

The New Orleans Prosperity Index: Tricentennial Collection

Rigging the Real Estate Market: Segregation, Inequality, and Disaster Risk

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Introduction

New Orleans history and culture is rooted in a unique sense of place. Yet beneath a shared sense of tradition and culture lies another reality marked by separation and disadvantage. The historical and contemporary dividing lines in New Orleans, like in most American cities, fall along categories (and gradients) of black and white, race and ethnicity. Gaining an understanding of the history of neighborhood segregation in New Orleans is essential to appreciating contemporary racial disparities in wealth, access to opportunity, and vulnerability to disaster risk.

Residential racial segregation is not a neutral phenomenon for blacks. Research demonstrates that “blacks on average remain more physically isolated from jobs than members of any other racial group.”¹ Housing segregation contributes to unequal exposure to crime and violence, environmental health hazards, and threats to physical and mental health.² For children, the concentrated neighborhood poverty associated with segregation can be catastrophic, as “child poverty can lead to chronic, toxic stress that disrupts the architecture of the developing brain...”³ Segregation also results in a peculiar dynamic where, regardless of income, blacks are more likely to live in a high poverty neighborhood than whites.⁴

This paper will examine an array of government policies and practices, reinforced by the private sector, which created artificial racial segregation in New Orleans and across the U.S. and helped lock in disadvantage for black New Orleanians.

Inequity in Access to High Ground

Any residential history of New Orleans must begin with an acknowledgment of both the influence of 100 years of French and Spanish cosmopolitan culture, as well as the city’s sordid distinction as the largest slave-trading center of the United States⁵ as documented in Richard Campanella’s geographic overview accompanying this collection. “Without the institution of slavery, New Orleans would not exist” given the forced labor required for the initial building of levees, digging of drainage ditches, and clearing of forests.⁶

The city of New Orleans is, by nature and by design, a vulnerable geographic location. It was already vulnerable to flooding at the time it was founded by the French in 1718, due to its location in the natural floodplain of the Mississippi River.⁷ Generations of settlers and governments have attempted to make the city more livable by draining soils and building levees and floodwalls. Paradoxically, these structures also increase human exposure to catastrophic flooding during a hurricane. The levees lock out the sediment and nutrients that built the land up over millions of years of natural flooding. Modern drainage structures, built to pump rainwater out of the city, have the effect of denying the land of water, which soils need to maintain organic character and shape. The result of draining out rainwater, sediment, and nutrients is constantly sinking land, or subsidence.⁸ This process has turned some parts of the city that were at or slightly below sea level a century ago, to more than ten feet below sea level today. No levee system is perfect, and levees are occasionally breached. Subsidence makes recovery from a catastrophic flood more difficult because when levees are breached a “bowl effect” is created, containing the standing water in the low lying areas of the city, which makes draining floodwater more difficult.



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While much of the land mass of New Orleans is below sea level, about one-half of the city is actually at or above sea level due to natural geologic ridges. The beginning of inequity in disaster planning began with the earliest settlement of the city. The early wealthy settlers had access to the surveyors' maps and knew the location of the geologic ridges that were above sea level.⁹ Once the early wealthy settlers bought up the land above sea level, the lower income residents had to settle on what was left: "low-lying flood-prone mosquito-infested backswamp."¹⁰ This began the process of the upper classes, "empowered members of the white caste (plus their slaves)" being settled on the higher land, or "front of town," and the lower income residents, including free people of color, settling in the lower elevations, or "back of town."¹¹

Legally and Socially Engineered Separation and Isolation

Residential patterns before the Civil War in New Orleans conformed to what has been described as the "back-alley pattern."¹² In the city, slaves often lived in slave quarters on compounds near their owners.¹³ In fact, city ordinances prohibited slaves from living off of their master's premises.¹⁴ Residential segregation was almost non-existent during this period because both slaves and free blacks lived in proximity to whites, with black residents living in every ward of the city.¹⁵ Although some interracial association is documented, with New Orleans reportedly having relatively greater social mixing than other Southern cities and a "middle caste" of free blacks acquiring some status and influence, laws nevertheless increasingly mandated economic and social segregation before the Civil War.¹⁶

Jim Crow New Orleans became firmly established throughout the 1890s, as growing numbers of blacks moved to the city from the plantations.¹⁷ Emancipated slaves "joined other socially marginalized people already settled at the physically marginalized geography that was the backswamp, in the formation of the city's first large-scale, exclusively black neighborhoods."¹⁸

The twentieth century was a transformative period in the establishment and institutionalizing of residential racial segregation in the city. A range of policies and practices combined to replace the relative integration of the "back-alley pattern" with the increasing American pattern of racial separation. The United States Supreme Court decision of *Plessy v. Ferguson*¹⁹ enshrined the doctrine of "separate but equal." Yet, the decision is of even greater significance in New Orleans as it helped complete the transition from "New Orleans's old Franco-Caribbean recognition of a gradient between black and white... into an American-style 'rigid, two-tiered [social] structure that drew a single unyielding line between the white and nonwhite.'"²⁰

The forces that created residential separation along categories of black and white cannot be explained as a series of isolated acts driven by private whim or prejudice. Rather, "until the last quarter of the twentieth century, racially explicit policies of federal, state, and local governments defined where whites and African Americans should live."²¹ Racial zoning, discriminatory federal underwriting and redlining in home finance, judicially enforced restrictive covenants, segregated public housing programs, and federal urban renewal policies all combined to separate and isolate black families and deprive them of full citizenship. This government-constructed architecture of residential segregation provided the landscape on which both public and private market actors perpetuated and entrenched the disadvantage of black residents.

