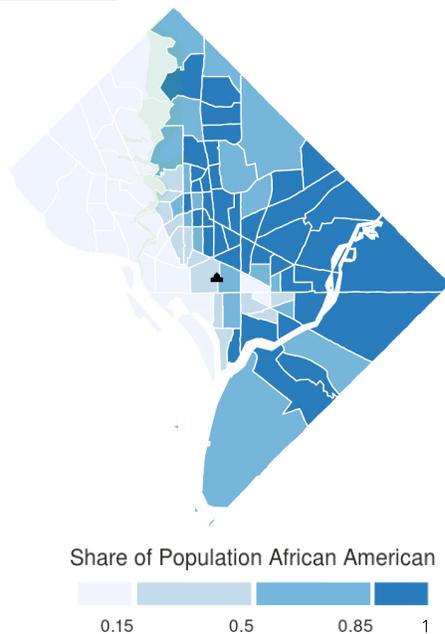


The Rise of Chocolate City and Suburban Growth: 1950-1990

By 1950, the civil rights movement was on the march in urban areas across the country, sparking conversations regarding the legality of Jim Crow Laws, the segregation of the public school system, and African American voting rights. In 1954, the U.S. Supreme Court found the racial segregation in the District's schools unconstitutional (*Bolling v Sharpe*). Between the decades bounding this decision, 1950 to 1960, there is a notable increase in the share of city neighborhoods that are more than 50 percent African American. At the same time, the city's overall population begins a decline that is not arrested until 2000.

In the wake of Martin Luther King Jr.'s 1968 assassination, there were large and destructive demonstrations in and around U Street, Columbia Heights, and Shaw (*Moulden and Squires, 2012*). The 1980 map shows an increase in the proportion of African Americans in the riot-affected areas from the 1970s to the 1980s. The geographic area in which African Americans are a majority nearly doubles.

MAP 3: DC, 1980

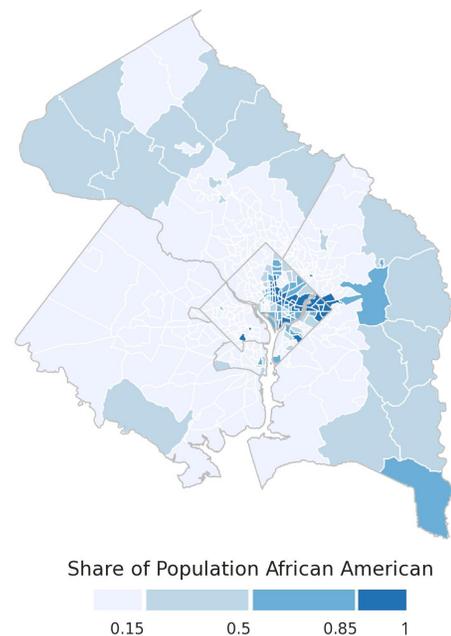


In contrast, Capitol Hill remains largely non-African American from the 1930s to the 1980s despite an increase in the share African American in the surrounding area. By 1960, the Capitol Hill Restoration Society and other young white professionals had renovated over 1,000 properties in the area, finding willing buyers (*Prothro Williams, 2003*).

This is also the period of the federal government's urban renewal program, when the city used its power of eminent domain, in conjunction with federal funding, to help construct the Kennedy Center, the Watergate Hotel, and expand the George Washington University Hospital. All these are in the vicinity of Foggy Bottom, and in areas predominantly African American before the demolition and construction (*Berry Sherwood, 1978*).

These changes are visible when we look outside of the city in 1960, when our suburban data begin.

MAP 4: COUNTIES, 1960



Likely due to the urban renewal projects, a small area in Arlington, just across the river from the new Kennedy Center, as well as the west edge of Prince George's County, both

see increases in the share of African American from 1960 to 1970. Notably, African Americans are absent in what we now call the “inner ring” suburbs, but are present in the farther reaches of the suburban counties.

The final part of this time period, from 1980 to 1990, sees DC’s most prominent struggles, and the proportion of African Americans remains relatively unchanged. In the 1980s, DC has the highest per capita murder rate in the U.S. and suffers from the arrival of crack cocaine (Asch and Musgrove, 2016). In addition, the city’s fiscal position deteriorates so that by the end of the 1990s it is placed into federal receivership.

