# THE DIVERSITY OF MAJORITY-BLACK NEIGHBORHOODS

by Michael Leo Owens and David J. Wright

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One would not know it from the academic literature or the popular media, but this nation's metropolitan areas host a complex array of majority-black neighborhoods differing in size, location, character and condition.  Most are segregated.  A number of them, however, are undergoing racial and ethnic shifts.  Many are fragile and threatened; others are vibrant and thriving.  Some lack a strong institutional infrastructure, while others have high levels of social capital in the form of churches, local businesses, neighborhood associations, schools and community development corporations.  Some are old.  Some new.  Some are declining, others trending up.

The stereotype of majority-black neighborhoods as distressed, deviant and dangerous urban underclass communities is misleading.  Majority-black neighborhoods are neither monolithic nor static. They are diverse and changing. And far too little about them is known, particularly about those neighborhoods that are working- and middle-class.

The Nelson A. Rockefeller Institute of Government's ongoing Urban Neighborhoods and Community Capacity Building Study is an effort to learn more about the diversity of majority-black as well as majority-Hispanic neighborhoods, and about efforts to stabilize and/or improve these communities. The Study, which is being conducted in sixteen of the nation's largest metropolitan areas,[1] emphasizes working- and middle-class majority-minority neighborhoods.  The goals of our multi-year study are five-fold:

- To identify and study the diversity of predominately-minority neighborhoods throughout the United States, especially those that are working-class and middle-class.

- To determine the characteristics distinguishing working-class and middle-class predominately-minority neighborhoods from their poorer and richer counterparts.

- To measure and distinguish among the *neighborhood effects* different neighborhood types have on residents – especially on children and families.

- To identify and analyze factors that enable some predominately-minority neighborhoods to stave off the problems of concentrated distress that are often associated with cities.

- To identify public policies that may ensure the stability of *nonpoor* predominately-minority neighborhoods; support the efforts of stakeholders to improve them; and help to turn around poor neighborhoods.

## MAJORITY-BLACK RESIDENCE IN NINE METROPOLITAN AREAS

In a research paper presented at the invitation of the Northwestern University/University of Chicago Joint Center for Poverty Research, we drew attention to the prevalence and characteristics of majority-black census tracts in the nine metropolitan areas in the country with half a million or more African-Americans: Atlanta, Baltimore, Chicago, Detroit, Houston, Los Angeles, New York, Philadelphia, and Washington, D.C..[2] At the start of the decade, these metropolitan areas accounted for more than one-third of the nation's nonhispanic black population.

### Prevalence

Majority-black census tracts are more common in our nine study PMSAs than in the nation as a whole. Of the 11,242 census tracts comprising the nine PMSAs in 1990, 2,136 or 19 percent had black populations greater than 50 percent, compared to 10 percent nationwide. As Table 1 shows, the proportion as well as the number of majority-black tracts was highest in the Baltimore and Detroit PMSAs, at nearly 25 percent. Three of the PMSAs had decidedly lower rates of majority-black residential areas, with Los Angeles the lowest at 8 percent.

**Table 1:  Majority-Black Census Tracts in the Nine PMSAs**

| PMSA | Total No. of Tracts | Majority-Black # | % |
|---|---|---|---|
| Atlanta | 505 | 123 | 24.4 |
| Baltimore | 591 | 129 | 24.8 |
| Chicago | 1782 | 394 | 22.1 |
| Detroit | 1180 | 291 | 24.7 |
| Houston | 694 | 108 | 15.6 |
| Los Angeles | 1660 | 136 | 8.2 |
| New York | 2500 | 540 | 21.6 |
| Philadelphia | 1288 | 182 | 14.1 |
| Washington, D.C. | 1042 | 216 | 20.7 |
| **Totals** | **11242** | **2123** | **19.0** |

Note:

1.  Data source: The *1990 Census of Population,* Summary Tape File 3A

2.  "Majority-black" tracts refer to census tracts with 50% or more nonhispanic black population

3.  PMSAs with greater than 500,000  nonhispanic blacks

At the start of the decade, majority-black census tracts had high concentrations of blacks. People of other racial and ethnic groups called these places home, but more than four-fifths (82 percent) of total residents were nonhispanic blacks.[3]  The proportions ranged from a high of 91 percent in Chicago and 88 percent in Detroit to 78 percent in New York and 67 percent in Los Angeles.

Nonhispanic blacks are more concentrated in majority-black census tracts among the nine metropolitan areas than is true for the country as a whole.  Slightly more than two-thirds (68 percent) of all nonhispanic blacks in the nine PMSAs lived in majority-black census tracts compared to 53 percent nationwide in 1990.  Table 2 illustrates that the degree of black residential concentration ranged from a high of 87 percent in Detroit and 78 percent in Chicago to a low of 52 percent in Houston and 45 percent in Los Angeles.

