The Black Suburban Sort: Is Suburbanization Diversifying Blacks' Racial Attitudes?

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The recent expansion in Black suburbanization is the most substantial shift in Black American residential patterns since the Great Migration. It has left Blacks more sorted between urban and suburban neighborhoods across metropolitan areas. This study explores whether this increasing residential stratification is associated with differentiation in Blacks' political views on racialized issues. I first lay out a theory of Black political sorting by place, specifying processes inherent in suburbanization that could lead to opinion stratification between suburban and urban Blacks. This is followed by a descriptive analysis of American Voices Project interviews with suburban and urban Black respondents. The data show Black suburbanization is neither as economically transformative nor politically differentiating as might be expected. Despite subtle opinion differences between suburban and urban respondents, they mostly converge in their bleak assessments of racialized issues.

Keywords: Black suburbanization, Black political attitudes, race, policing, neighborhood violence, Black Lives Matter

New Black residential patterns are changing the geography of race in America. Cities have been at the epicenter of the country's stark racial geography since the Great Migration, when Blacks became a predominantly urban population (Derencourt 2022; Wilkerson 2010). Cities are where the group's racial woes, from neighborhood inequality to intergroup conflict with Whites, have been most acute and where the battles for racial redress often have been waged. But the geography has shifted sharply over the last half-century. Blacks have been suburbanizing at accelerating rates in recent decades. Many are leaving big cities where Black popula-

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tions are dwindling steadily, inverting the racial group's residential patterns at a scale not seen since the Great Migration (Bosman 2020; Bartik and Mast 2021). More than half of all Blacks in the country's largest metropolitan areas now reside in suburban zip codes (Frey 2015).

The long struggle for Black liberation likewise has migrated to the suburbs. When a White police officer killed George Floyd, an unarmed Black man, in 2020, it ignited an unprecedented wave of multiracial Black Lives Matter (BLM) protests extending beyond big cities and into the suburbs throughout the summer. Media coverage of this largest racial justice social movement since the civil rights era mostly emphasized Whites' involvement when it sprouted in suburbia (Reed 2020; Sisson 2020). The virtual erasure of Black suburbanites from the reporting replicates a long-standing tendency in popular media to cast suburbs as uniformly White and middle class (Lewis-McCoy et al. 2023). Yet the growing presence of Blacks in the suburbs also should invite analysis of their attitudes about this so-called national reckoning on race. How do their views compare with those of their city-dwelling counterparts? Has the diversifying metropolitan geography of the Black population translated to Black public opinion?

This study explores whether the increasing geographic sorting of Blacks into suburban and urban neighborhoods is associated with stratification in their political attitudes. Although Blacks have never been a political monolith, evidence of stratification in Black political opinion historically has been minimal or hard to find.[1] Blacks typically stand out among American racial groups for the high levels of uniformity and pronounced liberal cast to their political views. Throughout the late twentieth century, this sturdy conventional wisdom tracked in their partisanship, voting choices, and opinions on a range of policies from criminal justice to social welfare (Dawson 1994; White and Laird 2020).

Yet in recent decades, signs of political diversity and even ideological moderation have surfaced in the Black mass public (Jefferson and Yan 2020; Tate 2010). Researchers have sought to pinpoint whether mass- or elite-level changes in the Black population (economic stratification, generational cleavages, and so on) might account for this newly discernible political heterogeneity (Cohen 2010; Dawson 1994; Watts Smith, Bunyasi, and Smith 2019). Among mass-level demographic changes, growing economic divisions in the population have drawn the most attention. Suburbanization, in contrast, has received relatively limited empirical notice in the research on Black political attitudes, although it is one of the most significant Black demographic changes of the last half-century (McGowen 2017, 2018). It is also a key driver of increasing economic segregation between low- and middle-income Blacks (Bartik and Mast 2021; Timberlake 2002)—the same divide researchers believe could be a source of political heterogeneity in the population.

The socioeconomic ramifications of Black suburbanization (economic segregation, concentrated poverty, and so on) have been researched extensively (Bartik and Mast 2021; Farley et al. 1978; Massey and Denton 1993; Pattillo 1999; Wilson 1987). Whether any political shifts have accompanied the Black suburban sort, however, remains an open question. Place-based differences in Americans' political views are hardly unusual. Making sense of American politics these days often entails thinking in geographic terms. Studies show that Whites have become increasingly sorted between red states and blue states, right-leaning rural towns, left-leaning big cities, and suburbs in the political middle (Gainsborough 2001; Cramer 2016; Nall 2018; Rodden 2019). Whether similar place-based political sorting is occurring among Blacks has remained a relatively unexplored empirical question, despite the growing signs of political diversity in the population.

My first aim in this study is to lay out a theory of a Black suburban political sort elucidating how the recent suburbanizing trend could produce variation in Blacks' political opinions.

1. Heterogeneity in Blacks' political views is often obscured by racial sorting in the two-party system, social pressure within the group, and the limits of survey instruments used to measure ideology in the United States (Jefferson and Yan 2020; White and Laird 2020).

Political sorting among Blacks by place is not an inevitability. The geographic distance between suburban and urban Blacks might make little political difference. Just as race often has exceeded class in shaping Blacks' political views, it also might supersede geography.[2] It might matter more than place, if racial hardships follow Blacks across zip codes and drive their political opinions. My theory specifies how the increasing residential stratification of Blacks into suburban and urban neighborhoods might crystallize opinion cleavages in the population but also accounts for the continuing force of race in Blacks' lives. The theory emphasizes causal mechanisms in selection and social processes inherent in the changing residential patterns of Blacks across metropolitan areas.

I then assess a unique national sample of interviews conducted with Blacks living in suburban and urban neighborhoods to determine whether their political views are distinct. My analyses focus on the respondents' perceptions and opinions on the issues that energized the 2020 protests following the Floyd murder: police brutality, neighborhood violence, and BLM. The empirical objective is to show whether living in a suburban versus an urban zip code is associated with any appreciable differences in how Blacks perceive or experience even the high stakes racial issues that typically unify them.

Descriptive analyses of the interviews uncover subtle differences as well as arresting commonalities in the opinions and perceptions of urban and suburban Black respondents. Both groups mostly distrust the police and support BLM. But urban Blacks are slightly more engaged in the movement and supportive of its tactics than their suburban counterparts. Violence is unrelentingly pervasive and safety far too elusive in both the urban and suburban Black neighborhoods represented in this study. Although slightly more suburban than urban respondents perceive their neighborhoods as safe and trust their neighbors, this minuscule distinction is easy to miss when so much distress characterizes the places where Blacks live on both sides of the urban-suburban divide. Still, even modest differences may have consequences for building a unified political agenda and mobilizing Blacks to support movements for racial justice.

The most striking pattern uncovered in the interviews is the interviewees' pronounced pessimism about the likely efficacy of the BLM movement and protests. Blacks in cities and suburbs alike register disillusionment about the prospects for racial justice in the United States. This sentiment is a far cry from the storied hope and determination associated with previous eras in the Black liberation struggle (Phoenix 2019). It raises questions about how readily Blacks' commitment to progressive racial reform can be harnessed and how reliably it can be sustained—especially if their investments in collective action and other forms of political engagement fail to yield meaningful returns. In what follows, I lay out the theory of Black political sorting by place and then turn to the results from analyses of the interview data.

THEORY AND EXPECTATIONS

Although the research on whether suburbanization has generated economic and social change in the Black population is robust, the empirical questions are hardly settled. At the outset of this belated Black exodus to the suburbs, expectations were sunlit. Some researchers heralded suburbanization as Blacks' ticket to socioeconomic mobility and greater residential integration with Whites (Massey and Denton 1993; Farley et al. 1978). Recent media coverage of this suburban wave also paints a picture of Black families decamping to the suburbs to escape the economic distress, shuttering schools, and violence of central city neighborhoods for better lives and more opportunity (Bosman 2020; Blow 2021; Demas 2022). This media narrative glosses over some of the complexities of contemporary Black suburbanization. For one, many suburban bound Blacks are not relocating from central cities to nearby sur-

2. Michael Dawson's *Behind the Mule* (1995) is the seminal study on the persisting influence of race on Black political attitudes despite growing class differences in the population.

rounding areas, but instead are tracing a reverse migration path from the urban Northeast and Midwest to destinations in the suburban South (Frey 2015). New Black suburban arrivals also include immigrants from the Caribbean and Africa, many of whom are bypassing central cities altogether and making the suburbs their gateway to the United States (Farrell 2016; Clerge 2019).

Still, accounts of Blacks exiting central cities loom large in the unfolding suburbanization trajectory. This characterization echoes the story that accompanied mid-twentieth-century White suburbanization, minus the element of patent racial aversion. Whites fled cities to avoid perceived signs of social decay: poverty, increasing numbers of Blacks, crime, and disorder. Along with racial distance from Blacks, the suburbs promised and delivered the American Dream for most Whites (Jackson 1985; Kruse 2005). For Blacks, the socioeconomic outcomes of suburbanization have been more uneven. Spurred by a combination of push and pull factors, the millions of Blacks migrating to the suburbs in recent decades have met mixed fortunes.

The Political Economy of Black Suburbia

Despite the few studies showing a link between Black suburbanization and modest declines in Black-White segregation, Black suburban dwellers largely live alongside other Blacks (Frey 2015; Fischer 2008). Most reside in majority-Black neighborhoods and municipalities (Massey and Tannen 2017). The economic profile of Black suburbia covers a wide range of places, from affluent outlying areas such as Prince Georges County, Maryland, to low-income, struggling inner-ring suburbs such as Ferguson, Missouri (Lacy 2007; Pattillo 1999; Smithsimon 2022; Wyndham-Douds, Lewis-McCoy, and Johnson 2021). Most Black suburbs, however, fall in the latter category (Wyndham-Douds, Lewis-McCoy, and Johnson 2021). The same problems plaguing Black neighborhoods in central cities—economic precarity, police brutality, resource deficits, and disinvestment—often follow Blacks into the suburbs, reflecting the stubborn racial inequalities of the metropolitan political economy. For instance, the uptick in Black suburbanization rates over the last two decades has coincided with a sharp increase in suburban poverty (Kneebone and Berube 2013; Rutan, Hepburn, and Desmond 2023). This rising poverty rate is especially pronounced in the inner-ring suburbs where most suburban Blacks reside. These suburban municipalities often lack the institutional capacity and resources to remediate poverty (Allard 2017). Black suburbs generally have smaller tax bases, boast fewer amenities, and are saddled with more fiscal burdens than White suburbs (Gay 2004; Pacewicz and Robinson 2021; Wyndham-Douds, Lewis-McCoy, and Johnson 2021).

Blacks are also less likely than Whites to land in incorporated suburbs and benefit from all the political and economic advantages such municipalities afford (Wyndham-Douds 2023). Incorporation gives municipalities the powers of general government and economic development, including perhaps most critically the authority to levy taxes and to control land use through zoning.[3] Unincorporated suburbs, where most metropolitan Blacks outside central cities live, lack these tools of governance. They instead must rely on county governments to provide essential services and functions such as public safety, sanitation, and the like, which may be stretched thin across many places. This jurisdictional status also can put Black suburbs at risk of fiscal free fall. With no control over land use and hence limited power to regulate development, these unincorporated

3. Decades of research show municipalities typically opt for incorporation—and then wield their regulatory powers over land use—for the purposes of exclusion and resource hoarding (Danielson 1976). Zoning laws, specifying what can and cannot be built within municipal boundaries, have become the leading mechanism for excluding "the undesirables" (non-Whites, the poor) from majority-White and high- or middle-income suburbs (Trounstine 2018; Gordon 2019). Likewise, incorporation enables these suburbs to claw back tax revenues that would have gone to county governments and thus prevent the potential redistribution of these resources to other areas (Wyndham-Douds 2023).

areas are susceptible to economic underdevelopment and environmental degradation.[4]

Yet overall, Black suburban zip codes still compare favorably to Black central city neighborhoods. Suburban Blacks on average live in less poor neighborhoods than their central city counterparts (Timberlake 2002). Despite the precipitous growth in the suburban poor population in recent decades, poverty still tends to be both less concentrated and visible in suburban areas than in central cities (Allard 2017; Lewis-McCoy et al. 2023). Black wealth, in contrast, is much more pronounced in the suburbs. Alexander Bartik and Evan Mast (2021) find that recent gains in Black household incomes have been concentrated in the suburbs whereas the losses have been steep in cities. Consequently, suburbanization has done more to segregate Blacks by income than to commingle Blacks and Whites in the same neighborhoods. As Blacks have suburbanized, they have become more economically sorted, with the greater proportion of high-earning Blacks in the suburbs and their low-income counterparts increasingly isolated in deteriorating central city neighborhoods (Bartik and Mast 2021).