By 1980, the distribution of African Americans in the greater DC area is more strikingly concentrated in Prince George’s County. Only a few far suburban areas retain African Americans.

White Flight Reversal: 1990-2010

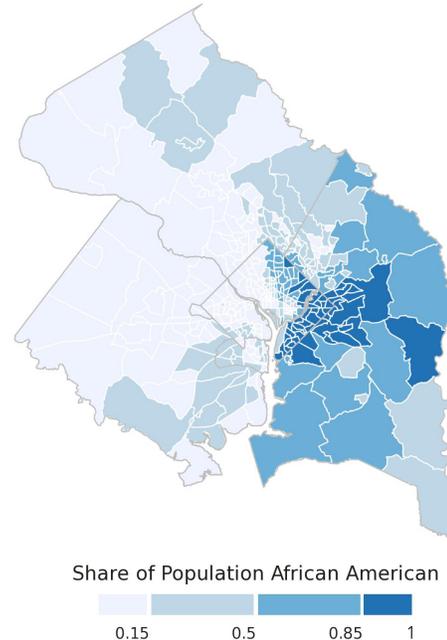
Between 1990 and 2000, DC saw some increases and some decreases in predominantly African American neighborhoods, while Prince George’s County became more African American. This decade saw the election of the first prominent African American county leader with Wayne Curry’s ascension to County Executive in Prince George’s County. In the 1990s as the Metro was extended farther into Virginia and Maryland and the Metro bus system became more robust, WMATA saw its peak ridership to date. Meanwhile, the District’s murder rate begins a long, slow decline from its peak in 1991 of 482 murders to 242 murders in 2000 (Asch and Musgrove, 2016).

In early 2001, the District is released from the direct federal oversight of the Control Board, which took budgetary decisions out of the hands of local elected officials in 1995. The decade of the 2000s is the first since 1940 to see population growth. In 2010, the locus of African Americans continues to move east; there are now no neighborhoods west of Georgia Avenue that have more than 85 percent of African American residents.

By the end of our period in 2010, African Americans are more represented in the DC area suburbs. While most of the Virginia jurisdictions continue to have a relatively low share of African Americans, Montgomery County now has

neighborhoods with substantial shares of African Americans. Over the period there has been a geographic shift of the African American population farther north and west.

MAP 5: COUNTIES, 2010



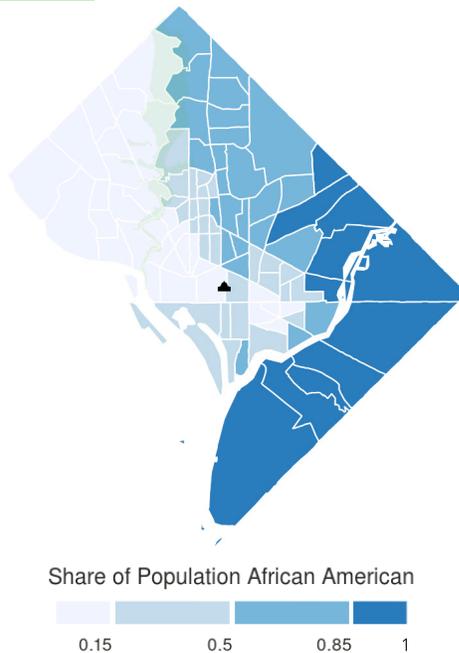
Today

Between 2009 and 2011 young professionals moved to Washington, DC, at the highest rate in history—1,000 young professionals per month (Asch and Musgrove, 2016). What was the heart of the African American population in the 1960s—U Street, Columbia Heights, and Shaw—has seen a decline in the share of African American residents. The neighborhoods of Manor Park and Petworth, the only mid-city areas with a substantial share of African Americans as of 1990, now also have declining shares of African American residents. Even the areas on the west side of the Anacostia River near Navy Yard with high shares of African Americans since the 1950s (though low absolute numbers) have recently declined in their proportion African American. The east side of the Anacostia River is now the most highly concentrated area for African Americans in the city.