Racial Zoning and the Architecture of Redlining

Local governments in Southern and border states with large black populations enacted explicitly racial zoning ordinances as early as 1910 to prevent all classes of blacks from entering neighborhoods predominated by whites. Despite the U.S. Supreme Court decision of *Buchanan v. Warley*²² in 1917 declaring racial zoning laws unconstitutional, the City of New Orleans passed such a law in 1924.²³ New Orleans' ordinance prohibited racial integration "except on the written consent of a majority of the persons of the opposite race inhabiting such community."²⁴ The Louisiana Supreme Court upheld the New Orleans racial zoning ordinance but the U.S. Supreme Court put an end to it in 1927.²⁵

Still, so-called "neutral zoning" was able to survive constitutional challenge and ensure the creation of racially homogeneous neighborhoods throughout and even beyond the twentieth century.²⁶ Local and federal officials across the nation promoted zoning ordinances that were designed to create and protect single-family zones for middle-class residents.²⁷ The single-family zone operated in two important ways to disadvantage black families: it created a mechanism for black exclusion from the most desirable neighborhoods while allowing all other less desirable land uses to proliferate in the few areas where blacks were permitted to live.

As to the exclusion of blacks, the single-family zone operated as an attempt to prevent: "[t]he blighting of property values and the congesting of the population, whenever the colored or certain foreign races invade a residential section..."²⁸ The prevailing view of the time reveals that single-family zones were not truly created for middle-class members of all races, they were created for whites. Compounding the effect was the exclusion of other residential uses, such as the multi-family use, which would have made the zones more accessible to lower-income blacks.

Though New Orleans had previously acted to regulate and separate its land uses by city charter, the Louisiana legislature explicitly authorized this practice in large cities in 1918, and a constitutional amendment in 1921 stated: “All municipalities are authorized to zone their territory, to create residential, commercial and industrial districts, and to prohibit the establishment of places of business in residential districts.”²⁹ In 1923, the Louisiana Supreme Court upheld a New Orleans land use ordinance in a zoning battle between the City and varied commercial interests seeking to locate in residential districts: Piggly-Wiggly stores, drive-in filling stations, a vegetable and fruit stand, an oyster counter, and an ice factory.³⁰

The segregated residential patterns that zoning rules facilitated over the course of the century exposed black neighborhoods to the harmful and noxious land uses deemed unsuitable for single-family zones inhabited by whites.³¹ As segregated black neighborhoods, geographically confined as they were, became increasingly overcrowded and associated with the undesirable and hazardous land uses permitted around them, and as white neighborhoods became increasingly identified as the most desirable locations for all manner of investment, the scaffolding necessary to support neighborhood redlining was erected.³²

Discrimination in Federally Backed Home Mortgages and Suburbanization for Whites Only

Federal housing policy, quite simply, blocked African Americans from access to real estate capital while offering whites the opportunity to accumulate wealth in segregated suburbs.³³ Beginning in 1917 and through the 1920s, the federal government promoted an “Own-Your-Own Home” campaign, built on the idea that homeownership would promote capitalistic values and prevent the spread of communism. Government-affiliated private organizations targeted white apartment dwellers for homeownership as a means of avoiding “racial strife.”³⁴

In the early 1930s, with its 50 percent down payments and short, interest-only repayment periods, homeownership was inaccessible to most working and middle-class families.³⁵ In 1933, in the midst of the Depression, the Roosevelt Administration created the Home Owners’ Loan Corporation (HOLC) to help rescue households in imminent danger of default.³⁶ The HOLC refinanced mortgages on more lenient terms, amortizing the payments to allow a portion to be applied to principal, and extending the repayment periods. However, the HOLC still sought to assess risk of default; it used race to assess risk and created color-coded maps using red to designate the highest-risk neighborhoods (“Hazardous”) and green to designate neighborhoods as lowest risk (“Best”).³⁷ Intermediate designations included blue for “Still Desirable” and yellow for “Definitely Declining.”³⁸ Few neighborhoods in New Orleans earned a green or even blue designation; the HOLC map for the Big Easy is a sea of red and yellow: “A neighborhood earned a red color if African Americans lived in it, even if it was a solid middle-class neighborhood of single-family homes.”³⁹ Though they reflected the broader views of industry appraisers and underwriters at the time, the federally sponsored HOLC maps “helped set the rules for nearly a century of real estate practice.”⁴⁰ (See Redline Map for New Orleans, Louisiana on page 9.)

Congress and President Roosevelt created the Federal Housing Administration (FHA) in 1934 to make homeownership more accessible to first-time buyers among the middle class. The FHA insured mortgages on terms more lenient than ever before: 20 percent down payments with fully amortized payments over 20 years.⁴¹ The first FHA Underwriting Manual, issued in 1935, favored racially segregated communities in newer suburbs and those with protection against “adverse influences” such as “infiltration of inharmonious racial or nationality groups.”⁴² Although the explicit racial language was dropped in 1947, the manual continued to require compatibility among neighborhood occupants into the 1950s.

By 1950, the FHA and Veterans Administration (VA) were insuring half of the nation’s mortgages.⁴³ Neither would approve financing for black applicants regardless of credit risk; nor would they insure loans in any neighborhoods providing housing for blacks. For New Orleans, this meant that returning GI’s of any race could not get federally backed mortgage credit in “central city, the Irish Channel, the Lower Garden District [or] the older sections of the city with historically racially mixed population patterns.”⁴⁴

The national impact of this discriminatory policy was exponential; in thousands of localities, mass-production builders obtained federally backed financing for entire subdivisions and even suburbs on the condition that no blacks would be admitted. Therefore, not only were blacks barred from suburban housing, they were denied federally backed loans anywhere they lived because their mere presence in the neighborhood disqualified them.⁴⁵ A rare exception to this policy occurred in 1954 when New Orleans Mayor DeLesseps Morrison, concerned about a severe housing shortage and social unrest, pleaded with the FHA to insure a subdivision for middle-class black professionals in Pontchartrain Park on a promise that it would not be integrated. Over NAACP protest, 1000 homes were built there for blacks only.⁴⁶ Outside of Pontchartrain Park, black neighborhoods within areas such as the Lower Ninth Ward developed, but African Americans who did manage to own homes at the time often built them without the help of a commercial loan.

Restrictive Covenants and State-enforced Exclusion

Property deed restrictions prohibiting an owner from selling or renting to blacks were in use in New Orleans in the early 20th century. One such 1913 covenant in the Lakeview neighborhood required the purchaser to agree “that no lots are to be sold to negroes or colored people.”⁴⁷ In 1979, 30 years after such restrictions were declared unconstitutional, a subsequent sale of that same property occurred “subject to certain restrictions contained in an act...dated May 24, 1913.”