Does Black Suburbanization Diversify Black Politics?

If Black suburbanization has had political ramifications, they are not nearly as well documented or understood as these economic outcomes. Research on the politics of Black suburbanites is relatively sparse (Johnson 2002; Frasure-Yokley 2015; McGowen 2017, 2018; Rogers 2018). Systematic political comparisons of Black suburban and urban residents are also few. It is unclear whether the geographic distance between the two groups is correlated with differences in their political views. Stratification in Blacks' political opinions certainly has not been the norm. Rather, Black political homogeneity has been the predominant pattern, prompting a long line of research by scholars of political behavior. For example, researchers have investigated why Blacks have remained unified, stalwart Democratic partisans despite growing socioeconomic divisions in the population (White and Laird 2020). The leading explanation for this uncommon degree of political uniformity is racial group solidarity and the far-reaching force of race on Blacks' individual life outcomes, such as how much they earn, where they live, and even their vulnerability to mortal or bodily danger during encounters with police (Verba and Nie 1972; Shingles 1981; Pinderhughes 1987; Dawson 1994).

Michael Dawson (1994) theorizes that political differences among Blacks remain mostly muted due to widespread perceptions of linked fate in the population. He predicts that as long as Blacks' individual life chances remain tethered to the fortunes of the group as a whole, they will put racial group interests above other considerations in their political decision making and thus generate high levels of opinion homogeneity in the population.[5] But Dawson also surmises that deepening intragroup economic divisions could rupture linked fate perceptions and lead to more political heterogeneity. The animating question in his study is whether upward mobility untethers middle-class Blacks from their racial group, and in turn diminishes the influence of race on their political attitudes. Their socioeconomic status presumably would have more sway over their political preferences than race. He and other researchers have detected evidence of incipient political diversity among Blacks in recent decades (Dawson 2001; Cohen 2010; Tate 2010).

4. Even incorporated Black suburbs are not immune from these economic challenges. Kiara Wyndam-Douds (2023, 230) notes some suburban "communities of color turn to incorporation as a tool of self-empowerment, autonomy, and placemaking." In the 1940s and 1950s, for instance, Blacks residing in areas just beyond central city limits occasionally incorporated to try to circumvent the racial inequalities of the metropolitan economy and make much needed investments in their neighborhoods. But incorporation generally has not bestowed the same protections and rewards to Black and Latinx suburbs as it has to White suburbs (Purifoy 2019; Waldner, Stillwell, and Smith 2019). It is a duller, less effective instrument for excluding others and stockpiling tax revenues when wielded in majority non-White suburbs.

5. Dawson (1995) introduces Black utility heuristic theory to account for how Blacks perceive distinct racial group interests and then prioritize them over other interests in their political calculations (Rogers and Kim 2021).

Although most research into the sources of this diversity has focused on income and educational differences, the ongoing geographic sort between suburban and urban Blacks warrants empirical attention as well. Like income and education, residence is a familiar proxy for making status distinctions within groups. A suburban address, recent studies suggest, does not merely denote a geographic location or U.S. Census category but also social status in the popular consciousness and even in measurable public opinion (Moos and Mendez 2015). Suburbanization among Blacks sometimes has been cast not simply as a path to social mobility or economic security, but also a way of decoupling Black suburbanites from the so-called tangle of pathology associated with poor Blacks in cities (Connolly 2014). Although Black flight to the suburbs has not been a cure-all for Black inequality, late twentieth-century liberal policies like residential mobility programs touted suburbanization as a solution to the problems of inner-city Black neighborhoods while deflecting attention from their structural roots. This individualistic liberal logic cleaved striving Black families in the suburbs from Blacks mired in beleaguered city neighborhoods. A suburban address away from inner-city perils and negative stereotypes promised a badge of respectability, which holds that good behavior by Blacks is enough to combat racism (Higginbotham 1993; Jefferson 2023). This ongoing geographic shift, then, potentially puts social status as well as spatial distance between urban and suburban Blacks.

A Theory of Black Political Sorting

In theory, these social and economic distinctions associated with neighborhood type could translate to an urban-suburban divide in Blacks' political opinions. Suburbanization entails both self-selection and social dynamics that could diminish the perceptions of shared racial group interests and linked fate, and in turn reduce consensus and generate cleavages in Blacks' political views. For much of the twentieth century, rampant discrimination in the housing market and exclusionary zoning policies put the suburbs out of reach for virtually all but the very wealthiest Blacks (Jackson 1985; Wiese 2004). But as some of these economic and racial barriers have fallen in recent decades, suburban residence has become an option for a wider swath of Blacks, including the growing numbers of low-income Blacks in inner-ring suburbs. Yet the current Black suburban trend remains selective.

First, Blacks beating a path to the suburbs today are typically a selected lot. They tend to have higher incomes, greater homeownership rates, and more postsecondary education than Blacks residing in cities (Bartik and Mast 2021; Frey 2015). Economic advantages buy easier access to suburban zip codes. In many middle- and high-income Black suburbs, residents also demand policies that promote economic selectivity. They routinely oppose commercial, residential, and infrastructure developments that might attract the poor (Wiese 2004; Connolly 2014; Smithsimon 2022). This is a tacit endorsement of policies that bar the entry of the have-nots. These exclusionary policies stymie the suburban aspirations of low-income Blacks in particular, who usually have even less chance of obtaining affordable housing in majority-White suburbs (Massey and Tannen 2017). The policies are consistent with a suburban ideology historians trace back to the postwar twentieth century. Chronicled across both Republican and Democratic strongholds outside central cities and starkly at odds with the statist orientation long associated with Blacks, this suburban ideology privileges individualism, privatism, free market forces, and the protection of property rights (Kruse 2005; Geismer 2015).[6]

When Black suburbanites support these exclusionary schemes, they are using municipal policies to differentiate their interests from those of low-income urban Blacks, whom they presumably view as a potential threat to their economic status and security. These policies are often framed as racial uplift measures (Connolly 2014). But they bolster the status of one

6. This historical scholarship has focused largely on White suburban areas. But a handful of recent studies have begun to document evidence of this suburban ideology in Black enclaves outside central cities (Connolly 2014; Smithsimon 2022).

segment of the population (that is, middle-class Black suburbanites) at the expense of another (poor Blacks in cities and inner-ring suburbs). They also risk restigmatizing poor central city Blacks through what Cathy Cohen (1999) calls secondary marginalization. This is what happens when already stigmatized segments of an oppressed group are shunned or see their interests discounted, including by relatively privileged group members. Although Black suburbanites might see these policies as good for the race and even crucial for protecting their status as upwardly mobile "respectable" racial group members, they reinforce negative stereotypes about poor inner-city Blacks.

Beyond further stigmatizing these vulnerable segments of the Black population, however, secondary marginalization also can weaken perceptions of linked fate (Bunyasi and Watts Smith 2019). Secondary marginalization often ensues when cross-cutting issues heighten interest conflicts among subgroups in the Black population. For instance, the crises facing low-income Blacks in central cities might not register or elicit concern among their counterparts outside the urban core. The latter might not view remedying the problems of inner-city Blacks as integral to improving the fortunes of Blacks as whole. Suburban Blacks simply might conclude "their blues ain't like mine." They even might deem any attention to the issues bedeviling their coracial counterparts in distressed city neighborhoods as marginal to the Black political agenda. Or they might worry any association with these issues could bog down the entire racial group or mar their own reputation as "respectable" Blacks.[7]

Scholars from W. E. B. DuBois (1899) to William Julius Wilson (1987) to Cathy Cohen (1999) have shown social class, gender, sexuality, and other differences can strain racial bonds and provoke political division among Blacks. The selective, exclusionary processes of Black suburbanization engender another potential cleavage in the population, this one between Black suburbanites and their counterparts in central cities, particularly the poor. This status-signaling spatial divide is akin to the class-based neighborhood divisions DuBois (1899) documented among Blacks in early twentieth-century Philadelphia and other cities. If Black suburbanites view their interests as incompatible with those of Blacks living in cities or see some urban Blacks as harmful to their socioeconomic status, perceptions of linked fate might recede.[8] Black suburbanites might put their distinct place-based interests or investment in respectability above their racial ties with urban Blacks. This presumably could lead to discrepancies in the political views of the two groups.

Neighborhood social processes in Black suburbs are another possible driver of this opinion divide. The roots of Blacks' linked fate perceptions and racial solidarity are economic, informational, and social (Dawson 1994). Since the early twentieth century, residential segregation has not only limited Blacks' economic mobility, but also cemented their attachments to the informational and social networks through which political preferences and norms gain currency in the population. The informational networks embedded in Black associational spaces, what Dawson (1994) dubbed the Black counterpublic, have been the key site for opinion formation in the population. This is where Blacks delineate specific preferences and build consensus about what is good for the group in politics. Black social networks, in turn, impose the racialized social pressure and monitoring that compels individual conformity with the collective preferences and norms crystallized in the Black counterpublic (White and Laird 2020). These informational and social processes have induced the high levels of uniformity in Blacks' political opinions.

Both processes historically have operated at the neighborhood level where Blacks tend to occupy racially homophilous networks as result of segregation. But the Black suburban wave has attenuated and diversified these neighborhood-level processes (Rogers 2018).

7. These are the predictable ramifications of Black respectability politics (Cohen 2010; Gaines 2012; Spence 2012; Harris 2014).

8. Ismail White (2007) finds Blacks' linked fate perceptions are not readily activated for issues framed as benefiting inner-city families.

First, the spatial distance between Black suburbanites and their city-dwelling counterparts reduces social contact between the two groups. This lessens the odds of their sharing associational spaces and militates against the mutual social monitoring and pressure to fall in line with dominant Black political views or norms. The distance between Black suburban and central city residents also decreases the likelihood of either group taking the other's interests into account when forming their opinions about issues.

For instance, the economic disinvestment and deadly violence devastating the poorest Black neighborhoods in cities may be less salient to Black suburbanites on the other side of the expressway, even if they reside in nearby low-income suburbs with similar challenges. In contrast, Black central city residents, even those living in other neighborhoods, may be more cognizant of these problems and concerned about their spillover effects. Overall, Black suburbanites might view their neighborhoods and socioeconomic prospects as markedly better than and safely removed from those of their central city counterparts. All this could reduce linked fate perceptions and lead to political opinion differences between the two groups.

