ABSTRACT

Title of Dissertation: **RACE, SPACE, AND EQUITY: HOW LOCAL YOUTH, LONGTIME RESIDENT PARENTS, AND LOCAL POLICYMAKERS PERCEIVE AND EXPERIENCE SCHOOL GENTRIFICATION**

Bradley Quarles, Doctor of Philosophy, 2024

Dissertation directed by: Professor Claudia Galindo, Department of Teacher and Learning Policy and Leadership

Public education has become increasingly entwined with gentrification, which involves the transformation of historically underinvested, predominantly minority neighborhoods for middle- and upper-income residential and commercial use. This phenomenon is supported by neoliberal reforms that marketize urban schools, with some policymakers and reformers assuming that these practices will attract parent gentrifiers, who will drive urban school transformation. However, this reform agenda rests on an uneven literature base that primarily highlights the perspectives of parent gentrifiers. This three-paper dissertation applies critical racial and spatial perspectives to three complementary qualitative investigations in Washington, D.C., a critical site of gentrification and market-based education reforms, to deepen our understanding of the relationship between gentrification and educational equity and amplify voices underrepresented in the existing literature.

Study 1, "'It Feels Like the City Pushed Us Aside': Mapping Local Youths' Experiences of Gentrification and Education in Washington, D.C.," draws on data derived from participatory mapping activities and focus groups involving 23 Black and 7 Latinx public high school students.

It explores how these young people depict and utilize space, perceive gentrification's educational and environmental impacts, and construct narratives of belonging and justice in a gentrified city. The analysis delves into how racism, spatial disparities, and various forms of oppression mold the landscapes encountered by local youths, shaping the narratives they construct about themselves and their surroundings. The findings highlight their complex understanding of gentrification as a source of both opportunities and challenges, with many conveying that city leaders view them as disposable. Through their words and maps, a counter-narrative emerges to essentializing discourses that undermine the agency and capacity of local youth to propose policy solutions for improving neighborhood and school dynamics central to their lives.

Study 2, "'A Prisoner's Dilemma: How Longtime Resident Black Parents Navigate School Choice, Gentrification, and Antiblackness," uses retrospective interviews with 19 longtime resident Black parents with deep ties to the community that predate revitalization. It investigates how the intertwined dynamics of race, place, and power influence their experiences of gentrification and decision-making. The findings illuminate the tension between neoliberal school choice policies that assume all families operate in a minimally restrictive marketplace and the racial hostility and spatial disparities constraining Black parents' agency within a gentrified school choice landscape. Instead of empowering families and compelling schools to be more responsive, the study reveals that for many longtime resident parents, school choice bred precarity, offering them "a chance, not a choice," at securing academically rigorous and culturally affirming educational opportunities.

Study 3, "Local Policymakers Sensemaking on Gentrification and Education: Working Towards Equity Across a Contested Landscape," examines how 21 elected officials and education administrators responsible for citywide education reforms process the multiple

messages and sources of influence concerning the competing interests of longtime resident families and parent gentrifiers. The study explores how local policymakers conceptualize whether gentrification enables or constrains educational opportunities throughout Washington, D.C., emphasizing its impact on longtime resident families. Additionally, it investigates how local policymakers' conceptions of race, space, and equity shape their sensemaking of gentrification. The findings challenge simplistic portrayals of all local policymakers as advocates for gentrification catering to parent gentrifiers. Instead, participants voiced a deep commitment to advancing transformative and adequacy notions of equity and centering marginalized families in their decision-making. Transformative policymakers aimed to disrupt racially spatialized disparities, whiteness, and entrenched power dynamics, while adequacy policymakers sought to address inequities within the city's existing policy frameworks. The findings provide insights for urban policy agendas that prioritize the needs of longtime resident families and other racially minoritized, historically disenfranchised communities.

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by

Bradley Quarles

Dissertation submitted to the Faculty of the Graduate School of the
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Advisory Committee:
Professor Claudia Galindo, Advisor and Chair
Associate Professor Tara Brown
Associate Professor Robert Croninger
Professor Jason Farman, Dean's Representative
Professor Molly Vollman Makris

Dedication

For my boys, Wright, Ames, and every other child, especially those from Black, Brown, and historically marginalized families, who deserve communities that cherish and protect them, schools that foster their curiosity, and teachers who recognize their limitless potential.

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I express my deepest gratitude to the participants who generously shared their time, experiences, and insights, on what are, for many, deeply personal issues. I hope this research benefits District families in some meaningful way.

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A special thank you goes out to my non-academic family and friends, whose unwavering support, patience, and understanding have been invaluable. Your encouragement and belief in me never wavered, even during moments of frustration and doubt.

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Introduction

Reforms to make cities more attractive for global investment, business activity, and affluent, predominantly white, and college-educated newcomers with school-aged children, known as parent gentrifiers, are increasingly intertwined with public education reforms (Brown-Saracino, 2017; Vives Miró, 2011). These reforms are part of the broader process of gentrification, wherein market-driven policy frameworks that commodify public goods like education and exploit rent gaps to inject targeted public-private investments transform historically underinvested, majority-minority neighborhoods for middle- and upper-income residential and commercial use (Smith, 1996).

The convergence of gentrification and neoliberal ideologies has profoundly reshaped educational landscapes in urban areas, particularly over the last 30 years.[1] Schools become marketable neighborhood amenities aligned with neoliberal choice, competition, and accountability principles. While research stops short of establishing a direct causal link, it suggests that expanding school choice options, revising student assignment policies, reconstituting low-performing schools by significantly changing staff or the educational model, or privatizing low-performing schools through charter school conversion are pivotal factors in persuading parent gentrifiers to relocate to neighborhoods in the early stages of gentrification and contemplate enrolling their children in public schools (Cucchiara, 2013; Good, 2017; Johnson, 2013).