Racially restrictive covenants became more widespread throughout the nation in the 1920s.⁴⁸ In 1931, a federally convened Conference on Home Building and Home Ownership published a recommendation that “zoning laws be supplemented by deed restrictions to prevent ‘incompatible ownership occupancy.’”⁴⁹ But even more crucially, the FHA favored properties for federally-backed mortgages if they were subject to enforceable racial deed restrictions, considering them as necessary to “strengthen and supplement zoning ordinances.”⁵⁰ In many instances, the FHA required subdivision builders who obtained preapproval for loans to include racial covenants in property deeds.⁵¹

Similar to states from every region of the country, the Louisiana Supreme Court upheld so-called “private” racial deed restrictions. The U.S. Supreme Court endorsed this view in 1926.⁵² Yet, government was involved at all levels in their enforcement. The most effective means was to implement them as a contract among all neighborhood owners so that any neighbor could sue to enforce the racial restriction. Even more effective was the creation of mandatory community association membership by subdivision developers to ensure universal participation in the whites-only covenants.⁵³ To be clear, enforcement meant seeking court-ordered eviction of African Americans from homes they had purchased.

The Supreme Court in *Shelly v. Kraemer* held in 1948 that court enforcement of racially restrictive covenants was in fact state action in violation of the Equal Protection Clause of the Fourteenth Amendment to the U.S. Constitution.⁵⁴ Yet, the FHA continued to insure covenanted properties for several years and then insured developments excluding African Americans until a 1962 executive order forbade it.⁵⁵ Owners continued to sue, sometimes successfully, for damages (as opposed to eviction) in enforcement of the covenants until 1953. “[R]acial covenants of one sort and another continued to be written into title documents” until passage of the Fair Housing Act in 1968, after which they remained in the record books and appeared in title searches.⁵⁶

The staying power of covenants might be that they “sent a signal to buyers about the racial preference of their neighbors.”⁵⁷ “By the mid-twentieth century, white and black New Orleanians were moving away from each other en masse (largely to low-lying suburbs), and the trend would only strengthen.”⁵⁸ Lakeview, the neighborhood where our exemplar restrictive covenant was located in 1913 and referenced in 1979, “remains mostly white to this day.”⁵⁹

Private Market Discrimination

Private market actors could not have created homogeneous neighborhoods on their own, but they certainly used the governmental tools available to them during the first half of the 20th century and reinforced the segregationist line. In 1924, the National Association of Real Estate Boards adopted a “code of ethics” that warned realtors not to further integration by “introducing into a neighborhood... members of any race or nationality... whose presence will clearly be detrimental to property values in that neighborhood.”⁶⁰ In New Orleans, local real estate industry members “stepped in to do the work of Jim Crow after courts struck down legislative mechanisms.”⁶¹ A *Times-Picayune* article in 1924 entitled “Segregation by Co-operation of Civic Bodies” described a committee formed by real estate agents whose “primary province will be to specifically denote residential areas for whites and colored. Such lines established, the next step will be for individuals and associations who perform any of the functions incidental to ownership...to pledge not to participate in any transaction in which either white or colored would attempt to obtain residence in any section reserved for the opposite race.”⁶²

DISCRIMINATORY PRIVATE MARKET PRACTICES PERSIST

Discriminatory private market practices persist. The Urban League documented discrimination by public and private lenders and realtors in the 1960s, and a Tulane study published in 1970 documented housing discrimination and unequal housing conditions.⁶³ In 1996, nearly 30 years after passage of the Fair Housing Act, the Greater New Orleans Fair Housing Action Center documented discrimination in 77 percent of housing tests conducted on the basis of race. A subsequent study conducted in 2014 documented less favorable treatment of African Americans in 44 percent of tests of rental units in the Greater New Orleans area.⁶⁴

Segregated Public Housing

The federally subsidized public housing program that emerged with the New Deal in the late 1930s systematically replaced integrated neighborhoods with segregated ones, and contributed to the residential isolation of black Americans.⁶⁵ The Housing Authority of New Orleans, created in 1937, was the first local agency to receive federal funding for demolition of dilapidated housing and development of new public housing units.⁶⁶ For example, housing considered substandard in the old Storyville neighborhood was demolished to allow for the development of the Iberville housing project.⁶⁷ Iberville was constructed for whites, and blacks who had lived in the neighborhood relocated to the Lafitte project built twelve blocks away.⁶⁸ In relative terms, the complexes built for whites in this period “were located on higher elevation and closer to the front of town, while the black-only projects occupied lower spots in the back of town.”⁶⁹

By the mid-1950s, New Orleans had over 3,000 public housing units explicitly designated for whites and over 7,000 for blacks.⁷⁰ The development of housing projects for black New Orleanians, though representing an improvement over the decayed housing it replaced, created and cemented starkly black neighborhoods for generations.

Eventually, the Civil Rights era resulted in the desegregation of housing developments in New Orleans, but “lower-income whites simply stopped viewing the projects as housing they were willing to accept. It was a decision they could afford to make.”⁷¹ Higher vacancy rates in white complexes reflected wider housing choice outside the city in newly built suburbs, which offered single-family homes on low-cost terms backed by the federal government. By contrast, blacks faced exclusion and discrimination in both the employment and housing markets, which led to limited supply and mortgage capital, higher rents and overcrowding, and longer waiting lists for public housing.⁷²

Urban Renewal

Slum clearance and urban renewal projects funded by the federal government reduced even further the limited supply of low-cost housing in the private market, thus increasing demand for public housing. The Housing Acts of 1949 (slum clearance) and 1954 (urban renewal) authorized the displacement of African Americans from urban neighborhoods in close proximity to downtown business districts, or otherwise deemed desirable for development, and forced relocation to more economically isolated and racially segregated residential areas. The program earned the nickname of “Negro clearance” because “[b]y the end of the 1950s, nearly nine out of every ten displaced families that were compelled to move into low-rent [public] housing were non-white.”⁷³ For example, the construction of Louis Armstrong Park and Cultural Center, Greater New Orleans Bridge, and the Parkchester Apartments in Gentilly removed large tracts of low-income housing units from the market.⁷⁴