Discrete informational and social networks also are likely developing in Black suburban neighborhoods apart from those in cities. Although Mary Pattillo (1999) and others find that some Black suburban families maintain ties to Black relatives and friends in cities, many establish separate social networks and associational spaces where they live (Haynes 2001; Lacy 2007; Smithsimon 2022). Ethnoburbs of middle-class and multinational Black communities with separate and distinct social dynamics have formed outside big cities such as New York, Atlanta, and Miami (Waters 1999; Wen, Lauderdale, and Kandula 2009; Clerge 2019; Hamilton 2019). This emerging Black suburban social geography has precipitated the diversification and decentralization of the Black counterpublic, which has been concentrated largely in central cities in the decades since the Great Migration (Dawson 2001; Rogers 2018). With this shift in the Black counterpublic infrastructure, the political opinions of Black suburban and central city residents may be developing along separate tracks. For example, if a distinct suburban ideology is emerging among Black suburbanites, their corner of the Black counterpublic outside central cities is where it might take root, sprouting in neighborhood associations, school boards, churches, and other civic spaces. With their lower population densities and larger lot sizes, however, suburban neighborhoods are also not nearly as conducive as city neighborhoods for the cultivation of the robust networks that have structured and unified Blacks' political opinions. As suburbanization has stretched and loosened the bonds among metropolitan area Blacks, the likelihood of opinion stratification between suburban and urban Blacks presumably has increased.

Yet inequality and discrimination tend to stalk Blacks across metropolitan areas in both urban and suburban zip codes. These pervasive racial hardships could temper the trends toward political sorting triggered by Black suburbanization. First, the familial ties Blacks in suburbs and cities maintain across zip codes are often activated and reinforced during crises, including those generated by racial bias (Sarkisian and Gerstel 2004). Blacks separated by geography but embedded in the same kinship networks support and bond with each other over these struggles, which in turn can foster expectations of reciprocity and reinforce perceptions of linked fate. Second, the racial inequities of the metropolitan political economy in areas like municipal bond ratings, bank lending practices, and business investment are not always easy to detect. Nor do racial harms necessarily take the same forms across Black neighborhoods. Yet some racial injustices, like anti-Black police violence or profiling, are so prevalent and widely politicized they are familiar to Blacks almost everywhere (Soss and Weaver 2017). Videos of police killings of unarmed Blacks are a grim viral staple of this social media age, making these deadly encounters increasingly visible to Americans. But they are especially palpable to Blacks who are acutely aware of their vulnerability to this form of state violence and the mortal threat it poses to them. Blacks make up approximately 14 percent of the U.S. population but account for more than 25 percent of all police shooting victims (Fox et al. 2019).

Such high salience racialized issues should activate linked fate perceptions and unify the opinions of Black suburban and urban residents. Surveys confirm that these issues elicit broad agreement among Black Americans. In almost every poll, they lament persisting anti-Black racism and racial inequality, not only in interpersonal encounters, but also in their experiences with housing, employment, and government (Schuman, Steeh, and Bobo 1985; Horowitz, Brown, and Cox 2019). But the double jeopardy of feeling overpoliced and underpoliced in their neighborhoods has become especially salient for Blacks in recent decades (Prowse, Weaver, and Meares 2019). Racially fraught policy issues, such as these police shootings of unarmed Blacks, tend to prime feelings of solidarity or linked fate, which in turn induce high levels of opinion agreement and even unanimity in the group (Dawson 1995; Jefferson, Neuner, and Pasek 2021).

Expectations

Based on these theoretical priors, I expect differences in Black suburban and urban opinions to register mostly on ostensibly nonracial issues, especially if they entail residential interests or place-based perceptions. In a previous analysis of survey data, for instance, I found Black suburban residents express more favorable opinions about their local institutions and services than their urban coracial counterparts (Rogers 2018). I anticipate they also should convey more positive impressions about their neighborhoods than urban Blacks. Claudine Gay (2004) finds that Blacks' assessments of their neighborhood quality can shape their perceptions of linked fate. Those with better opinions of their neighborhoods are less likely to believe that race determines their life chances or limits their opportunities. Differing perceptions of neighborhood quality could be a major dividing line in the opinions of suburban and urban Blacks.

In contrast, opinion variance between the two groups should be muted or replaced by uniformity on high salience racialized issues. I expect Black opinion consensus across neighborhood types on the problems that animated the 2020 demonstrations: police discrimination and violence against Blacks. Black Americans' bleak views of the police are longstanding and widely documented (Morin and Stepler 2016). Some studies indicate that Black suburbanites are even more dissatisfied with policing and concerned about police violence than their central city counterparts (Harvard, RWJF, and NPR 2017). Proportionally more suburbanites than urban residents are victims of deadly encounters with police (DeAngelis 2021; Sinyangwe 2020). Black suburban municipalities also rely disproportionately on revenue-motivated policing to address fiscal distress (Pacewicz and Robinson 2021; Beck 2023). This revenue-generation policy likely increases contact and the odds of dangerous conflicts between civilians and police in cash-strapped Black suburbs. Considering these trends, I expect as many or more complaints about unfair policing from Black suburbanites as from Black city dwellers.

Finally, Blacks consistently register robust support for BLM (Horowitz 2021; Thomas and Horowitz 2020). They continue to exceed all other racial groups on this score, even as overall public support for the movement has waned in the years since the Floyd murder. I anticipate strong backing for BLM from both urban and suburban Blacks. Urban Blacks, however, might report greater engagement with the movement due to their exposure to the more extensive Black counterpublic networks in cities. I also expect Black suburbanites to worry about protest tactics causing reputational or other harm to Blacks because they may be more anxious about respectability than their urban counterparts.

These expectations are summarized as follows:

> Black suburban residents express more positive perceptions of their neighborhoods than Black urban residents.
>
> Suburban and urban Blacks both report discrimination and mistreatment by police. Black suburbanites complain as much or more about discriminatory policing as their urban counterparts.
>
> Although Black suburban and urban residents endorse BLM protests, the latter are more engaged in the movement. Black sub-

Table 1. Blacks by Neighborhood Type

Neighborhood type	Number of Blacks	Percent of Total Blacks
Rural	34	11
Suburban	99	31
Urban	184	58
Total	317	100

Source: Author's tabulation.

urbanites' support for the movement, particularly its tactics, is moderated by respectability concerns.

DATA AND METHODS

To test my expectations, I relied on interviews conducted for the American Voices Project (AVP). The interview protocol combines qualitative, survey, administrative, and experimental techniques to gather data on Americans. The initial wave of the AVP collected a national sample of interviews with 1,613 Americans, including an oversample of 317 Black respondents, roughly 20 percent of the total. The AVP used three-stage cluster sampling across U.S. Census tracts to ensure coverage of key geographic areas, well-defined neighborhoods, and an oversample of Americans in the bottom half of the national income distribution.[9] This strategy yielded a Black oversample especially well suited for comparing Blacks living in different types of neighborhoods. The neighborhood classifications are not self-reported by interviewees but instead imputed based on their census tracts.[10] I created a dataset of the 317 Black respondents and sorted the sample by urban, suburban, and rural residence to focus on those in the first two neighborhood categories. As table 1 shows, Blacks from these two neighborhood types comprise 89 percent of the entire Black sample, with a 58 percent urban and 31 percent suburban share. Although the remaining 11 percent of respondents recruited from rural neighborhoods are not the focus on the analysis, I occasionally refer to distinct patterns in their interview responses to contextualize the suburban-urban comparisons.

Some suburban and urban interviewees live in metropolitan areas that lately have seen exponential growth in their Black suburban populations—spurred in part by Black outmigration from nearby central cities such as Atlanta, Chicago, and Detroit. These same metropolitan areas are also where poverty has suburbanized sharply since the 1990s. With so many of the respondents recruited from high-poverty census blocks, the AVP data allow for opinion comparisons between urban and suburban Blacks who face similar socioeconomic challenges in their respective neighborhoods. Although the overrepresentation of respondents from these high-poverty areas enhances the validity of comparisons between the two groups, it also limits how much I can extrapolate from the findings in this study to the universe of Black suburban and central city dwellers across the United States.

AVP interviewing proceeded in two stages between fall 2019 and summer 2020, starting with face-to-face interviews and then transitioning to telephone interviews in early 2020 when the COVID pandemic erupted. The interview schedule covers a wide range of topics, including family, finances, health, social networks, community, and politics. To explore the theory of Black political sorting by place, my analyses focus on Black interviewees' responses to questions about their experiences

9. AVP sampled census tracts proportional to their poverty population as indexed by the official poverty measure based on the five-year estimates of the 2016 American Community Survey (ACS).

10. AVP respondents were not asked to characterize their neighborhoods as rural, suburban, or urban. The neighborhood classifications (urban, suburban, rural) are based on the Department of Housing and Urban Development's (HUD's) Urbanization Perceptions Small Area Index methodology applied to each household's census tract number.

with neighborhood safety and law enforcement. I also examine attitudes about BLM and its goals. Only a subset of interviewees, roughly 33 percent, received probes about the BLM protests because these were added to the protocol in fall 2020. This was after the initial wave of demonstrations sparked by the Floyd killing earlier in the spring. All respondents, however, received probes about their neighborhoods as well as their encounters with police and the criminal justice system. The protocol posed policing questions both with and without the BLM prime. This combination of questions about policing, the carceral state, and neighborhood conditions prompted respondents to think and talk about some of the racially fraught issues that not only animated BLM summer, but also historically have bedeviled Blacks in their quest for justice and liberation (Thurston 2018; Taylor 2020). Blacks' opinions on these issues deserve empirical scrutiny because they not only affect their daily lives, but also offer insight into whether they believe democracy is working for them.

These AVP probes are especially apt for investigating whether the geographic sorting of Blacks into urban and suburban neighborhoods is associated with variance in their views. The questions about BLM and discriminatory policing are a stringent test of Black opinion stratification. By drawing attention to these chronic racialized issues, the 2020 BLM protests presumably primed linked fate perceptions and increased the odds of opinion consensus between suburban and urban Blacks. The demonstrators' fierce condemnation of anti-Black police violence likely resonated with Blacks across zip codes and neighborhood types. Although the movement was associated with rallies mostly in big cities, its inception dates back to the 2012 killing of seventeen-year-old Black teenager Trayvon Martin in a Miami suburb. BLM garnered even greater public attention in 2014 when it reached Ferguson, Missouri, a suburb outside St. Louis, where a police officer shot eighteen-year-old Michael Brown (Lung-Amam and Schafran 2018). In surveys before and after the 2020 protests, Blacks registered high support for the movement and concerns about police brutality. The group's largely consistent opinions contrasted with Whites' decidedly more mixed impressions (Azevedo, Marques, and Micheli 2022; Fields et al. 2022; Horowitz 2021; Thomas and Horowitz 2020).

But this stark racial divide in opinions might cloak complexities in Blacks' views, including variation by residence. Large-*N* surveys can miss heterogeneity in Black political attitudes. Dawson (1995, 207) notes that "survey analyses of African-American politics are likely to overestimate the degree of political unity" in the group. Surveys typically underrepresent subgroups such as low-income Blacks and rarely feature topics on which Blacks might disagree. Further, the exigencies of survey instrumentation, such as close-ended question items, often preclude delving into the nuances of public opinion. General survey items about perceptions of racism or support for BLM indicating overall group consensus among Blacks may conceal intragroup diversity on political ideology, involvement, or the specifics of policy (Dawson 2001; Bunyasi and Watts Smith 2019).

Interviews are a useful alternative for uncovering patterns beneath the usual consensus issues and revealing signs of opinion divergence—or even convergence—that are either hidden or impossible to detect in survey data.[11] The AVP's open-ended probes about racially discriminatory law enforcement, BLM, and neighborhood perceptions allow for attention to subtle details and distinctions in Black respondents' views. Any opinion differences between suburban and urban Black respondents on these topics, which have elicited so much racial group consensus in surveys, would count as suggestive evidence of a link between residential sorting and opinion stratification in the population.