**Table 2:  Non-Hispanic Black Population in Majority-Black Tracts**

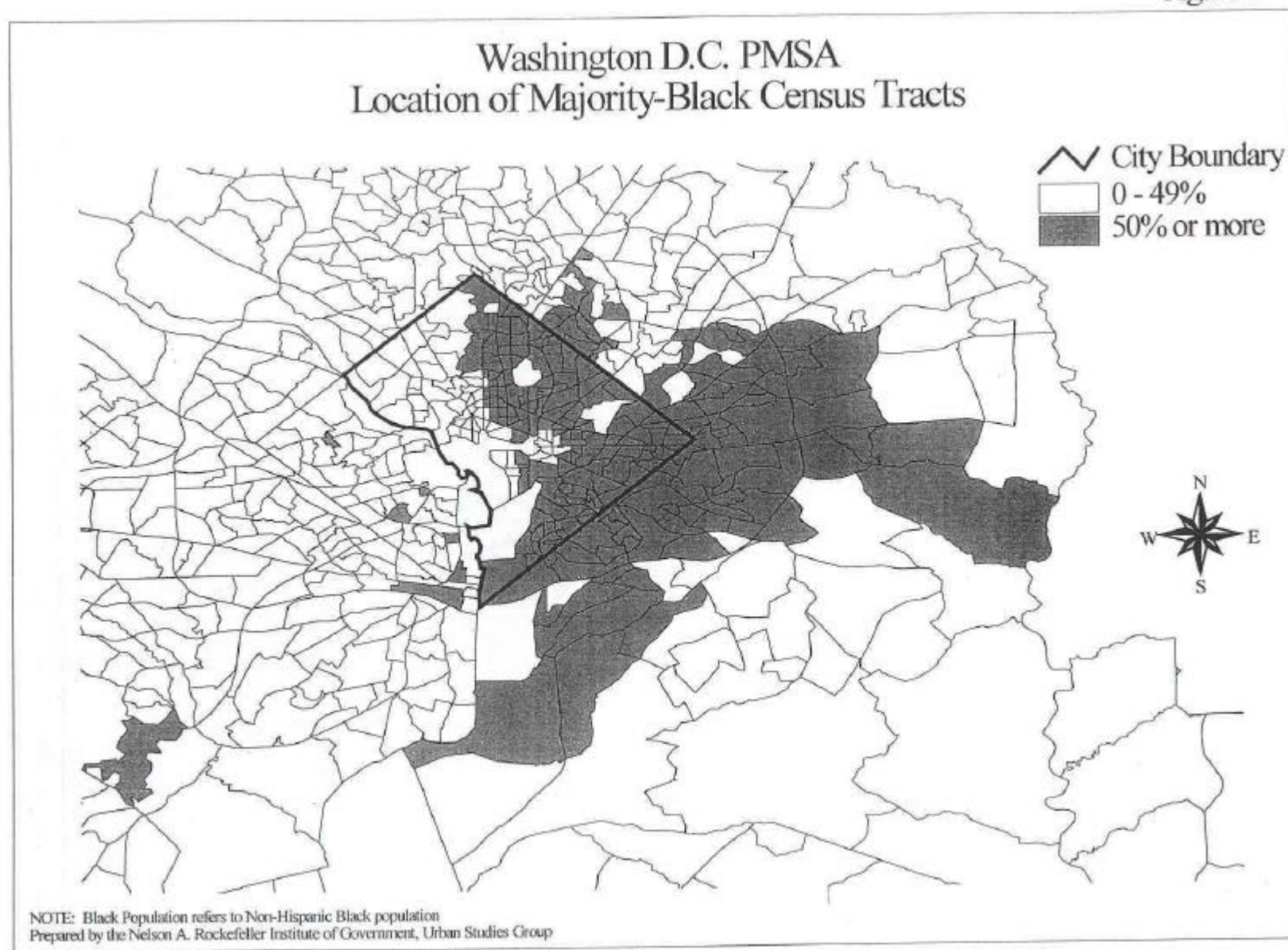| PMSA | Total Pop. | Total Black Pop. | | Blacks in Majority-Black Tracts | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | | # | % | # | % |
| Atlanta | 2959950 | 743326 | 25 | 502550 | 68 |
| Baltimore | 2389334 | 612021 | 26 | 433410 | 71 |
| Chicago | 7426591 | 1410477 | 19 | 1105690 | 78 |
| Detroit | 4266654 | 938549 | 22 | 819643 | 87 |
| Houston | 3335159 | 605223 | 18 | 317064 | 52 |
| Los Angeles | 8873926 | 947317 | 11 | 427611 | 45 |
| New York | 8550654 | 2018124 | 24 | 1361841 | 67 |
| Philadelphia | 4961726 | 931941 | 19 | 647321 | 69 |
| Washington, D.C. | 4245716 | 1059259 | 25 | 653882 | 62 |
| **Totals** | **47009710** | **9266237** | **20** | **6269012** | **68** |

Note:

1.  Data source: The *1990 Census of Population,* Summary Tape File 3A

2.  "Majority-black" tracts refer to census tracts with 50% or more nonhispanic black population

**Geography**

When their majority-black census tracts are mapped, most of the PMSAs studied display what can best be described as black *corridors*.  These swaths of black settlement originate in areas in close proximity to central business districts and extend outward into the suburbs.  The metropolitan areas of Los Angeles and Washington, D.C. reflect one such pattern, with a unidirectional black corridor (Figure 1).