Another implementation of slum clearance was the construction of interstate highways to achieve “the elimination of [so-called] unsightly and unsanitary districts.”⁷⁵ Federal administrators of the highway program deferred to industry leaders and local government officials who made plain their racial motivations to displace large numbers of blacks from low-income housing and middle-class residential areas.⁷⁶ A prominent example of this was the Claiborne Avenue highway construction that bulldozed a mixed-income black community in the mid-1960s.⁷⁷

Pre-Katrina Housing Conditions

When Hurricane Katrina hit New Orleans in 2005 and the levees failed, the exclusionary and isolating housing policies of the previous century left New Orleanians particularly vulnerable to the coming floodwaters. Only 42 percent of African Americans were homeowners pre-Katrina, as compared to 56 percent of white households.⁷⁹ The roughly 100,000 African American renter households in the city were much more susceptible to long-term displacement in the event of a disaster or prolonged evacuation.⁸⁰ Though the storm displaced households of all races, ethnicities, and incomes, black households, because they were more likely to live “on the higher-risk eastern side of the metropolis” were “more likely to be flooded than other groups,” with 68 percent of African Americans facing displacement, as opposed to 43 percent of whites.⁸¹

INCREASING SEGREGATION

After 1930, the increasing separation and isolation of black New Orleanians became noticeable and intensified with each decade of the middle 20th century. By 1950 roughly two-thirds of neighborhood blocks were segregated with less than 1 percent of either white or black households. A slight decrease in segregation in 1970 might be explained by the development of New Orleans East, a suburban neighborhood developed for middle-class blacks in the 1950s but increasingly occupied by both whites and blacks in the 1960s.⁷⁸ Between 1980 and 2000 New Orleans became more racially segregated in contrast to the national trend; the average black resident in 2000 lived in a neighborhood where 82 percent of fellow residents were black.

(See maps in “Three Hundred Years of Human Geography in New Orleans” by Richard Campanella, in The New Orleans Prosperity Index: Tricentennial Collection.)

The Post-Katrina Period and Current Inequities

The rebuilding of post-Katrina New Orleans could have reversed residential patterns of racial segregation given the sheer magnitude of the destruction and the billions in recovery dollars that followed. Unfortunately, many policy decisions made during the recovery repeated or amplified existing patterns of separation and inequality.

One of the highest profile examples of recovery gone wrong was the federally-funded, state-administered Road Home rebuilding program. Homeowners were offered rebuilding grants determined by the lesser of either pre-storm value of their damaged home, or the cost to rebuild. As a result, homeowners in segregated white neighborhoods, which had higher pre-storm values, received higher grant awards than homeowners in predominantly African American neighborhoods, who were frequently awarded the lower pre-storm value of the home. This was true even when the homes were the same size and age, and the damage was similar. In 2008, the Greater New Orleans Fair Housing Action Center filed a lawsuit against HUD and the State of Louisiana alleging that the rebuilding grant formula was discriminatory, and had the effect of reinforcing historic patterns of segregation and disinvestment.⁸² HUD agreed to a \$62 million settlement in 2011, but by that time many African American homeowners had already made their decisions not to return based on the lower award amounts offered.⁸³

In addition to lower grant awards, low-income and African American homeowners often started out with less insurance coverage. Many of these homeowners did not know that they were in a floodplain due to old, outdated maps being used by the mortgage banks and insurance industry. So when the flooding occurred, many found themselves with no flood insurance to cover the loss. Those working-class families who did have flood insurance tended to have very little, due to the high cost. Very few had insurance sufficient to cover a total loss.⁸⁴

Ultimately, the disaster recovery process was much quicker for middle-class and disproportionately white families who either had minimal flooding due to neighborhood location and flood elevation, or were more likely to be fully insured and able to recover most of the value of the house from the flood policy. A 2015 Louisiana State University (LSU) report found that 70 percent of long-term white residents were able to return to New Orleans within one year, whereas only 42 percent of long-term black residents made it back in the same time period.⁸⁵

In the rebuilding efforts, black households also saw echoes of the highway building and slum clearance programs of the mid-century. In particular, the State of Louisiana used eminent domain to seize 265 homes in lower Mid-City to make way for the new VA and LSU hospitals.⁸⁶ The neighborhood was 78 percent African American before the storm and many families had restored their homes only to see them taken and demolished.⁸⁷

New Orleans renters at the time were disproportionately African American and as they sought to return to the metro area they also had to contend with neighboring parishes taking actions designed to remind them they were not welcome. These communities, which had previously provided working-class whites with an affordable suburban housing alternative, as well as an exit strategy to avoid school desegregation, took great lengths to ban or restrict rental housing in the years following Hurricane Katrina. In Jefferson Parish, the Council passed a resolution in 2006 objecting to any developments funded by low-income housing tax credits and then specifically changed the zoning on a property to kill the replacement of 200 apartments. In 2007, Kenner also passed a moratorium on all multi-family construction. Perhaps best known is St. Bernard Parish's 2006 "blood relative" ordinance, which prohibited the rental of even single-family residences unless to a blood relative.⁸⁸ At the time, 93 percent of parish homeowners were white.⁸⁹

Of the subsidized housing rebuilt after the storm, a disproportionate amount was rebuilt in New Orleans. However, even the City of New Orleans took actions to reduce its affordable rental housing stock by continuing with pre-storm plans to demolish 5,000 units of public housing. The demolitions and still unfinished mixed-income rebuilding plans dramatically shifted the housing authority's portfolio toward vouchers subsidizing tenants in neighborhoods farther from the city center.⁹⁰ By 2010, nearly 7,500 households (43 percent of the program) were clustered in New Orleans East, the Lower Ninth Ward, or Algiers. That trend continues, as 8,800 households (47 percent) now reside in the same census tracts, most of which are in segregated and high-poverty neighborhoods.⁹¹ The data suggest that low-income black renters are not gaining housing choice and opportunity in the post-Katrina period.⁹²

Outside of housing authority programs, there are other indications that New Orleans may be following national trends of gentrification and displacement. The Data Center's Prosperity Index finds that after decades of white flight to the suburbs, over the last two decades, higher income whites are increasingly moving into New Orleans.⁹³ National studies utilize home values to assess gentrification and find that increases in home values often correlate with changes in racial demographics.⁹⁴ Pre-Katrina, many high-ground

WHAT IS ORLEANS PARISH?