My research team and I used NVivo to code respondents' views on themes emphasized in the 2020 protests and commonly associated with the national reckoning on race—topics on which Black opinion variance might be hard to

11. Dawson (1995) recommends multiple research approaches, including focus groups and case studies, to study Black political attitudes. This mix of methods, he argues, is warranted by Blacks' growing demographic diversity and their increasingly complex, intersectional social identities.

Table 2. Coding Framework

Themes	Codes
Neighborhood safety and economic opportunity	Crime: Is crime cited as a neighborhood problem? Violence: Is violence by neighbors or police mentioned? Social Trust: Is the neighborhood characterized as safe or unsafe? Are neighbors viewed favorably or unfavorably? Are they trusted? Economic opportunity: Do respondents see economic opportunities in their neighborhoods? Do they see inequality between rich and poor in their neighborhoods?
Law enforcement	Police: Are police viewed favorably or unfavorably? Are personal experiences with police positive or negative? The latter include unfair stops, searches, questioning, threats, or abuse? Arrest: Have respondents or people they know experienced arrest? Courts: Have experiences with courts been positive or negative? Incarceration: Have respondents or people they know been in prison or jail?
Black Lives Matter movement BLM/M4BL	Cognitive awareness and engagement: Do respondents mention BLM/M4BL? Are they aware of BLM/M4BL? Do they discuss BLM with others? Direct engagement: Have respondents or people they know participated in protests? Tactics: Do they endorse BLM protests or view them as harmful? Police reform or abolition: Do they mention police reform or abolition? Do they mention any other policy ideas?

Source: Author's compilation.

detect. After reviewing the interview schedule, I identified four relevant general themes and devised corresponding codes. The themes are neighborhood safety and economic opportunity, law enforcement, racism, and BLM. These issues have featured prominently in media coverage on the recent upsurge in social movement activity for racial justice. I leveraged respondents' reactions to the questions about neighborhood safety, law enforcement, and BLM across the entire interview protocol to test the expectations of the theory (table 2). After the team coded the interviews, I relied on a series of NVivo queries to analyze how suburban and urban respondents in the Black sample compare on these topics. The AVP protocol also includes a survey administered to respondents after the interviews. Although the interviews are the principal data source for the analyses, I also tracked the distribution of responses by these two groups, their rural counterparts, and Whites on several related survey items. These data do not allow for a test of the causal mechanisms underlying the theory of Black political sorting by metropolitan residence. But they provide fine-grained insights into whether and how Blacks views vary across the urban-suburban divide.

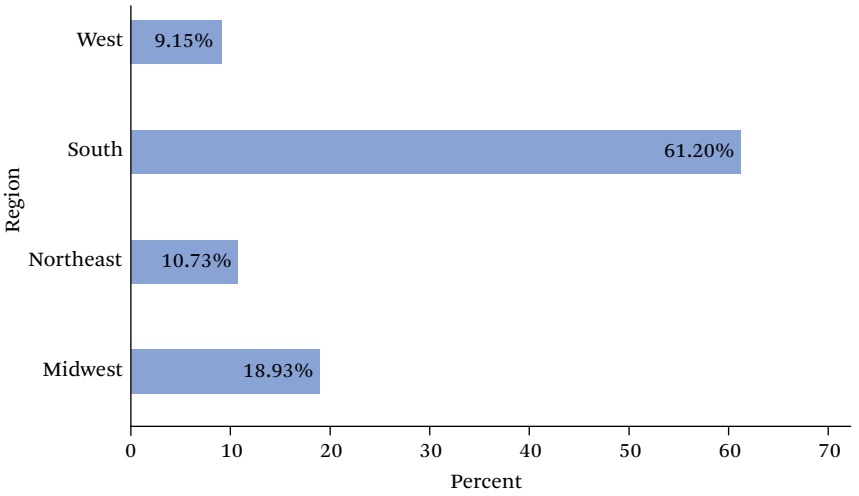
RESULTS AND ANALYSIS

I now turn to the patterns uncovered in my comparisons of the demographics and views of the Black suburban and urban respondents. My analyses also include some references to the rural Black and White respondents to contextualize and clarify key findings.

Demographics: Which Sorts of Blacks Live in Urban and Suburban Neighborhoods

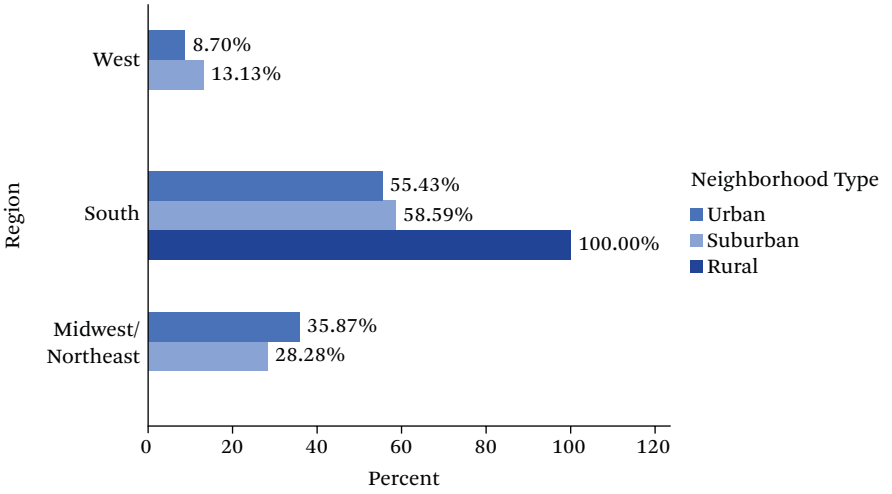
The entire AVP Black oversample includes more women than men and is almost evenly divided between the old and young. The interviewees represent all regions of the country. The majority, 61 percent, reside in the South. Another 19

Figure 1. Regional Distribution



Source: Author's tabulation.

Figure 2. Region and Neighborhood Type

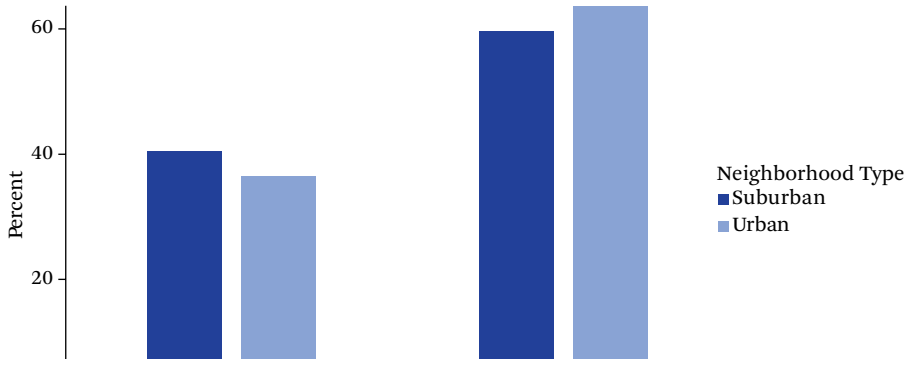


Source: Author's tabulation.

percent live in the Midwest and the remaining 20 precent are roughly split between the Northeast and the West (figure 1). Suburban respondents greatly outnumber their urban counterparts in the samples drawn from the Midwest and West and just barely in the one recruited from the South. Urban interviewees exceed suburban participants only in the Northeast (figure 2). The overall urban and suburban Black samples are commensurate on several key demographic variables. Both have higher shares of women. They constitute 63 percent of the urban sample and 59 percent of the suburban group (figure 3). Both samples are roughly split between older and younger respondents. Fifty percent of the urban interviewees are forty-five years or older and 55 percent of the suburbanites fall in the same range. Young respondents make up 48 and 44 percent of the urban and suburban samples respectively (figure 4).

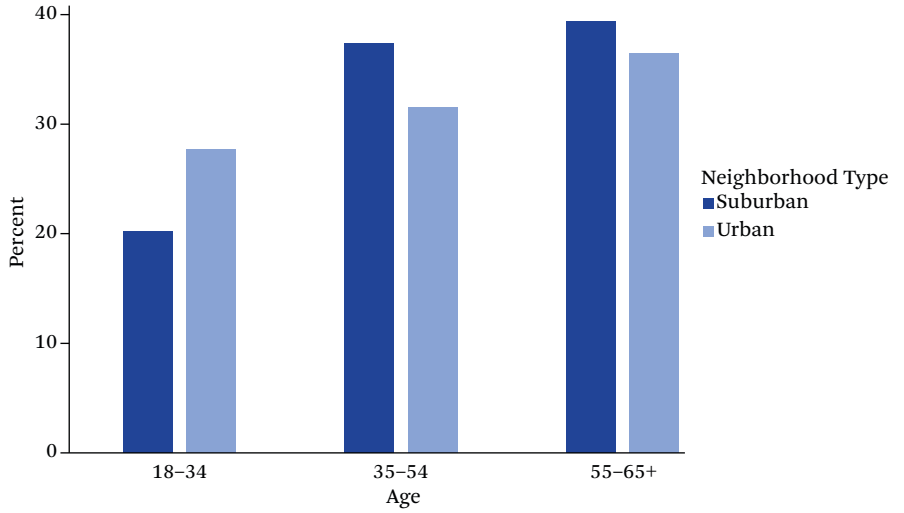
But evidence of a suburban edge shows in

Figure 3. Gender and Neighborhood Type



Source: Author's tabulation.

Figure 4. Age and Neighborhood Type

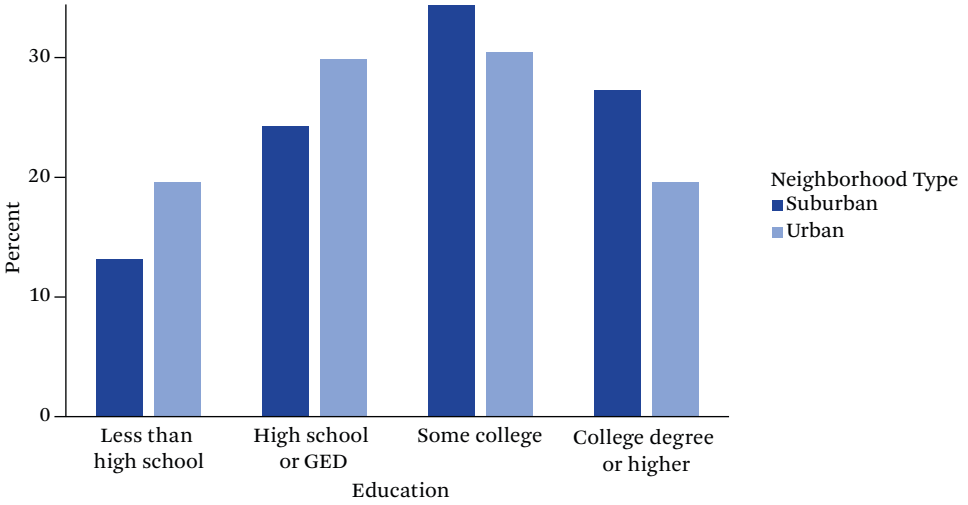


Source: Author's tabulation.

the socioeconomic indicators. Relative to the urban sample, a larger share of the Black suburban respondents reports at least some college education and a smaller proportion lack a high school diploma. Approximately 62 percent of the suburban interviewees went to college, whereas 50 percent of their urban counterparts did. Only 13 percent of the suburbanites did not finish high school, in contrast to almost 20 percent of the urban respondents (figure 5). The same suburban advantage is evident in relative access to economic resources. The suburban sample has almost twice as many homeowners as the urban sample. Roughly 31 percent of the suburbanites own their homes, whereas only 17 percent of the city respondents do (figure 6).