Figure 1

# Washington D.C. PMSA
## Location of Majority-Black Census Tracts



Legend:
- City Boundary
- 0 - 49%
- 50% or more

NOTE: Black Population refers to Non-Hispanic Black population
Prepared by the Nelson A. Rockefeller Institute of Government, Urban Studies Group
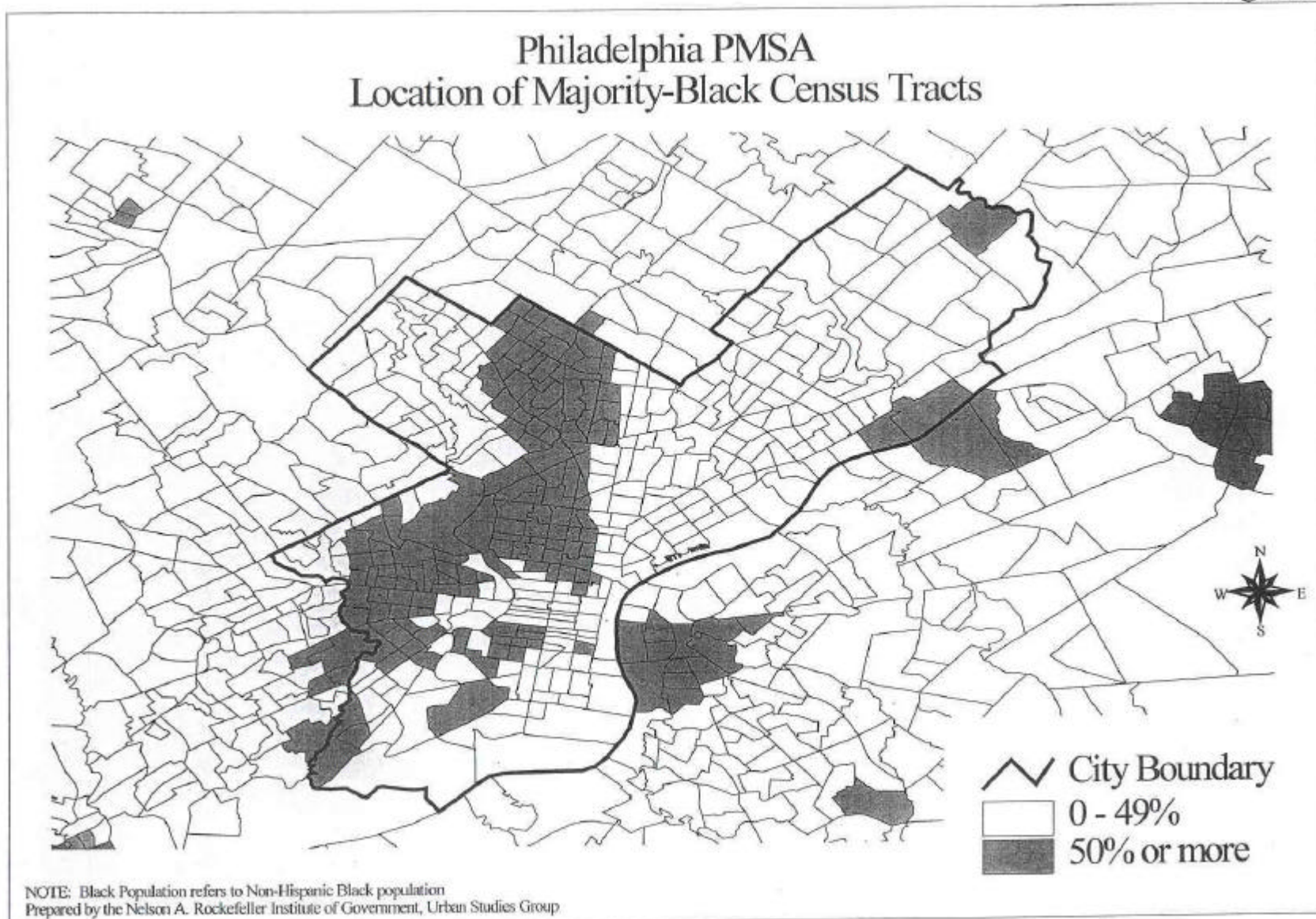
In other PMSAs, like Baltimore, Chicago, and Houston, there are bi- or multi-directional paths of black settlement. Starting from their urban cores, the majority-black census tracts in these PMSAs extend in different corridors across the boundaries of their central cities out into the suburbs.

A few of the study areas, however, reflect what are better described as *clusters* rather than corridors of black settlement. In Atlanta, Detroit, Philadelphia, and New York, majority-black census tracts are tightly grouped into clusters (Figure 2).

Majority-black census tracts in the nine metropolitan areas tend to be in cities. The ratio of urban to suburban majority-black census tracts is 6:1.[4] Overall, 85 percent of the majority-black census tracts in the nine PMSAs are located in central cities, compared to 57 percent of all census tracts. The same may be said about the distribution of blacks among majority-black census tracts. Nearly 84 percent of the 6.2 million blacks residing in majority-black census tracts in the nine PMSAs we studied lived within the limits of their central cities in 1990. The New York PMSA accounts for the largest proportion -- 96 percent -- of nonhispanic blacks living in urban majority-black census tracts followed by the Detroit PMSA at 92 percent. The lowest proportions of nonhispanic blacks residing in urban majority-black residential areas -- 47 percent and 55 percent -- were respectively in the Atlanta and Washington, D.C. PMSAs.