Orleans Parish is the city of New Orleans. New Orleans and Orleans Parish are interchangeable. Their boundaries are the same and they contain the same population.

neighborhoods—from Bywater, to Irish Channel, to Black Pearl—were majority black. (See map of Percent African American by Census block group in Orleans Parish, 2000 on page 10.) The New Orleans Redevelopment Authority’s recently commissioned Market Value Analysis (MVA) shows that many of these areas are now among the most expensive in the city. (See map of New Orleans Market Value Analysis, 2015 on page 11.) The high housing costs suggest that low-income, and disproportionately African American, renters may be vulnerable to displacement in these areas, and a map of recent census estimates suggests these neighborhoods are all now majority white. (See map of Census tracts in Orleans Parish by race, 2011–2015 on page 12.) New Orleans has made significant public investments in many of these neighborhoods, including a new streetcar line, waterfront park, and a number of fresh food retailers. After the 2020 census is released providing definitive data on displacement in New Orleans, it is likely to show that African Americans have been relegated to higher risk neighborhoods farther from job centers, where health and life outcomes are, in all likelihood, worse.

Recent analysis on the racial wealth divide in New Orleans reveals the enduring effects of segregationist housing policies, because home equity is the largest portion of most Americans’ wealth. As of 2014, the median property values for white-owned homes (\$300,000) are twice that of blacks (\$150,000).⁹⁵ Nationally in 2011, the typical (median) white family had fifteen times the wealth of the typical black family.⁹⁶ Historic discrimination in lending, home sales, zoning, and deed restrictions drives the glaring racial discrepancies in family wealth.

Implications for Future Policy and Actions

City leaders can enact and continue to pursue the following policies to mitigate future displacement of residents most vulnerable to the continuing effects of historically engineered segregation:

- * Pass inclusionary housing policies like the Smart Housing Mix policy,⁹⁷ as called for in the Assessment of Fair Housing (AFH) plan created jointly by the City of New Orleans and the Housing Authority of New Orleans (HANO). The Smart Housing Mix policy would ensure new market rate housing typically built on high ground also includes units affordable to the average worker.
- * Expand efforts to dedicate public land in neighborhoods vulnerable to gentrification to affordable housing development, as committed to in the AFH plan and currently under way on HANO scattered sites.
- * Couple neighborhood investments in fresh food retail, transit, greenways, and other amenities with complementary affordable housing investments to ensure long-term residents can stay and enjoy the new amenities.
- * Require homestead exemptions for short-term rentals to restrict these income-producing opportunities to legitimate New Orleans residents.
- * As reflected in the AFH, hold rental housing to basic health and safety standards so that residents are not displaced by leaks, mold, and fire hazards.
- * Pursue property tax relief policies at the state legislature to assist long-term, low-income homeowners who have seen significant increases in their tax assessments.

Given the continuing importance of housing vouchers in assisting low-income black renters in the city of New Orleans in the post-Katrina period, HANO should continue to pursue reforms—adopted in the AFH plan—designed to ensure wider access by housing voucher holders to areas of opportunity and to prevent displacement from thriving neighborhoods. HANO is currently:

- * Implementing more flexibility in setting rents at the zip code level.
- * Partnering with advocates to recruit landlords in low-poverty areas.
- * Considering ways to streamline entry into the program for new landlords.

Additional initiatives that have achieved success in other communities such as Baltimore, Chicago, and Dallas,⁹⁸ which city leaders should pursue, include:

- * Providing robust housing counseling and search assistance for voucher holders.
- * Prohibiting discrimination on the basis of voucher use.
- * Increasing supply of units in low-poverty census tracts.
- * Increasing high-frequency transit access to areas with high voucher concentration, as called for in the AFH and the RTA Strategic Plan.

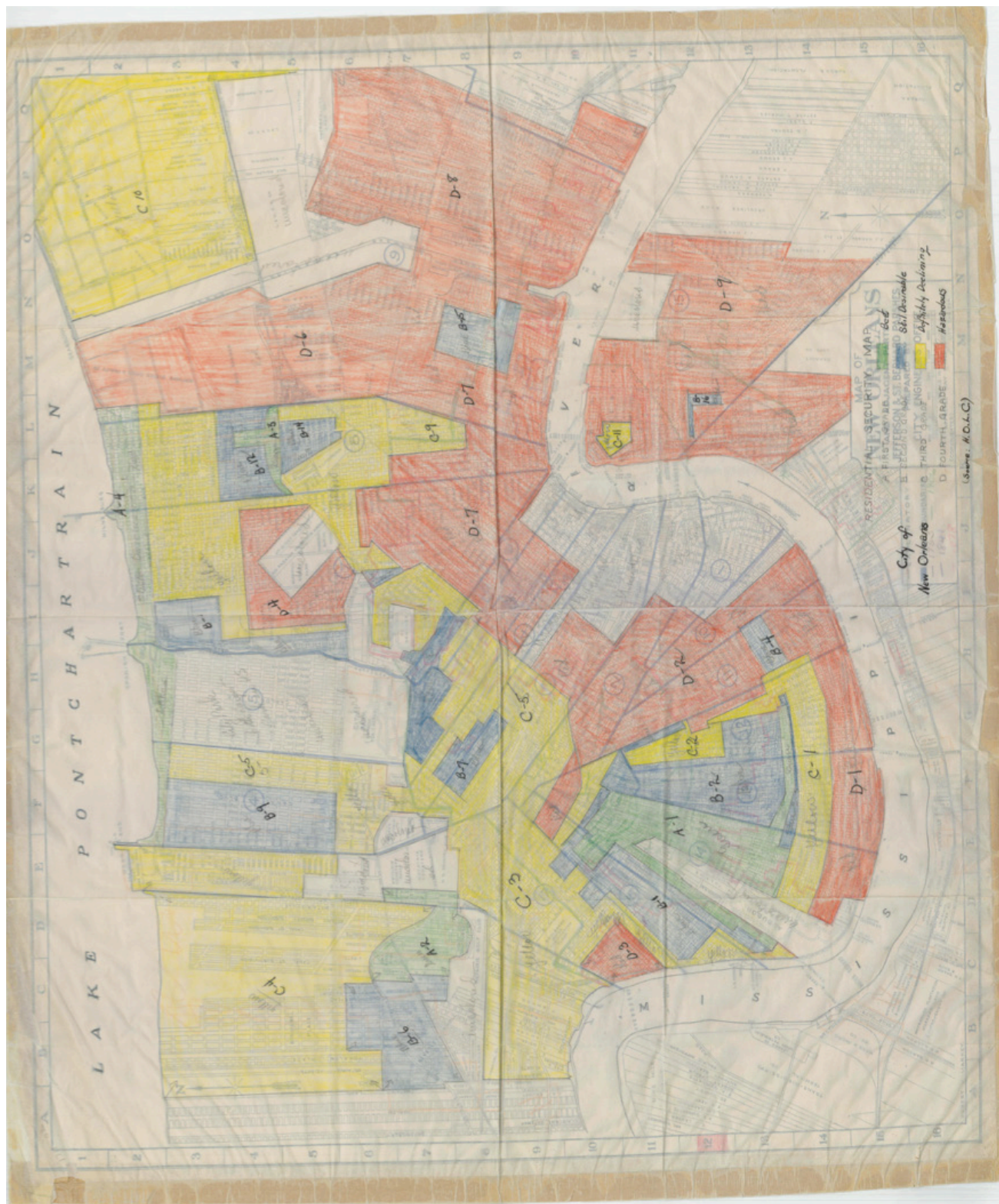
The city can mitigate flood risk and combat historic patterns of segregation by zoning for higher population density at higher elevations and enacting inclusionary housing policies.⁹⁹ While the City has studied inclusionary zoning,¹⁰⁰ it has not yet connected inclusionary zoning directly to reduction of flood risk in any existing plans. The next round of amendments to the City’s most recent comprehensive zoning ordinance¹⁰¹ will need to begin specifically implementing and enforcing designs to allow the city to live in harmony with water, so that regardless of race, income, geographic location, or elevation, residents can avoid the damage of flood inundation.