George's County were deemed some of the wealthiest African American communities in the United States (The Washington Post, 2015).

What remains unclear is what these changes mean for the future of the region over the next twenty or thirty years. How will they impact the relationship between the city and suburbs? And what do they mean for the richness and influence of African American culture in the region?

MAP 6: DC, 2010



As of 2011, DC is no longer a majority African American city. Through a combination of more non-whites moving into the city and more African Americans moving into Maryland and Virginia, the region's demographics have changed drastically since the 1930s. Indeed, in 2015 five communities in Prince

WORKS CITED

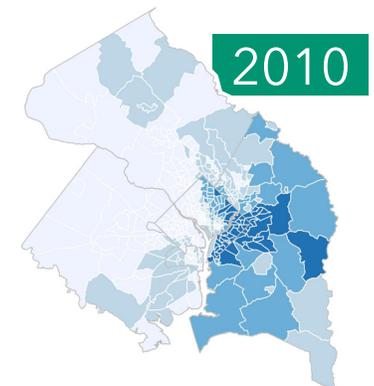
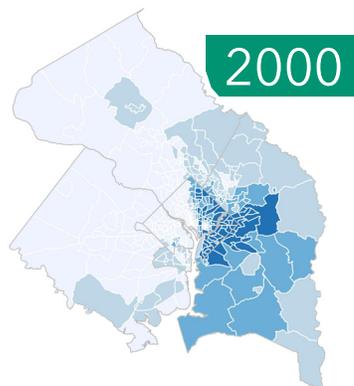
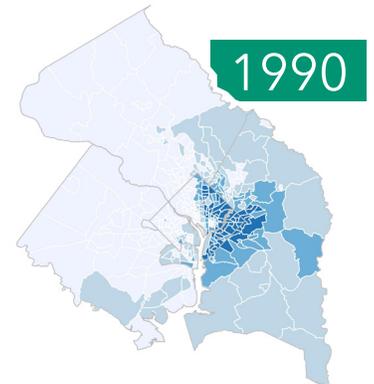
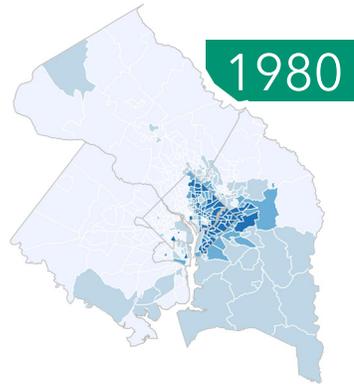
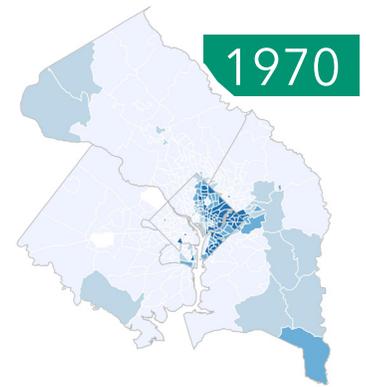
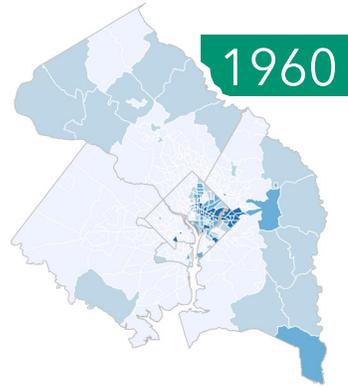
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Data Notes

To construct the maps in this brief, we used shapefile maps of Census tracts from 1930 (earliest available) to 2010 for the District, and for 1960 (earliest available) to 2010 for the broader DC area. For each decade and geographic extent, we constructed areas in years after the first to consistent over time with the initial definitions. For example, to create the 1950 DC map, we evaluated which 1950 tracts matched which 1930 tracts (using GIS software). We then use data from the Decennial Census to match time-consistent definitions, summing up later tracts to areas equivalent to the 1930 boundaries. When a newer tract is divided across a 1930 (or 1960, in broader area case), we attribute 1950 characteristics in proportion to the land area of the 1950 tract that falls in the 1930 tract.

COUNTY TIMELINE

Key:



DC TIMELINE