Figure 2

# Philadelphia PMSA
## Location of Majority-Black Census Tracts



**City Boundary**

☐ 0 - 49%

▨ 50% or more

NOTE: Black Population refers to Non-Hispanic Black population
Prepared by the Nelson A. Rockefeller Institute of Government, Urban Studies Group

**INCOME DIVERSITY**

William O'Hare and William Frey observed that "black Americans run the gamut from poor to wealthy, *and so do their neighborhoods*" (emphasis added).[5] Table 3 reflects the distribution of all nonhispanic blacks living in majority-black census tracts within the nine study PMSAs among four categories based on median household income. (Statistical tests demonstrated that other socio-economic variables we explored – including educational attainment, employment, poverty and home ownership – explained essentially the same variation among tracts as income.) These categories of majority-black census tracts are defined as follows:

- **Low-income** areas are majority-black census tracts where the median household income is less than .5 times their primary metropolitan statistical area's (PMSA's) median.

- **Moderate-income** areas are majority-black census tracts where the median household income equals .5 to 1 times their PMSA's median.

- **Middle-income** areas are majority-black census tracts where the median household income equals 1 to 1.5 times their PMSA's median.

- **High-income** areas are majority-black census tracts where the median household income is equal to or greater than 1.5 times their PMSA's median.

The most significant finding is that, contrary to the stereotype, most nonhispanic blacks living in majority-black census tracts live in areas that are not low-income. Better than two-thirds of all nonhispanic blacks in majority-black census tracts live in "moderate-income," "middle-income," or "high-income" census tracts.

There is considerable variation in the distribution of nonhispanic black across the categories of majority-black census tracks in THE nine PMSAs. With the exception of Detroit, however, all the PMSAs had substantially greater shares of their nonhispanic black populations living in moderate-income rather than low-income majority-black residential areas.

**Table 3**

**Non-Hispanic Black Population in Majority-Black Tracks by Income Type**

| PMSA | Total Pop. | Total Black Pop. # | % | Blacks in Majority Black Tracts # | % | Low Income # | % | Moderate Income # | % | Middle Income # | % | High Income # | % | Missing Data |
|------|-----------|----|---|----|---|----|---|----|---|----|---|----|---|----|
| Atlanta | 2959950 | 743326 | 25 | 502550 | 68 | 155349 | 31 | 270814 | 54 | 76387 | 15 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| Baltimore | 2389334 | 612021 | 26 | 433410 | 71 | 139206 | 32 | 257498 | 59 | 29262 | 7 | 0 | 0 | 7444 |
| Chicago | 7426591 | 1410477 | 19 | 1105690 | 78 | 426518 | 39 | 600341 | 54 | 78009 | 7 | 297 | 0 | 525 |
| Detroit | 4266654 | 938549 | 22 | 819643 | 87 | 399253 | 49 | 351980 | 43 | 55516 | 7 | 12274 | 1 | 620 |
| Houston | 3335159 | 605223 | 18 | 317064 | 52 | 120494 | 38 | 169843 | 54 | 26727 | 8 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| Los Angeles | 8873926 | 947317 | 11 | 427611 | 45 | 95643 | 22 | 235999 | 55 | 79423 | 19 | 16546 | 4 | 0 |
| New York | 8550654 | 2018124 | 24 | 1361841 | 67 | 328805 | 24 | 661828 | 49 | 295630 | 22 | 65560 | 5 | 10018 |
| Philadelphia | 4961726 | 931941 | 19 | 647321 | 69 | 242721 | 37 | 352256 | 54 | 42387 | 7 | 2078 | 0 | 7879 |
| Washington, D.C. | 4245716 | 1059259 | 25 | 653882 | 62 | 160866 | 25 | 398103 | 61 | 80986 | 12 | 12048 | 2 | 1879 |
| **Totals** | **47009710** | **9266237** | **20** | **6269012** | **68** | **2068855** | **33** | **3298662** | **53** | **764327** | **12** | **108803** | **2** | **28365** |

Note:

1. Data source: the 1990 *Census of Population,* Summary Tape File 3A

2. "Majority-black" tracts refer to census tracts with 50% or more non-hispanic black population

3. Some tracts with 50% or more black population had zero value for Median Household Income. However, block group data reveal that a number of these tracts did have income.  Therefore they cannot be treated as Low Income  and their populations cannot be included in the calculation of Low Income tracts.  Instead they are labled as Missing Data.

- *Low-Income:* The relative proportion of the nonhispanic blacks living in low-income majority-black census tracts ranged from a low of 22 percent in Los Angeles, 24 percent in New York and 25 percent in Washington, D.C. to a high of 49 percent in Detroit and 39 percent in Chicago. Remember, these low-income tracts are not census tracts with extreme poverty (40 percent or higher); they are tracts with a median income of less than half the median for their PMSA. [6]

- *Moderate-Income:* The relative share of the nonhispanic blacks living in moderate-income majority-black census tracts ranged from a low of 43 percent in Detroit and 49 percent in New York to a high of 61 percent in Washington, D.C. and 59 percent in Baltimore.