The City's most recent master plan calls for "Comprehensive stormwater management systems that include natural drainage efforts to directly fight soil subsidence by absorbing or retaining as much stormwater runoff as possible through porous surfaces, retention ponds, rain gardens, and open drainage canals built directly into the natural landscape."¹⁰² There is an existing formal plan of action, written by a consortium of local and national firms, titled the "Urban Water Plan,"¹⁰³ that describes the specifics of planning for environmentally sustainable stormwater management. The New Orleans City Council recently passed a set of building code ordinances that, in addition to requiring design features such as permeable concrete and rain gardens to mitigate flooding, allows developers to opt out of certain design features when impractical if they pay an extra fee.¹⁰⁴ These drainage fees are designated for a green infrastructure fund for projects to be determined. As a first priority, the City Council should designate this funding for construction of natural drainage canals dug into public land (parks, large medians, undeveloped public green space), complete with natural vegetation and aesthetic design features to fit in with the surrounding neighborhood. The low-lying areas of the city should be given priority. Only when all flood elevations are equally protected can the New Orleans landscape become a truly equitable environment.

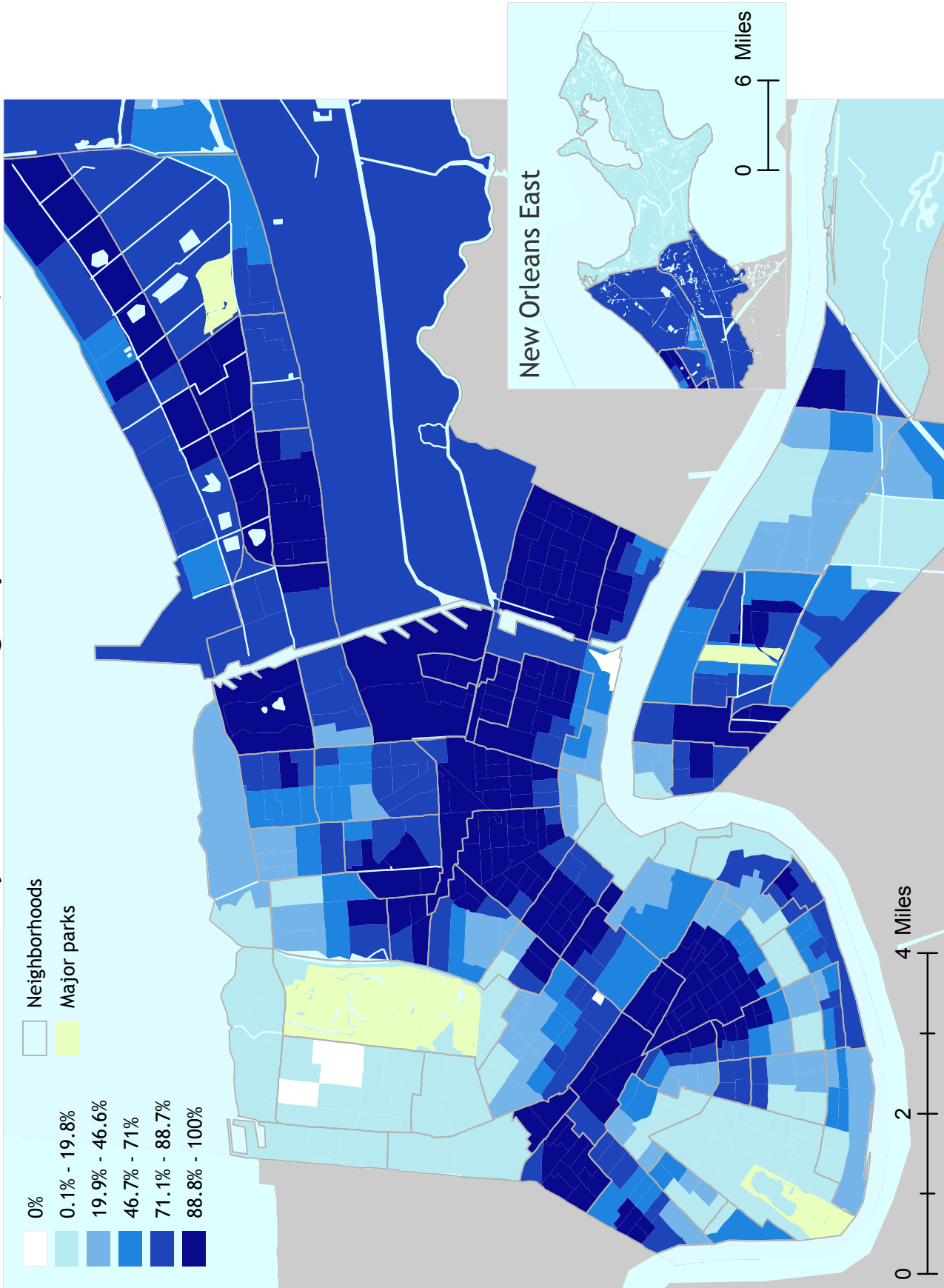
Conclusion