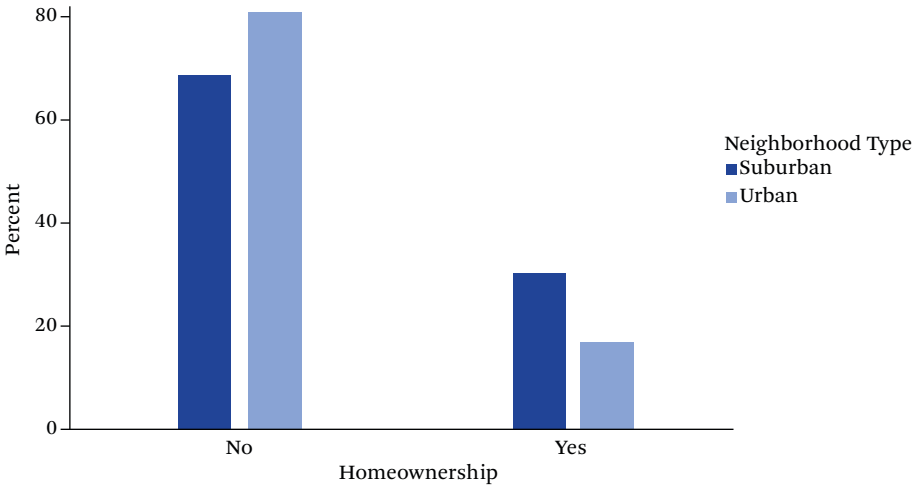
Finally, the evidence of income selectivity is even more stark (figure 7). Only 32 percent of the urban respondents report incomes over $24,000 per year. In contrast, 56 percent of the suburban interviewees fall in this higher in-

Figure 5. Education and Neighborhood Type



Source: Author's tabulation.

Figure 6. Homeownership and Neighborhood Type

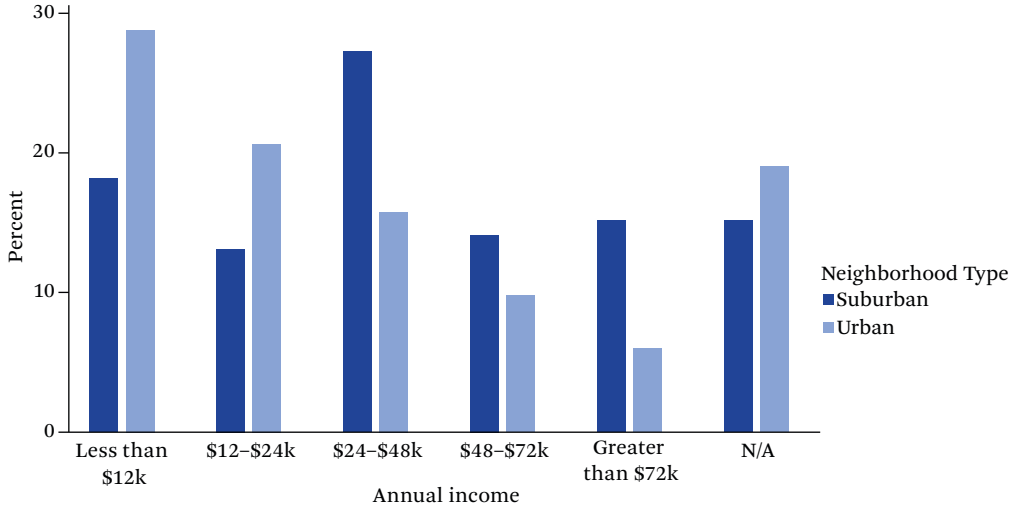


Source: Author's tabulation.

come bracket. On the low end of the income scale, the pattern is inverted. Almost 50 percent of the urban respondents say their families earn less than $24,000 each year, relative to 31 percent of the suburban dwellers. Overall, these figures point to the selection processes shaping the Black exodus to the suburbs. The most upwardly mobile Blacks are leading the charge. The socioeconomic sorting other researchers have documented in national Black suburbanization trends are evident in the AVP Black sample.

Despite their relative economic edge, however, many suburban respondents live in distressed neighborhoods. Their high proportion in the interviewee pool is due to the overrepresentation of high-poverty census tracts in the AVP sample. Yet this sampling artifact captures a familiar reality for Black suburban dwellers. Unlike their White counterparts, they cannot

Figure 7. Income and Neighborhood Type



Source: Author's tabulation.

easily turn their economic advantages into access to desirable residential settings. The residential returns to middle-class status—or to income and educational advancements—are smaller for Blacks. "Upwardly mobile African Americans reside in communities with more abandoned housing, higher crime rates . . . and poorer prospects for economic growth than the neighborhoods in which [W]hites of comparable socioeconomic status reside" (Gay 2004, 550). In the suburbs as elsewhere across the metropolitan United States, Blacks' aspirations to prosperous and peaceful neighborhoods are often thwarted by racial inequality.

Neighborhood Safety for Blacks

It is hardly a certainty, then, that suburban interviewees would perceive more safety and security in their neighborhoods than their urban counterparts. Both urban and suburban respondents in the sample express worry, frustration, and sometimes resignation about crime and violence in their neighborhoods. Consider the following three responses to the same query about perceptions of neighborhood safety. The first is from Lynette, a middle-age woman in a southern suburb; the second from Otis, an older suburban man in the Southeast; and the third from Colin, an urban male in the South. Lynette explained, "Sometimes I get a little agitated because there're a lot of young people that live here and do lots of drugs." Otis, the elderly suburbanite, echoed the same concerns: "Well, I live in an area where young kids like everywhere you go, got a drug alley over here, and the kids are always shooting and all that stuff. I don't go around there." Colin described similar conditions: "There was a time when the kids wouldn't even hardly play out in the streets because of the gun violence, and drugs, and all that kind of stuff. Now the community is getting a little better." Across both samples, older respondents are more attuned to neighborhood violence and frequently cast it in generational terms by faulting youth involved with guns and drugs.

Even younger respondents, however, cited youth violence and crime as acute problems where they live. Some said they have been the victims of crime or witnesses to violence in their neighborhoods. Shauntelle, a young woman in a mid-Atlantic city, reported that she has seen these challenges up close. "My neighbor, she just lost her son two years ago . . . and it looks like . . . probably trying to rob him or probably thinking that he had drugs on him or something . . . My car has been broken into three times within the year." Grace, a suburban woman also living in the mid-Atlantic region, vividly recounted how her home was burglar-

ized and car stolen. "They kicked in my door. They took all my perfume because when I travel out and I wear about different perfume. They took this car, my car. I got rid of that. They broke two TV. They kicked the door in. They stole a lot of my clothes." This grim litany confirms that most Black respondents on both sides of the urban-suburban divide reside in neighborhoods scarred by violence and crime. Reports of such problems were more muted among Black interviewees from rural areas. Rural respondents not only had less complaints about crime and violence but also tended to attribute them to outsiders.

Aside from the apparent rural exception, the reports of neighborhoods beset with violence and crime span generational, gender, and metropolitan geographic divides among the interviewees. The picture of almost quotidian peril painted by these respondents is perhaps not surprising in a sample drawn from mostly high-poverty Census tracts. Research consistently shows neighborhoods with substantial levels of concentrated poverty are especially prone to crime, violence, and other forms of disorder (Wilson 1987; Sampson 2012). The residents of these high-poverty metropolitan neighborhoods, whether urban or suburban, are more likely to encounter unsafe conditions then than Americans living in less impoverished areas.

Yet some meaningful distinctions surface when the interview data are disaggregated by income. My research team and I sorted the interviewees into four income brackets ranging from those reporting incomes under $24,000 per year to those with earnings above $72,000.[12] Those in the former category, the poorest respondents in the sample, stand out. Across both the urban and suburban samples, the volume and severity of the neighborhood violence and crime they cite far exceed what respondents in higher income brackets mention. Higher-earning respondents, especially those in the suburbs, are more preoccupied with property crimes in their neighborhoods, whereas the poorest respondents report more drug activity, gun violence, and threats to their survival in the places where they live. Within the low-income cohort, urban respondents refer to worries about crime and gun violence modestly more than their suburban counterparts. But this may be a distinction without a difference. Overall, the poorest urban and suburban interviewees are the likeliest to report living in unsafe neighborhoods.

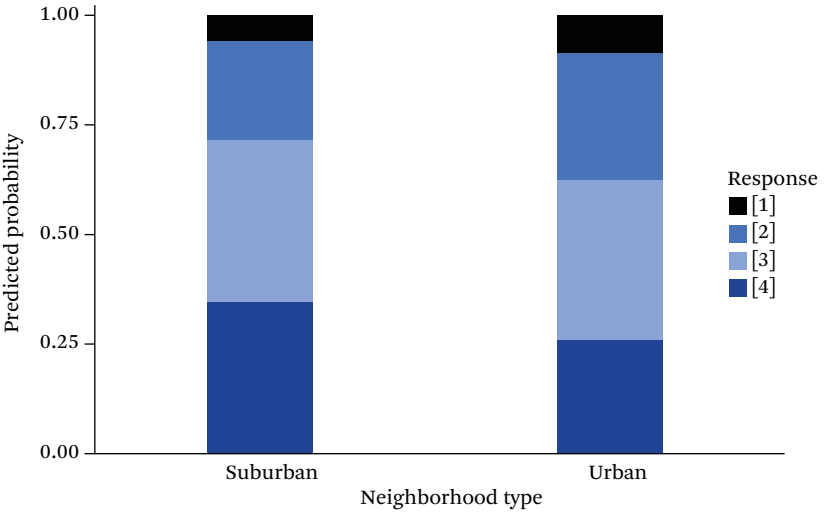
Without additional data about their geographic context, social ties, and individual predispositions, it is impossible to draw firm inferences about why low-income urban and suburban respondents have similarly dim views of their neighborhoods. For instance, financial paucity simply may relegate the poorest Black suburbanites to lower-quality neighborhoods than their higher-earning Black suburban counterparts. They may live in neighborhoods resembling or even abutting the extreme poverty neighborhoods that have long existed in population-dense cities and are now emerging in suburbs too. Or their social ties with relatives and friends in these city neighborhoods may inform their perceptions of their own nearby suburban environs.[13] In any case, the familiar urban stereotype of neighborhoods distressed with crime and violence is a reality reported not only by urban low-income Black respondents but also by their suburban counterparts. Both groups are all too familiar with these threats to safety in the places where they live.

These vexing problems often plague and further degrade neighborhoods already mired in high levels of poverty, economic disinvestment, and other forms of systemic inequality. The statistical results from analyses of the survey module underscore this bleak assessment. Although the module does not include a question about neighborhood safety specifically, it features one about perceptions of neighborhood economic opportunities. The question is: "To what extent do you think there are opportunities for adults to get good jobs or further their education in your area?" Respondents could

12. We subdivided the interviews into four income categories: less than $24,000, $24,000 to $48,000, $48,000 to $72,000, and more than $72,000.

13. My thanks to an anonymous reviewer for proposing this possible explanation.

Figure 8. Perceived Economic Opportunities by Neighborhood Type



Source: Author's tabulation.

choose one of four categorical ratings: not at all [1], a little [2], some [3], or a lot [4].