- *Middle-Income:* The proportion of nonhispanic blacks living in middle-income majority-black census tracts also varied markedly. It ranged from a low of 7 percent in Baltimore, Chicago, Detroit and Philadelphia to a high of 22 percent in New York, 19 percent in Los Angeles and 15 percent in Atlanta.

- *High-Income:* The share of nonhispanic blacks living in high-income majority-black residential areas ranged from a low of zero in Atlanta, Baltimore and Houston and from less than one percent in Chicago and Philadelphia to a high of 5 percent in New York and 4 percent in Los Angeles.

Table 4 shows the prevalence of majority-black tracts among the nine study PMSAs according to their income type. The distribution is similar to but, because of differences in population density, somewhat different from the distribution of population shown in Table 3. Again, low-income majority-black census tracts constitute a minority of the places in which blacks live.[7] Low-income majority-black residential areas accounted for 784 out of 2,136, or less than 37 percent of the census tracts with nonhispanic black majorities in the nine PMSAs. Overall, the ratio of low-income majority-black residential areas to all majority-black residential areas in 1990 was 1:3. The ratio between low-income majority-black residential areas and moderate-income majority-black residential areas was less than 1:1. The pattern, however, varied among the nine PMSAs. In one-third of the PMSAs in our study, the proportion of low-income tracts was between one-fifth and one-quarter of all majority-black tracts. Only in Detroit was the proportion of low-income tracts greater than one half.

Among the nine primary metropolitan statistical areas in 1990, the predominant type of majority-black census tract was moderate-income, or what might be called "working class." We identified almost one thousand census tracts (975) that were both majority-black and moderate-income, which amounted to nearly half (46 percent) of all the majority-black census tracts in the nine PMSAs. There is a ratio of

1:2 between moderate-income to other types of majority-black census tracts; nearly 3:1 to middle-income majority-black census tracts and 15:1 to high-income majority-black census tracts. Proportions of moderate-income majority-black residential areas ranged from a high of 61 percent in Washington, D.C., 54 percent in Los Angeles, and 53 percent in Baltimore to a low of 37 percent in Detroit.

With a ratio to all majority-black tracts of roughly 1:3, middle-income areas, while less common, exist in each of the nine PMSAs. The lowest rate of middle-income majority-black census tracts is found in Chicago and Detroit, at 6 percent, with New York, Los Angeles and Washington, D.C. highest at 29 percent, 19 percent, and 12 percent, respectively.

Blacks have been and continue to be less successful than other racial and ethnic groups at forming high-income or upper middle-class residential areas.[8] Our research found high-income majority-black census tracts to be relatively rare. All told, 3 percent (64) of the majority-black census tracts in the nine metropolitan areas were high-income. Overall, the ratio of these high-income majority-black tracts to all majority-black census tracts in the nine metropolitan areas is 1:33. (We don't know yet how this compares to majority-white census tracts, but we suspect that the comparison is unfavorable.)

## Table 4

## Majority-Black Tracts in the Nine PMSAs with 500,000 or more Blacks

| PMSA | Total No. of Tracts | Majority-Black # | % | Low Income # | % | Moderate Income # | % | Middle Income # | % | High Income # | % | Missing Data |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Atlanta | 505 | 123 | 24.4 | 57 | 46.3 | 54 | 43.9 | 12 | 9.8 | 0 | 0.0 | 0 |
| Baltimore | 591 | 132 | 22.3 | 45 | 34.1 | 70 | 53.0 | 14 | 10.6 | 0 | 0.0 | 3 |
| Chicago | 1782 | 395 | 22.2 | 194 | 49.1 | 176 | 44.6 | 23 | 5.8 | 1 | 0.3 | 1 |
| Detroit | 1180 | 293 | 24.8 | 158 | 53.9 | 109 | 37.2 | 17 | 5.8 | 7 | 2.4 | 2 |
| Houston | 694 | 108 | 15.6 | 52 | 48.1 | 48 | 44.4 | 8 | 7.4 | 0 | 0.0 | 0 |
| Los Angeles | 1660 | 136 | 8.2 | 32 | 23.5 | 74 | 54.4 | 26 | 19.1 | 4 | 2.9 | 0 |
| New York | 2500 | 544 | 21.8 | 116 | 21.3 | 221 | 40.6 | 155 | 28.5 | 48 | 8.8 | 4 |
| Philadelphia | 1288 | 187 | 14.5 | 75 | 40.1 | 90 | 48.1 | 16 | 8.6 | 1 | 0.5 | 5 |
| Washington, D.C. | 1042 | 218 | 20.9 | 55 | 25.2 | 133 | 61.0 | 25 | 11.5 | 3 | 1.4 | 2 |
| **Totals** | **11242** | **2136** | **19.0** | **784** | **36.7** | **975** | **45.6** | **296** | **13.9** | **64** | **3.0** | **17** |

Note:

1. Data source: the 1990 *Census of Population,* Summary Tape File 3A

2. "Majority-black" tracts refer to census tracts with 50% or more non-hispanic black population

3. Some tracts with 50% or more black population had zero value for Median Household Income. However, block group data reveal that a number of these tracts did have income.  Therefore they cannot be treated as Low Income  and their populations cannot be included in the calculation of Low Income tracts.  Instead they are labled as Missing Data.