The policies and practices that created a racially separate and unequal housing market in New Orleans, originating at all levels of government and throughout the private market, did not happen overnight. And, racial wealth disparity that has compounded over generations will not be eradicated through isolated policy changes, litigation, or public pronouncements. This is precisely why any redress of historic segregation and inequality requires an unrelenting, coordinated, and singular focus on making our most economically and culturally vibrant neighborhoods equally accessible to everyone. And yet, as recently as early 2018, our City government has failed to require developers to include any affordable housing units in an up-and-coming neighborhood on high ground. And our state is currently considering a bill that would prohibit local governments from acting to remediate historic segregation through inclusionary zoning measures. At worst, these practices appear bent on repeating or building on segregationist policies that facilitate wealth creation for whites and deny health, wealth, and opportunity to blacks. At best, they postpone action that is urgently needed to address re-segregation and isolation of low-income renters and stark racial wealth inequality. Rather than accepting segregation and inequality as an enduring aspect of New Orleans tradition and culture, a most fitting way to celebrate our city's tricentennial would be to pursue a range of policies designed to remediate segregation and foster inclusion.

Redline Map for New Orleans, Louisiana

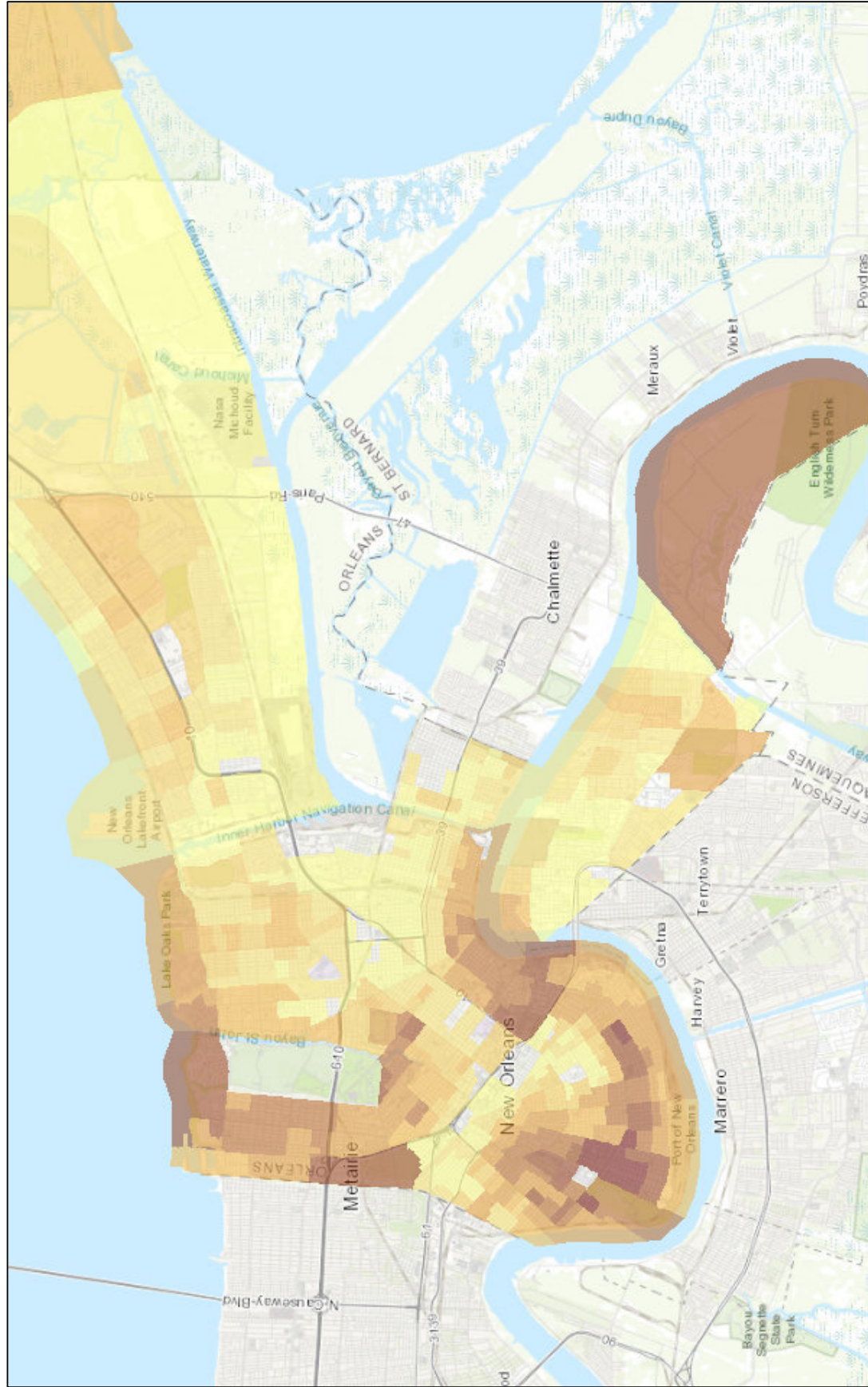


Percent African American by Census block group in Orleans Parish, 2000



Source: U.S. Census Bureau. Census 2000 Full-count Characteristics (SF1). From a compilation by the GNO Community Data Center. <<http://www.gnocdc.org>>
Note: Percent African American is based on the number of people who checked African American, excluding those who checked the ethnicity Hispanic, on their 2000 Census form.