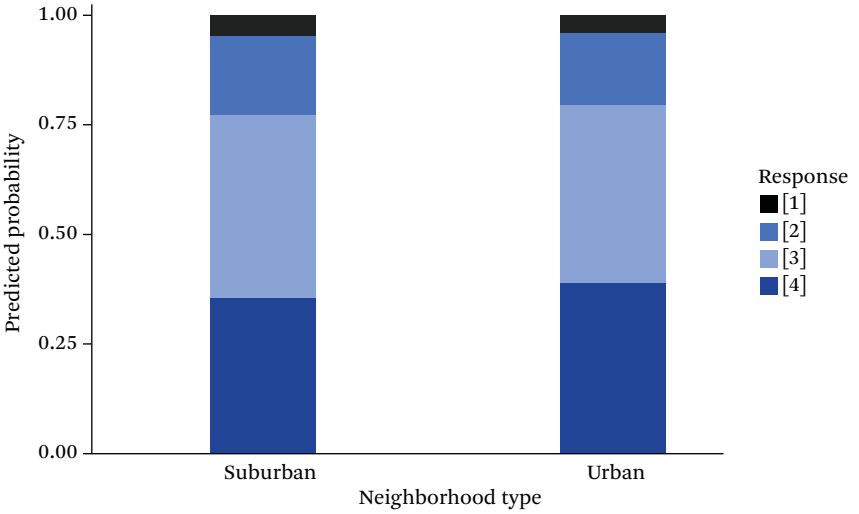
I used a predicted probabilities model to compare the responses of the urban and suburban interviewees. None of the differences uncovered between the two groups are statistically significant. Only a minority perceived ample economic opportunities in their neighborhoods: fewer than 40 percent of the urban (0.26) and suburban (0.35) respondents respectively expressed this view (see figure 8). The majority saw very limited or no opportunities for economic gain in their neighborhoods. These impressions diverge sharply from those of Whites in the AVP sample who largely registered more sanguine perceptions of employment and educational opportunities in their neighborhoods than Blacks (see figure 9). Consistent with historical patterns, suburban and urban Whites saw more economic promise where they live than their rural White counterparts.[14] In a means comparison test on this survey item, these differences are statistically significant. Whites' perceptions of economic opportunity vary by neighborhood type. In contrast, economic inequality is apparently a persistent feature of the places where Blacks live. Yet as figure 8 shows, the overall distribution of ratings between the urban and suburban respondents tilts in the expected direction. By the raw numbers, more suburban than urban participants saw avenues to economic advancement in their neighborhoods.

This shade of difference in the two groups' impressions comes into sharper focus in the interviews. In these extended exchanges, substantially more suburban than urban respondents reported satisfaction with their neighborhoods and made no mention of violence. Of the suburban interviews coded for observations about neighborhood safety, 43 percent were with respondents who said they feel safe in their neighborhoods. For instance, Jasmyn, a young woman who recently moved to a Midwestern suburb, had this favorable appraisal of her new neighborhood. "I don't have any problems with the neighbors. It's a safe neighborhood actually really safe, like I don't even think people lock their car door that's how safe it is. I'm not saying that they shouldn't, but people just have a different mindset over here and it is . . . pretty chill, so I like it, I haven't had any problems with it. I couldn't see myself living anywhere else."

In contrast, only 25.5 percent in the urban sample expressed similar positive attitudes

14. The figure does not include the proportions for rural Whites to avoid disclosing respondents' identities.

Figure 9. Whites' Perceptions of Economic Opportunities



Source: Author's tabulation.

about where they lived, but with a telling caveat. Some urban Blacks who said their neighborhoods were safe also reported exercising extreme vigilance or taking precautions to avoid danger. Consider these two typical observations, one by Donna, a mother, and the other Suzette, a single young woman. "As a mom," Donna offered, "I'm not going to say I feel this is safe, but we try to make it safe. This is what we do. Okay. When we're going somewhere, we're all going. When we're coming in, we're going to come in at a decent hour, . . . make sure the doors locked and stuff like that and make ways that we live safe. The things that we practice and do safe. But not just trust people and say it's safe." Suzette gave a qualified assessment, "Well, there is no crime, there is no killing, and that's it, just be nice to everybody. It's all right, nobody shooting no gun, nobody not threatening, you not get robbed, but you could get robbed any minute, right, you just got to look — make sure you always watching your surroundings, and that's basically it, it's all right." These sentiments were pronounced among women, especially mothers focused on protecting their children.

Other urban respondents seemed inured to the violence around them or resigned to living in a high-crime area. This young woman from a southwestern city, Amanda, explained:

> I feel pretty safe. I never fear for my life or fear like, "Oh I got to do this; I got to do that or, oh my god, they're coming; they're going to do this." I never feel like that. Well, I'm from the hood, so I guess it doesn't really bother me.

Another urban respondent, a young woman named Cynthia, said:

> I haven't been here that long . . . But far as now, just watching the news, a man was just killed around the corner probably August XXX, I've been here for a month. And it's probably not like, "Okay, this person doesn't mean to me or anything," but you just have to watch your back, things like that. Just keep an eye on your surroundings. It's not the best neighborhood, but I'm happy I have a home.

The troubled reputations of these city neighborhoods often extend to the suburbs. Studies show these negative impressions linger like a specter even when the neighborhoods start to improve (Sampson 2012). They also travel with Blacks who relocate to the suburbs. A substantial share of the suburban interviewees' references to crime were recollections about neighborhoods they had left. Some with favorable attitudes about their current neighborhoods

had moved from city areas they described as distinctly less safe. Kevin, a young man in a southwestern suburb, painted a vivid contrast. "I love [my neighborhood]," he said. "It's peaceful, quiet. It's totally different . . . I don't forget where I'm from. I grew up [around] a lot of drugs, murders, and gangs." Only months after moving to a Midwest suburb, Dontrelle, also in his twenties, concluded, "I could really say it feels peaceful. Since I've been here for a couple months, I haven't heard nothing. No gun shot or saw anything . . . Man, I just got to move from [where I lived previously] . . . because there . . . the type of people that'll plot on you and stuff . . . try to rob you or some shit probably. Over there it was just like, man, every night. I used to couldn't even go to sleep." These respondents viewed the relative calm and safety of their suburban neighborhoods as an upgrade from their former city addresses. But, overall, the suburbs do not grant Blacks the same level of safety from violence and crime they typically afford to Whites.

Racialized Double Jeopardy

Many Americans ordinarily look to police to ensure public safety in their neighborhoods. Black Americans, however, do not perceive these state authorities as unimpeachable tribunes of protection for their group. Rather the stable in-group consensus, reflected in large-*N* surveys and the historical record, is that police often pose a racial threat to Blacks (Hinton 2021). Even when Blacks have petitioned for law and order in their distressed neighborhoods, the aggressive tactics employed by police have unleashed perverse consequences and prompted opinion reversals by leaders and ordinary citizens (Forman 2017; Fortner 2105). This dim view of police among Blacks has only intensified in recent years (Fields et al. 2022).

It shows in the interviews with urban and suburban respondents, both of whom registered overwhelmingly negative opinions of the police, as expected.[15] They expressed little to no trust in these state agents, perhaps the only face of government they ever see in their neighborhoods.[16] Fraught and sometimes dangerous encounters with law enforcement officers were almost a ubiquity across both groups.[17] Many respondents or people they know had been entangled with the police or the criminal justice system. A substantial number complained about anti-Black bias in these encounters.

This statement, from Ben, an elderly suburban man in the Southeast, is emblematic of the jaundiced views widely expressed by both sets of respondents:

> I don't like the police period, they're not my friend, and I keep saying I came up in the era where police, they take a hold, uphold the law and be biased, when it comes to a neighborhood, all they see is Black, I have seen it's literally if you get caught in a dark, they will hurt you, and there is nothing you can do about it, there is no one you can verify, and since I've been in [my state] I've seen and go to kids, and now I like the commissioner, the city council, if the police got to stop me or whatever, make sure that you get to whatever light and you toot your horn or whatever, so everybody can come out and see, so that something going to happening to you, that's everywhere.

Xavier, a young male resident of a West Coast city, said that encounters with an iron-fisted criminal justice system were commonplace for people in his life and the basis for their distrust of the police:

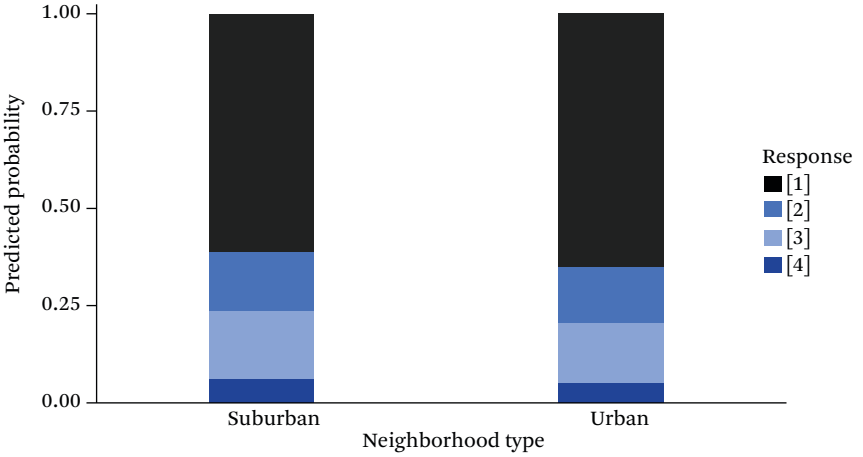
> Well, all my life I would say I've experienced the police being Black in America, that is a common thing, from . . . young it was always uncles and relatives like going to prison, getting arrested, that type of thing. So yeah, po-

15. Corey Fields and his coauthors (2022) also find distrust of the police is almost universal among Black AVP interviewees in their analyses of the data.

16. As Soss and Weaver (2017) theorize, Blacks and other marginalized minority groups likely infer lessons about government responsiveness and their standing as citizens from encounters with police.

17. Rural Blacks in the AVP sample are curious outliers from their suburban and urban counterparts on the topic of policing. They report far less dissatisfaction and fewer encounters with police in their interviews.

Figure 10. Police Discrimination by Neighborhood Type



Source: Author's tabulation.

> lice interaction was normal, and it was never really positive ever, so just growing up in the hood. I would say it gives you a negative thought towards the police you know what I'm saying. I believe that there's good one, there's bad ones, I myself prefer to not interact with them at all, just to stay safe, I don't want to be the next Black man shot by police. So I try to avoid them at all costs, but I don't think they're all bad, but I still try to stay away from all of them.

Other respondents articulated the peculiar frustration of feeling both overpoliced and underpoliced in their neighborhoods. Hakeem, a young urban interviewee in the Midwest, described this distressing dilemma and the distrust it breeds between Blacks and the police:

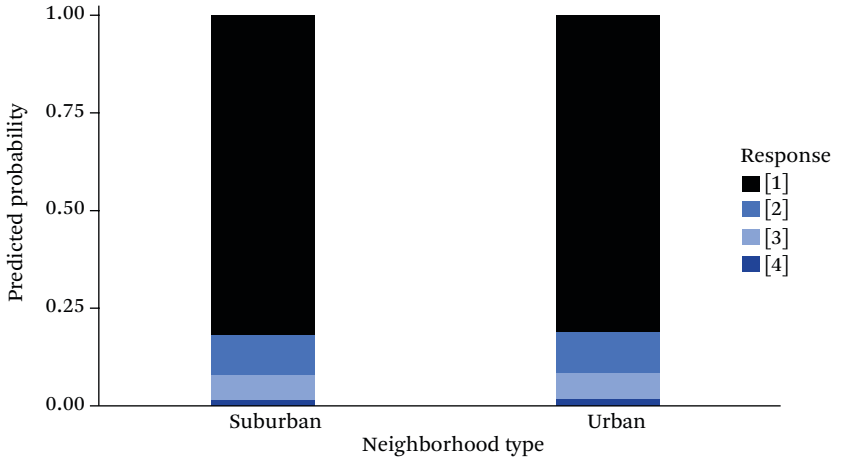
> They [the police] think just because we're in [LOCATION] everybody over here is bad, but we're not. I have never had any run-ins personally with them, but I have seen some things that I didn't like that they did . . . I have seen racism . . . I've heard some of the police officers say none of you all work. We work. Everybody on this block works. You all are just . . . or whatever because we're [LOCATION]. I've called the police a couple of times, and they never showed up . . . We pay taxes. We're not gangbangers or anything over here. I'm not saying it's not going on over here, but if I call you and say it's an emergency, I'm not going to call 911 for no reason. Then you show up an hour late and you have an attitude when you come like you don't want to do your job.