The New York PMSA had the highest percentage of high-income majority-black census tracts – nine percent. The Los Angeles PMSA accounted for the second highest proportion of high-income majority-black census tracts – three percent. Interestingly, the Detroit PMSA – where majority-black census tracts disproportionately are characterized by high rates of unemployment and poverty and low rates of college graduates – had the third highest proportion as well as number of high-income majority-black census tracts. One-third of the metropolitan areas studied had no high-income majority-black tracts. Specifically, the Baltimore, Houston, and, surprisingly, the Atlanta PMSAs were without high-income majority-black census tracts in 1990.[9]

There are several plausible explanations for the paucity of high-income majority-black residential areas:

- **Few black households earn high incomes.** There has been a growth in the number of nonhispanic black households that have attained middle-class status (at least in terms of income) in America. Yet rather than high individual incomes, black middle-class household incomes are often the product of "packaging" (the bundling of incomes from numerous wage earners or sources), which rarely produces very high household income or wealth accumulation.[10]

- **A substantial number of high-income black households have chosen, when and where possible, to live outside areas of majority-black settlement.** Many of the nation's most affluent nonhispanic black households live in majority-white or mixed racial/ethnic areas. Fifty-two percent of the nonhispanic black households in the United States earning more than $45,000 in 1990 resided in non-majority-black census tracts. Furthermore, 54 percent of nonhispanic black households in the U.S. earning $75,000 or more in 1990 lived outside majority-black census tracts.[11]

- **Many high-income black households live in areas below their economic status.** Some high-income black households have made a conscious decision to not live among other high-income households. For others, barriers may exist which prevent them from either moving into such areas or forming high-income majority-black residential areas. Either way, 95 percent of the black households in our nine study PMSAs earning $45,000 or more in 1990 resided in majority-black census tracts other than high-income. Of the highest-income black households in the nine PMSAs (those earning more than $75,000), nearly half – 48 percent – resided in low-, moderate- and middle-income majority-black census tracts.[12]

**Location**

Majority-black census tracts in the nine PMSAs are in close proximity to each other. One is more likely to find majority-black census tracts that are contiguous with other majority-black census tracts than non-majority-black census tracts, even in the suburbs. Majority-black census tracts also are likely to be clustered among majority-black census tracts of their own income type. Low-income and high-income majority-black census tracts are grouped separately from each other, with low-income majority-black census tracts often distant from high-income majority-black census tracts.

Moderate-income and middle-income majority-black census tracts are often located between low-income and high-income majority-black census tracts. It appears that these residential areas function as buffers or zones of transition between the poorest and the most affluent areas of black settlement.

Central cities house the greatest number and proportion of majority-black census tracts in the nine metropolitan areas. This is true of the overwhelming proportions of each of the four types of majority-black census tracts: 94 percent of low-income, 81 percent of moderate-income, 74 percent of middle-income, and 90 percent of high-income majority-black census tracts lie within the bounds of cities. Two types of majority-black census tracts account for more than four-fifths (85 percent) of all urban majority-black census tracts – low-income and moderate-income.

Nevertheless, a fair proportion of majority-black census tracts – 15 percent – are suburban. Like their urban counterparts, most of majority-black census tracts located outside the central cities of the nine PMSAs are moderate-income. Three-fifths of suburban majority-black census tracts are moderate-income, with middle-income majority-black tracts accounting for the second largest concentration – 25 percent – of suburban majority-black census tracts.

A similar pattern can be seen in the geographic distribution of the nonhispanic black populations of our nine PMSAs. Slightly more than half (51 percent) of the nonhispanic blacks residing in urban majority-black census tracts live in moderate-income majority-black census tracts (followed by 38

percent in low-income majority-black tracts). Middle-income and high-income majority-black census tracts account for 10 percent and 2 percent, respectively, of the remaining urban nonhispanic black population residing in majority-black census tracts. With respect to the suburbs, 64 percent of nonhispanic blacks reside in moderate-income majority-black census tracts. All other suburban nonhispanic blacks living in majority-black tracts are distributed among middle- (26 percent), low- (9 percent), and high-income (1 percent) majority-black census tracts.

**Attributes**

Table 5 shows selected socio-economic characteristics of the majority-black residential areas grouped according to income type. As was the case with the statistical tests performed for our taxonomy, these data suggest that a number of variables are linked to income. For example, as the category of observation moves up the income scale from low- to high-income majority-black residential areas, the relative measures of age of the population, level of educational attainment, family composition, labor force participation and employment, the mix of white collar/managerial-professional workers, and home ownership all increase or improve. Conversely, moving from low- to high-income majority-black residential areas, the proportion of the population below the poverty line falls, as well as the proportion of households on public assistance.

Table 5 also shows that moderate-, middle- and high-income majority-black census tracts bear little resemblance to either media or academic descriptions of concentrated urban black poverty. Moderate-income majority-black census tracts closely track the nine PMSA average on most of the socio-economic indicators used in our study. Middle- and high-income majority-black census tracts fare as well or better than the nine PMSA average, as well as the national (USA) average, on most socio-economic indicators, including educational attainment, labor force participation and unemployment, home ownership, and persons below poverty.