New Orleans Market Value Analysis, 2015



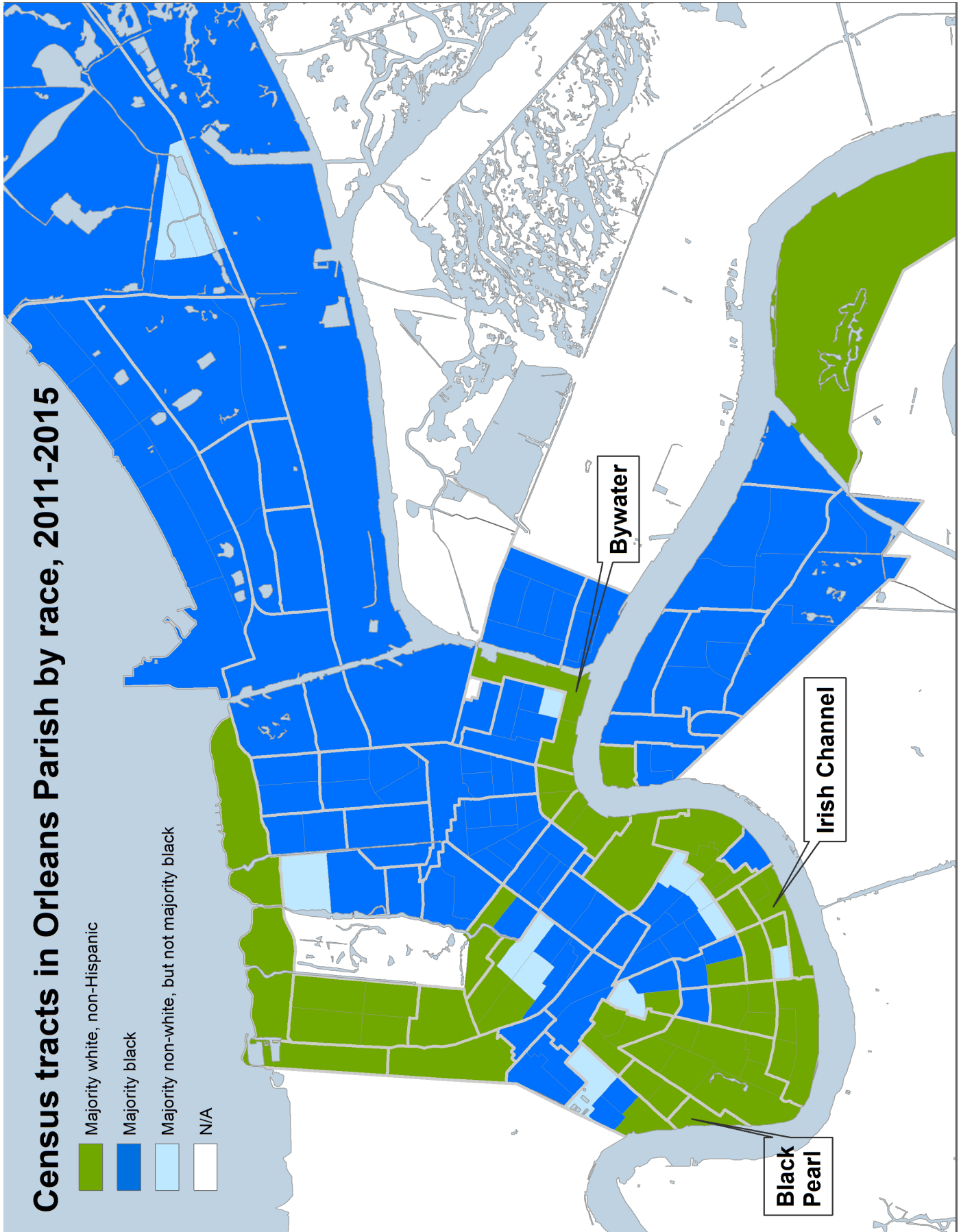
February 15, 2018

Median Sales Price (\$), 2013 - Aug 2015



Sources: Esri, HERE, DeLorme, Intermap, increment P Corp., GEBCO, USGS, FAO, NPS, NRCAN, GeoBase, IGN, Kadaster NL, Ordnance Survey,

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Acknowledgments from the Authors

The authors would like to thank Ellen Lee, David Lessinger, Andreanecia Morris, Alex Polikoff, and Morgan Williams for their valuable comments on an earlier draft of this essay. Special thanks to Kim Glorioso of Tulane Law School for her exceptional research assistance.

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About The Data Center

The Data Center is the most trusted resource for data about greater New Orleans and Southeast Louisiana. Since 1997, The Data Center has been an objective partner in bringing reliable, thoroughly researched data to conversations about building a more prosperous, inclusive, and sustainable region.

The Data Center (formerly known as the Greater New Orleans Community Data Center) became the local authority for tracking post-Katrina recovery with *The New Orleans Index*, developed in partnership with the Brookings Institution.

About The New Orleans Prosperity Index: Tricentennial Collection

The New Orleans Prosperity Index: Tricentennial Collection includes contributions from more than a dozen local scholars. These reports will assess the long reach of historical practices on contemporary policies and practices contributing to today's racial disparities across multiple systems (criminal justice, education, housing, business ownership, health care, etc.), and provide recommendations for furthering future progress. In addition, The Data Center will release a comprehensive set of metrics that address the question: "Have black New Orleanians experienced increased economic inclusion since the end of the Civil Rights era?"

Acknowledgments from The Data Center

Many thanks go to Elaine Ortiz for editorial assistance, and Southpaw Creative for design.

The Data Center wishes to thank the Ford Foundation, JPMorgan Chase Foundation, Surdna Foundation, Entergy Corporation, and the W.K. Kellogg Foundation for their generous support of this inaugural edition of *The New Orleans Prosperity Index*. Additional gratitude goes to Baptist Community Ministries, Foundation for Louisiana, The Keller Family Foundation, Methodist Health System Foundation, RosaMary Foundation, and United Way of Southeast Louisiana for their generous support of the work of The Data Center.

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