The survey data validate these respondents' views. A single item on policing asks, "Over your lifetime, have you ever been unfairly stopped, searched, questioned, threatened, or abused by police because of your gender, age, race, income level, or other characteristic?" The response categories are as follows: no [1]; yes, once [2]; yes, several times [3]; yes, many times [4]. A predicted probabilities model shows substantial shares of urban (0.34) and suburban (0.38) respondents reported at least one instance of unfair treatment by police (see figure 10).[18] A far lower and statistically significant proportion of rural Blacks could remember even a single episode of police harassment.[19]

18. The proportions of Whites reporting discriminatory treatment at the hands of police are much smaller by comparison (see figure 11).

19. I conducted a means comparison test for all three groups on this survey item. This statistically significant result for rural Blacks should be read with caution given the small number of these respondents in the AVP sample.

Figure 11. Whites' Perceptions of Police Discrimination



Source: Author's tabulation.

By comparison, no differences in the distribution of responses across the suburban and urban respondents on this survey item are statistically significant. But as figure 10 illustrates, a greater proportion of the suburban respondents than their urban counterparts recalled experiencing police discrimination. Although this is not a statistically meaningful difference, it warrants further consideration.

The suburban respondents are notably expansive about police bias against Blacks in the interviews. Eddie, an older male respondent from a mid-Atlantic state, characterized police stop and frisk tactics as routine harassment:

EDDIE: Police always mess with you though. Especially up in this city.

INTERVIEWER: How? What do they do?

EDDIE: Harasses you. Like, if you just hanging out on a sidewalk or a street, they figure you're dealing drugs. All like that. They done stopped me a whole lot of times, they think I'm dealing drugs, "What you got in your pockets?" Search me and everything. Search my wheelchair. That's harassment. And they don't find nothing on me, but that's just the stuff you got to go through. And uptown, it's worse than out here in the county.

Shonda, a woman from a southern suburb, summed up her encounters with police along the same lines. "My experiences with law enforcement is that I typically get followed sometimes. I've been followed a lot. Checking my bag, my shirt, I guess to make sure it's my car, and the thing that I didn't steal anything. One time my husband and I was in his truck and he has a pretty decent truck for I guess our ethnicity, so, you know."

Urban respondents also mention racial profiling by police, but often with an air of hardened resignation. More AVP interviewees in this group knew people who had been victims of police violence. A few even reported they had experienced police brutality. This series of stark observations by Damian, a young man from the West Coast, captures this perspective.

> For me honestly, people have been getting beat up and killed by the police all my life, so it's like nothing new to me, to me I'm numb to it, like I expect to be harassed by the police, just because I'm Black in America, you know what I'm saying, like that comes with it, it comes with it, it's kind of fucked up to say, but like, I expect to be like harassed I expect that when police see me or interact with me that it's going to be for a negative reason, that just comes along with being Black in America it is like a part of life.

Overall, reports and denunciations of police bias, particularly racial profiling, are slightly

more frequent in the suburban sample, in keeping with the expectations of the theory. Perhaps urban respondents have as many troubling encounters with police, but they already hold these authorities in such low esteem that they expect harassment or worse. Black suburbanites either have higher expectations for law enforcement in their zip codes, or proportionally more run-ins with police that go awry perhaps due to the heavy reliance on revenue-motivated policing in Black suburbs. Either way, distrust of police is so rampant across both groups that it tracks as racial common sense. Many respondents detail the steps they take or teach their children to avoid police harassment and violence because distrust of law enforcement is the racial group norm.

There are, however, outliers in both samples. A minority of the Black AVP interviewees registered positive opinions about the police, but they tend to be qualified on a couple dimensions. First, some respondents with this minority opinion have relatives or friends who have worked in law enforcement. Thousands of Blacks are part of the country's security state, with many filling the ranks of local police departments. Despite law enforcement's troubled reputation for anti-Black violence and discrimination, police agencies and prisons have been sites of stable, state-subsidized jobs and career advancement for some Blacks in the decades since the 1960s (Beltran 2023; Taylor 2016). These Blacks and their families rely on law enforcement for their livelihoods. This personal familiarity seems to moderate criticism of the police in general, although the increasing numbers of Blacks involved in policing has not mitigated police brutality in Black communities.

Second, on both sides of the urban-suburban divide, respondents with positive impressions of police typically emphasize respect as a crucial solvent for avoiding conflict with these state agents. Calvin, a southern suburban man with relatives in policing, said, "I ain't never had no problem with law enforcement. I never had no problem with law because I believe in obeying the law and I talked to them like I want to be talked to. I respect them because I want to be respected, so I don't have no problem . . . And my [relative] works, well I mean, he works in [law enforcement]." Terri Ann, an older woman from a city in the South, echoed this view, although without citing any personal relationships with police: "I don't have a problem with law enforcement. I really like law enforcement. I welcome them into my life at any time, because [PERSONAL NAME] a very respectable person of law enforcement. I don't break the law, so I have no problem with law enforcement being a part of my life. And I have not had any problems with law enforcement, and when I say not any, not any. [PERSONAL NAME] sorry for the people who have, but I have not and neither has my husband."

This emphasis on respect is an explicit endorsement of Black respectability as a tactic for warding off discriminatory treatment and the threat of harm by police. The strategy tutors Blacks to "police" their personal comportment to survive encounters with law enforcement. If they display good and proper behavior, the thinking goes, Blacks can earn the respect of Whites (Kennedy 2015; Obasogie and Newman 2016; Jefferson 2023)—and in the case of the police, they can avoid falling victim to extrajudicial violence. Self-correction allows for self-preservation. But this individualistic approach ignores or glosses over the mounting evidence that anti-Blackness in policing is a systemic problem requiring a comprehensive institutional remedy.

Black Lives Matter

The BLM movement has trained its focus on police violence against Blacks and framed the issue in systemic terms. It flatly rejects "respectability as a tool of resistance in contrast to some previous iterations of Black social movements. . . . It also elucidates the ways in which respectability politics is often employed to maintain inequality" (Bunyasi and Watts Smith 2019, 188). The 2020 BLM summer protests not only condemned recent cases of police brutality against Blacks, but also connected them to a long harrowing history of anti-Black state violence (Taylor 2022). Movement leaders urged a series of drastic police reforms, from abolition to defunding the police to increasing spending on social services to combat the root causes of crime (Byrd 2020). Among Black po-

litical elites, agreement on the racialized nature of the problem was widespread, but consensus on the appropriate policy solution was elusive.

The AVP interview protocol queried respondents about BLM and the 2020 protests with the following probes:

> So far, we've talked a lot about the period since the coronavirus/COVID-19 became an issue. Another topic a lot of people have been talking about lately is race and/or racism and policing. Some people tell us the issues raised by the Black Lives Matter movement have affected them a lot, some say they've affected them somewhat, and others say they haven't affected them at all. How about for you?
>
> How have you been thinking about the issues Black Lives Matter raises?
>
> How have you been thinking about race in the United States. Recently?
>
> How have you responded to the increased focus on race and/or racism and policing? Some people say they're aware of the issue but they keep their thoughts to themselves, others say they've talk to family and friends, others say they've joined protests. What about you?
>
> What about people you're close to?
>
> Tell me more about that.

Support for the BLM movement and its goals was widespread among both the urban and suburban Black interviewees, following the expectations for this study and echoing the pattern in national surveys. A greater proportion of the urban respondents, however, reported cognitive engagement with family and friends about the 2020 demonstrations and the issues animating the movement. Consider the sophistication evinced in these observations by Derrick, a middle-aged urban respondent from the Northeast:

> So again, [stop and frisk] was clearly racial discrimination, so that being said, it's not an experience that's unique to me, it's definitely something that is very pervasive, it still goes on, I mean, not stop and frisk per se, but you know, you have other activities that the police engage in, like, for example, the quality of life crimes that I mentioned earlier, they'll definitely target people of color knowing that, again, they don't have a lot of political support, they don't have a lot of popular sympathy with the general population, just to put it in a nutshell, police don't pick on people with powerful friends they tend to pick on people who are marginalized. So that definitely includes racial minorities and that's been my experience as well.

His allusions to racial bias in police practices and racial disparities in political influence reflect deep engagement with Black discourse on these issues. Jennifer, a mother from a mid-Atlantic city, said she relied on Black counterpublic networks for information about the protests:

> We had a banner down here on where I live on the major street. People out there are protesting. So, you sign your name or make a statement on the banner or whatever. So, me and my daughter did that, but definitely conversations whether it's conversations that were happening in our church family, within the family. Everybody's talking about it. You keep abreast of what's happening on the news. And I know you know there are fake news and how media can betray things or whatever. Keep abreast of everything or what's happening.

Both urban and suburban interviewees across the board expressed awareness of the problem, saw it in racial terms, sometimes put it in historical context, and believed the movement to resist it is righteous. As the exchanges about policing reveal, most Black AVP interviewees perceived racialized violence and misconduct by law enforcement as a threat to the entire racial group. Police brutality, they maintained, is a danger to ordinary Blacks everywhere. Corey Fields and his coauthors (2022, 7) offer the same interpretation of the participants' attitudes in their study. "Hearing these respondents," they conclude, "one gets the impression that the police do not keep people safe. Instead, they in-

duce an overwhelming sense of vulnerability and violability."

Although the respondents largely agreed on this diagnosis of the policing problem in Black neighborhoods, they did not register consensus on the policy remedy. For instance, almost none of the interviewees mentioned abolition or defund the police in their conversations with interviewers. Very few cited any policies at all, except to call for legal accountability for police officers who brutalize civilians. The absence of policy talk in the conversations with Black interviewees is presumably an effect of the heterogeneity of Black leaders' opinions on the issue. The sharp focus on anti-Black police violence at the height of the protests did not translate to agreement among Black politicians or movement leaders on how to redress the problem (Taylor 2020). Black elite opinions were fractured, leaving ordinary Blacks with no clear cues on which specific policies would reduce the threat posed by police and improve public safety for the group.

Opinions about the actual protests and the tactics employed are much more salient in the interviews. Though some interviewees in both groups say they participated in protests where they live or in nearby downtown locations, the suburban respondents report they preferred to discuss the issues with family and friends in lieu of demonstrating. The ones who participated insisted the protests they joined were peaceful, as two suburban interviewees underscored. Sheila, a woman in the Midwest, explained: "Yeah. I participated in a march for Black Lives Matter and we marched around out state house here in [LOCATION]. And it was controlled. The police were, they gave us our space, they were very respectful." Darlene, from the South, was succinct but precise. "I have expressed my views. I have participated in peaceful protests." Perhaps both were signaling respectability by emphasizing the peaceful tenor of the protests they joined.[20]

Some suburban residents said the protests were an invitation to chaos, rioting, and property damage. Urban residents echoed these concerns. This is a striking and unexpected point of consensus among both groups. Consider the respectability anxieties reflected in these comments by Angela, a middle-aged suburban woman on the West Coast: "But wait a minute 'Black Folk' you know what the climate is out there . . . But you're out there taunting the police . . . doing behavior that you should know, if you have the IQ of a four-year-old, you should know that doing those types of things is going to get you into trouble." Eric, a young male from a Midwestern city, cites the potential for property damage. "I'm not surprised when I hear these stories [about police killing unarmed Blacks]. . . . It's not shocking. It's not going to make me want to go out and all Black people be doing like that, I think they use it as an excuse to tear up their own city."