Table 5 shows two other items of interest: As the median household incomes of majority-black census tracts increase (1) the proportion of their residents who are foreign-born increases and (2) the proportion of public sector workers increases with the income of majority-black census tracts.

**Table 5**
**Socio-Economic Profiles of Majority-Black Census Tracts**
**in the Nine Primary Metropolitan Statistical Areas by Income Classification, 1990**

| Socio-Economic Indicator | Income Classifications of Census Tracts | | | | PMSA | |
| | Low Income | Moderate Income | Middle Income | High Income | Average | U.S.A.* |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| Non-Hispanic Blacks | 86% | 82% | 76% | 75% | 82% | 12% |
| Foreign Born | 7% | 13% | 17% | 25% | 12% | 8% |
| Age Distribution | | | | | | |
| 18 years old or less | 34% | 30% | 27% | 26% | 30% | 27% |
| 65 years old or greater | 11% | 10% | 9% | 9% | 10% | 13% |
| High School Graduates | 51% | 67% | 79% | 83% | 64% | 75% |
| College Graduates | 6% | 13% | 21% | 29% | 13% | 20% |
| Married w/Spouse Present | 21% | 32% | 44% | 49% | 31% | 54% |
| Female Headed Households with Children | 24% | 16% | 9% | 7% | 17% | 6% |
| Husband-Wife Households | 21% | 35% | 52% | 65% | 33% | 56% |
| Labor Force Participation | | | | | | |
| 16 - 65 year olds | 57% | 73% | 79% | 89% | 70% | 76% |
| 16 - 19 year olds | 34% | 40% | 41% | 40% | 38% | 49% |
| Unemployment | | | | | | |
| 16 - 65 year olds | 13% | 9% | 6% | 5% | 10% | 5% |
| 16 - 19 year olds | 15% | 13% | 11% | 9% | 13% | 8% |
| Sector of Employment | | | | | | |
| Private | 65% | 63% | 60% | 57% | 63% | 71% |
| Public | 25% | 26% | 28% | 30% | 25% | 15% |
| Non-for-profit | 8% | 8% | 8% | 9% | 8% | 7% |
| Occupation | | | | | | |
| Blue-Collar | 51% | 42% | 35% | 29% | 43% | 39% |
| White-Collar | 15% | 20% | 28% | 35% | 21% | 26% |
| Pink-Collar | 21% | 24% | 24% | 23% | 23% | 16% |
| Persons Below Poverty | 44% | 20% | 8% | 4% | 26% | 13% |
| Households on Public Assistance | 34% | 16% | 8% | 6% | 20% | 8% |
| Owner-Occupied Housing | 27% | 45% | 68% | 86% | 43% | 64% |
| Non-Hispanic Black Homeowners | 87% | 81% | 73% | 70% | 80% | 5% |

Note: U.S.A. average is for all census tracts regardless of racial composition
Source: 1990 *Census of Population*, Summary Tape File 3A

**NEXT STEPS**

The Urban Neighborhood and Community Capacity Building Study is *taxonomic* – what are the main neighborhood types?  It is also *longitudinal* – how have they evolved?  It is *multi-disciplinary*, looking at both statistical data on socio-economic conditions and trends and observational data on political and social conditions and institutions.  And, it is *policy oriented* – focused on determining those factors influencing the stability and progress of majority-minority neighborhoods.

The use of *neighborhoods* as the unit of analysis is important to us.  But it requires much effort.  There is no agreement on overarching standards for bounding neighborhoods, few existing sources of data organized at the neighborhood level, and problems of internal diversity, i.e., different groups – young people, older people, employers, religious leaders, and others – have different perceptions about the specific boundaries of the neighborhoods they share.

Unlike census tracts which are drawn with the intent to produce roughly equivalent populations, neighborhoods hold meaning for the identification of place and social organization.  Our methodology uses census tract geography as a beginning point for, rather than as a proximate definition of, neighborhood-level research.  Our method specifies neighborhood boundaries, first through consultations with Planning Department officials and information from historical and government documents, and then through field visits and interviews with local residents.  The objective is to draw boundaries that have the greatest degree of resonance among these sources. We tested this method in pilot research on majority-black neighborhoods in New York City. [13]  It is now being applied to majority-black neighborhoods in the 16 metropolitan areas in the Study.

Our field research, underway in an initial sample of 46 neighborhoods, begins by defining the boundaries of a neighborhood and then constructing a profile.  This includes neighborhood-level data on such broad, identifying characteristics as neighborhood economic security, housing characteristics,

and quality of services -- with a special emphasis on schools, public safety and health, neighborhood features and the proximity of selected locational features, and neighborhood civic life.

Subsequent research will focus on the structures of civic engagement in majority-black and majority-Hispanic neighborhoods, be they prosperous or poor. Do predominately black or Hispanic neighborhoods that are working-class and middle-class foster bonds of community among their residents, who then promote and preserve stable, non-deviant environments? How central is social capital in staving off deterioration in majority-black and majority-Hispanic neighborhoods? How are civic infrastructures built and maintained? Can the communities were are interested – working- and middle-class minority neighborhoods – offer new insights into the role of public policy in developing and/or sustaining civic engagement, institutional infrastructures, and social capital among the residents of the poorest majority-minority neighborhoods? What is the level of need for bridging mechanisms that incorporate majority-minority neighborhood residents into larger social, economic, and political communities? What examples of these mechanisms exist? How do they work?

A central interest to be addressed in our study is the extent to which public policy affects moderate-, middle-, or high-income majority-black residential areas. Another involves the extent to which policy lessons can be learned from better-off majority-minority residential areas and applied to those that are poor: Can the experience of non-poor areas point to innovative strategies that can be developed for improving low-income majority-minority residential areas or at least slowing down their decline? We are hopeful that our methodology for studying majority-minority residential areas will help answer these questions and benefit academics and government policy makers, as well as the residents of America's metropolitan areas.

# Endnotes

[1.] The sixteen Primary Metropolitan Statistical Areas/Metropolitan Statistical Areas in the study include: Atlanta, Baltimore, Boston, Buffalo, Chicago, Cleveland, Denver, Detroit, Houston, Kansas City, Los Angeles, New York, Philadelphia, St. Louis, San Francisco/Oakland and Washington, D.C..

[2] Richard P. Nathan, David J. Wright and Michael Leo Owens, "Working Paper on Majority-Black Residential Areas," paper presented at Northwestern University/University of Chicago Joint Center for Poverty Research, March 1997.

[3.] At the national level, nonhispanic blacks comprise 78 percent of the populations of majority-black census tracts, with nonhispanic whites accounting for 15 percent of their residents as of 1990. Asians and Pacific Islanders comprise another 1 percent of their residents. Hispanics account for 5 percent of the residents of majority-black census tracts. Half of this group, however, do not identify themselves with any racial category. But of those who do, 30 percent consider themselves white, while another 18 percent identify themselves as black.

[4.] *Urban* refers to the area located within the boundaries of central cities. Consequently, *suburban* refers to the area located outside the boundaries of central cities.

[5.] William P. O'Hare and William H. Frey, "Booming, Suburban, *and* Black," *American Demographics* (September 1992), 30.

[6.] The comparability between the literature's use of the terms "extreme-poverty areas" (census tracts with poverty rates equal to greater than 40 percent) and "high-poverty areas" (census tracts with poverty rates between 30-35 percent) and what we term "low-income" census tracts is high. Using Geographic Information Systems techniques, we found that 89 percent of the census tracts with poverty rates equal to or greater than 40 percent had median household income that were .5 times or less the median for their PMSA. Furthermore, we discerned that 93 percent of majority-black census tracts with poverty rates over 40 percent overlapped "low-income" census tracts. Additionally, 46 percent of the low-income majority-black census tracts in the nine PMSAs were extreme-poverty areas and another 24 percent were high-poverty areas in 1990.

[7.] Although some majority-black residential areas are *low-income*, not all households residing in them are low-income. There is a considerable amount of socio-economic diversity among the residents of poor black census tracts. For an insightful look into the economic and social milieu of poor census tracts, see Paul A. Jargowsky, "Beyond the Street Corner: The Hidden Diversity of Ghetto Neighborhoods," paper presented at the 1995 Annual Meeting of the American Sociological Association.

[8.] See Bart Landry, *The New Black Middle Class* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1987); William P. O'Hare and William H. Frey, "Booming, Suburban, *and* Black," *American Demographics* (September 1992), 30-35; and David J. Dent, "The New Black Suburbs," *The New York Times Magazine*, June 14, 1992, 19-24.

[9.] Some metropolitan areas have high-income majority-black census tracts that formed subsequent to the 1990 Census. From field observation, we know this to be the case in Atlanta, for example. These census tracts, however, are not reflected in the data.

[10.] See Bennett Harrison and Lucy Gorham, "Growing Inequality in Black Wages in the 1980s and the Emergence of an African-American Middle Class," *Journal of Policy Analysis and Management* 11 (1992), 235-253. For a discussion of the differences between black economic status based on wealth versus income, see Melvin L. Oliver and Thomas M.

Shapiro, *Black Wealth/White Wealth: A New Perspective on Racial Inequality* (New York: Routledge, 1995).

[11.] Figures derived from the *1990 Census of Population and Housing*, Summary Tape File, 3A.

[12.] Figures derived from the *1990 Census of Population and Housing*, Summary Tape File, 3A. The pattern for our study areas differed slightly: 40 percent of nonhispanic black households earning more than $45,000 in 1990 and 42 percent of nonhispanic black households with incomes of $75,000 or more lived outside majority-black census tracts.

[13.] The Urban Neighborhood and Capacity Building Research Study was shaped by pilot research conducted in the predominately-black residential areas in and around New York State's largest cities. The southeastern section of New York City's Queens County served as the main area for the pilot research. See Richard P. Nathan, Julian Chow, and Michael L. Owens, "The Flip Site of the Underclass: Working and Middle Class Urban Minority Neighborhoods," Rockefeller Institute Bulletin (1995), 14-22.