Many suburban interviewees register concerns about violent backlash from police and the criminalization of Black protesters. Some urban respondents seem to harbor similar fears, with a trace of fatalism about police officers' dehumanizing attitudes toward Blacks. A handful of rural responses to the BLM probe reflect the same concerns. But the rural interviewees were far removed from protest activity hot spots, said they did not join any demonstrations, and talked about BLM with family and friends less than their suburban and urban counterparts. The latter two groups tend to have more visceral responses. Consider this reaction from Darnell, a middle-aged urban interviewee from the West Coast: "I feel like it's putting yourself in position to be the next reason for a protest because they killing Black people and minority and Brown people for no reason . . . to me and personally, I feel like it's backwards, they already want to shoot you and kill you, so why go in and aggravate them, and give them a reason to shoot you and kill you. I mean, that's how I see it." Tasha, a female urban respondent living in the Northeast, put similar concerns in less fatal terms: "The police want to paint a picture of disarray. It clearly wasn't." Recalling previous damage to her city in the wake of earlier riots, Yvette, a young sub-

20. Interviewer effects may have biased these responses. The interviewees may have emphasized Black respectability to guard against the risk of activating negative stereotypes about angry or dangerous Black protesters in the minds of White interviewers specifically. A separate study on interviewer effects could help clarify this issue.

urban woman in the Midwest, worried about protesters' safety and police inciting conflict: "We had riots in the 80s and our city never bounced back . . . I hope when they are messing up all these [inaudible], I hope they will clean it up as well because it wasn't nice growing up in a city that had been messed up because of riots . . . I hope the police will stop fighting and things and not letting emotions like overwhelm them."

These warnings about the danger Blacks incur when they protest and the accompanying calls for restraint are a familiar refrain in Black politics. Even in the wake of catastrophic betrayals by government and egregious harm to the group, Black leaders tend to exhort their constituents to bridle their anger.[21] Marshaling multiple streams of evidence, Davin Phoenix (2019) has shown that Blacks are much less likely than Whites to express anger in politics whether in the streets or the voting booth. "Ever fearful of channeling a [B]lack anger that has long been stereotyped as dangerous and uncontrollable, elites offer Black audiences messages intended to placate rather than animate" (Phoenix 2019, 15). The urban and suburban Black AVP interviewees both seem acutely aware of this stereotype threat, though the latter rely more on respectability signals to counter it.[22] Anxiety about pernicious stereotyping likely informs their disapproval and ambivalence about BLM protest tactics. The criminalization of Black protest "send[s] a clear message to Black individuals who are considering joining efforts to advocate for [B]lack lives. . . . You risk being labeled a threat, targeted, monitored, and brought down by state agents" (Phoenix 2019, 17).

The most notable overlap in the BLM opinions of the suburban and urban interviewees is their disillusionment about what the demonstrations would accomplish. The following remark from Alicia, a suburban middle-aged woman in the Midwest who participated in protests, is typical.

> I just felt it was us blowing off steam. I don't think that in a greater scheme of things, it really mattered. And I don't think that the powers, that they take Black Lives Matter seriously. I think that it is, and I know this sounds horrible, but I think we are allowed to blow off steam." Steve, a young man from a West Coast city, put it even more baldly. "I don't plan on going and joining any protests because this shit is going to keep happening, like police are going to keep killing minorities and getting away with it, so I mean I'm not going to go out there and give them a reason to shoot me.

These interviewees' brutal assessments resemble the disillusioned liberalism periodically reflected in Black political opinion and famously expressed by twentieth-century Black leaders.[23] W. E. B. DuBois and Martin Luther King Jr., for example, "both moved from relatively optimistic analyses of America's bitter racial conflicts to evaluations . . . more tempered by despair than hope" (Dawson 2001, 274). The AVP respondents' observations reflect similarly dim expectations for democratic responsiveness to BLM demands for racial justice, but also a form of democratic fatigue or what Sally Nuamah (2020) calls collective participatory deficit. This is the deepened mistrust, fatigue, and disillusionment that creep into Blacks' political attitudes when they repeatedly experi-

21. Even when Black anger is unleashed politically, it tends to be apportioned selectively. Traci Burch (2022) finds that narratives about the threat level posed by Black victims of police "officer-involved" deaths can determine whether Blacks mobilize in the wake of these incidents. Her analysis reveals Blacks under age forty are more likely to take political action after cases involving high-visibility, relatively nonthreatening Black victims.

22. Invoking respectability norms to counter racist images is jarringly at odds with a core tenet of the BLM movement (Jefferson 2023; Bunyasi and Watts Smith 2019). In contrast to some earlier Black social movements, BLM rejects Black respectability as a weapon of resistance. It faults Black respectability's preoccupation with individual comportment for contributing to the perpetuation of inequality, deflecting attention from its structural causes, and authorizing punitive social policies to address it.

23. Ernest McGowen (2017) also finds high levels of disillusioned liberalism in Blacks residing in majority White suburbs.

ence nonresponsiveness or half-measures from government. This pronouncement from Michelle, a young urban interviewee in the Southeast, illustrates how hope and engagement can turn to disillusionment and disengagement. "At first, like I want to say, like [year], when I graduated from high school . . . I was very vocal, but as time went by, I just became less vocal because, you know, it's just . . . repetitive, it's like repetitive suicide, you know, what can I do personally to make a difference? As going online, tweeting, or talking about it really isn't helping."

Marcus, a young suburban man, recalled the same trajectory in his appetite for engagement.

> Honestly, I felt numb to these issues as I gotten older, because I've gotten used to them. Like I remember, younger as a kid, I would cry out of fear when I hear about incidents like Tamir Rice, and I haven't felt anything this time . . . I feel like it's just a normal thing now. Sometimes, I'd rather not talk about it because I don't feel like anything can change . . . Mostly, I have the right idea. I just don't have that willingness, that fight in me anymore . . . I think it's mostly the exhaustion with it, and I don't feel like there is much hope for a system based on racial inequity, to be transformed in a solvable way.

These expressions of disillusionment are an ominous portent for Black social movements and the struggle for racial egalitarianism in the United States. The interviewees' observations suggest that Black hope in the American democratic experiment is not inexhaustible. Blacks could lose faith in the experiment and the will to pursue political action to perfect it if racial reform and justice remain elusive.

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

This excavation and analysis of Black AVP interviewees' opinions on BLM, policing, and neighborhood conditions yielded only limited support for the theory of Black political sorting. Black suburban and urban respondents evinced perceptible but minor differences in their appraisals of conditions in their respective neighborhoods, as expected. In discussions of the 2020 BLM protests, Black suburban interviewees also registered more preoccupation with Black respectability than their urban counterparts. Yet opinion convergence was greater than divergence between the two groups despite the geographic distance separating them. The striking opinion cohesion uncovered in this analysis underscores the theoretical caveat outlined at the beginning of the study: racial hardships burdening Blacks on both sides of the urban-suburban divide also corral and coalesce their views on racialized issues. These racial disadvantages cling to Blacks across geographic boundaries and militate against place-based opinion differentiation in the group.

In contrast, suburbanization historically has lifted Whites from the lowest rungs of the socioeconomic ladder to secure middle-class status. In the mid- and late twentieth century, the move to the suburbs established a buffer between these upwardly mobile Whites and the economic precarity of central city neighborhoods (Jackson 1985). Evidence of this pattern echoes in the AVP interviews, with White suburbanites signaling favorable views of their neighborhood economic conditions. Suburbanization may no longer be the surefire ticket to socioeconomic mobility and security it once was, but it still cashes out more readily for Whites than for Blacks. Late twentieth-century suburbs also created political distance between White suburbanites and their coracial counterparts in cities, usually shifting suburbanites' opinions rightward or toward the middle of the political spectrum (Gainsborough 2001; Kruse 2005).

The recent suburbanizing trend among Blacks has not been nearly as economically transformative or politically differentiating. For many Blacks, a suburban zip code is a hollow prize, especially as extreme poverty has increased outside the urban core in recent decades. The suburbs are not inviolable safe havens that shield Blacks from the indignities and ravages of racial inequality. Suburbanization seems to offer the group flimsy protection at best against these challenges. It simply may produce variation in the same general condition of deprivation that Blacks face across metropolitan areas. Similarly, unless suburbanization can deliver substantial and stable material

improvements that enable Blacks to avert racial hardship, it may lead to only minuscule degrees of differentiation rather than sharp divisions in Black public opinion.

The suburban and urban Black interviewees in this study shared a deep distrust of police and many of the same concerns about excessive violence and scarce economic opportunities in their neighborhoods. Though these patterns seem to undercut expectations for Black political sorting between urban and suburban Blacks, supporting evidence might be found elsewhere. First, this study set an admittedly stiff test for the theory of placed-based political sorting by focusing on several highly racialized issues that typically unify Black opinion. Questions about other topics such as schooling or social welfare policies might uncover geographically sorted attitudinal differences between the two groups (Lewis-McCoy 2014; Posey-Maddox 2014).[24] Second, the AVP oversample of people living in high-poverty U.S. Census tracts helpfully magnifies the challenges faced by Blacks in struggling central city and suburban neighborhoods, reflecting how poverty has spread beyond the core of metropolitan areas. But a nationally representative sample—including more of the middle- and high-income Blacks that have departed or bypassed central cities and flocked to the suburbs in recent decades—also might yield evidence of opinion stratification. In fact, the similarities in views uncovered in this analysis may be largely an artifact of the oversampling of low-income respondents across geographic areas.

Finally, further research to assess the underlying mechanisms of the theory is warranted. This descriptive analysis focused only on expected effects. Data limitations did not allow for a precise inquiry into causes. For instance, the analysis did not directly measure the selection and social processes at the heart of the theory. It also did not include neighborhood-level contextual or compositional data to differentiate between the urban and suburban locations where Black AVP interviewees reside. These additional analyses into the foundations of the theory await.

For now, this study's most sobering evidence of opinion convergence between suburban and urban Black interviewees is their bleak assessment of the prospects for racial justice following the 2020 BLM insurgency. Even as the biggest protest movement in American history gripped the country, the two groups expressed disillusionment in the promises of American liberalism and resignation to Blacks' grim racial plight. Their views contrasted sharply with general perceptions about the significance of the movement, particularly for Whites. Observers widely hailed the multiracial protests as a high watermark for White racial liberalism and antiracism. Some studies lent credence to these pronouncements (Reny and Benjamin 2021). Media outlets hopefully characterized Whites' heightened awareness of anti-Black violence and early support for the BLM protests as a breakthrough in the national reckoning on race. But the Blacks in this study largely viewed the insurgency as a political dead end.

These Black interviewees have been proven prescient and perhaps all too well schooled in American liberalism's failures and betrayals. Liberalism in the United States has faltered repeatedly since its mid-twentieth-century triumphs. This is perhaps why Blacks are extraordinarily pessimistic about its promise of justice, equality, and democratic responsiveness for all. They have learned this lesson through harrowing experience. A long line of research has assayed the limits of Whites' racial liberalism (Clemmons 2022). White support for BLM has cooled. Though some states and municipalities passed police reforms, no national policy sea change to end or curb anti-Black police brutality has materialized (Johnson 2023; Blow 2022). Federal police reform bills have stalled in Congress. The main federal legislation to emerge from the summer-long 2020 protests was the establishment of Juneteenth as a national holiday (Taylor 2022). Although the movement gave rise to a new generation of Black leaders, these politicians cannot count on mobilizing Blacks who may view America's liberal promise as increasingly hollow. This creeping disillusionment may be especially pronounced among Blacks living in distressed city neighborhoods and their coun-

24. I thank an anonymous reviewer for this insight.

terparts in struggling suburbs. There is no guarantee these Blacks will return again and again to the political battleground if they fail to secure remedies for their racial plight or to reap meaningful rewards for their investments in collective action.

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