[1] Since the mid-1990s, federal initiatives have significantly accelerated state-sponsored gentrification. For instance, HOPE VI, a United States Department of Housing and Urban Development program to convert public housing projects into mixed-income developments, awarded 254 revitalization grants to 132 housing authorities between 1993 and 2010 (U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development, 2010). Additionally, initiatives such as the U.S. Department of Education's Promise Neighborhoods, Empowerment Zones, Business Improvement Districts, and mortgage industry deregulation have all played roles in targeted redevelopment efforts in previously disinvested urban areas (Crowley, 2009; Davis & Oakley, 2013).

This perspective assumes that by loosening the tie between neighborhood and school quality, expanding school choice will empower longtime resident parents—Black parents and other racialized people of color with deep community ties predating revitalization—to "escape" low-performing schools and secure the "right" educational fit for their children, operating within a minimally restrictive and responsive educational marketplace (Scott, 2013; Siegel-Hawley et al., 2016). This policy rationale also suggests parent gentrifiers will utilize their resources to reshape urban school communities, imparting valuable capital to longtime resident families (Joseph & Feldman, 2009). Consequently, reformers anticipate that local youth—the children of longtime residents—will experience significant academic performance gains and improved social and emotional well-being by attending schools with superior resources, teachers, and standards and residing in revitalized neighborhoods with reduced crime rates (Kahlenberg, 2001).

Literature at the intersection of gentrification and education has primarily focused on parent gentrifiers' schooling decisions and experiences. Synthesizing much of this scholarship (e.g., Butler, 2021; Freidus, 2019; Stillman, 2012), Posey-Maddox et al. (2014) introduced the term "school gentrification" (p. 454) to describe parent gentrifiers' effects on urban schools. This framework characterizes school gentrification as a process in which the influx of affluent newcomers brings about improvements in facilities, programming, and overall school climate, leading to the exclusion of racially and economically minoritized students and families. Nevertheless, while extensive analysis exists on the influence and actions of parent gentrifiers, significant questions persist regarding how other key constituencies experience and interpret this urban restructuring.

In particular, our understanding of how local youth conceptualize and experience gentrification and the strategies longtime resident Black parents employ in navigating gentrified school choice markets remains incomplete. Although emergent scholarship has explored how principals and other school leaders mediate these processes (Diem et al., 2019; Green et al., 2023; Roda, 2020), the nuanced perspectives of local policymakers—the education administrators and elected officials responsible for planning and adopting system-wide reforms—within gentrifying municipalities have also received relatively less attention. Additionally, while research on gentrification and education have emphasized the phenomenon's class-based dynamics, it often manifests as a racialized project (Smith & Stovall, 2008). Failing to acknowledge that the economic restructuring of neighborhoods and cities for affluent, predominantly white interests necessitates the displacement of Black people and other marginalized people of color risks obscuring the power imbalances that enable this transformation and shape the politics of urban schools (Butler & Boggs, 2023; Green et al., 2022; Jenkins, 2020; Rucks-Ahidiana, 2022). Slater (2006) and others have characterized the field's inattentiveness to these lines of inquiry as an "eviction of critical perspectives" (p. 738) in gentrification scholarship, emphasizing a tendency to study the phenomenon without delving into the racially spatialized power structures that unevenly position residents to either benefit from or be adversely affected by gentrification (Harvey, 2008; Lipman, 2011; Newman & Wyly, 2006).

The field's limited accounting of these considerations underscores the need for a recalibrated research agenda that balances the perspectives of parent gentrifiers with other key interest groups affected by gentrification's multifaceted social, economic, political, and educational impacts. A thorough examination of these undertheorized dimensions is crucial for a nuanced comprehension of gentrification and both its potential drawbacks and advantages. By

attending to these essential gaps, researchers can offer insights beyond the field's prevailing methodologies, foster a more comprehensive and inclusive discourse on gentrification, and identify policy solutions to foster equitable systems of support and inclusive educational environments for all families.

This dissertation responds to Slater's (2006) call to recenter critical perspectives in gentrification scholarship through three related qualitative studies, which took place in Washington, D.C. Focusing on key constituencies underrepresented in the existing literature, this dissertation centers Black and Latinx local youth (Chapter 2), Black longtime resident parents (Chapter 3), and local policymakers responsible for planning and enacting citywide education reforms (Chapter 4). This dissertation's conceptual framework employs sensemaking (Spillane et al., 2002; Weick) and critical race and space perspectives, including critical spatial studies (Lefebvre, 2011; Soja, 2010), critical geographies of education (Gulson, 2007; Nguyen et al., 2017), Black Critical Theory (Dumas & ross, 2016; McKittrick, 2011), and borderland studies (Anzaldúa, 2012; Blackburn, 2005). Sensemaking examines how social actors and groups interpret information, draw upon existing knowledge and mental models, construct narratives, and respond to change and uncertainty (Ganon-Shilon & Schechter, 2017; Sutherland, 2020). This lens, grounded in organizational theory and psychology, sheds light on the cognitive and emotional aspects of one's decision-making and adaptation (Coburn, 2001). Simultaneously, critical race and space perspectives offer a framework to scrutinize the structural and systemic inequalities embedded in gentrification and emphasizes the racial dynamics, spatial changes, and power imbalances that shape these urban transformations (Delaney, 2002; Lipsitz, 2007; Soja, 2010). Together, these perspectives enable a comprehensive exploration of participants' micro-level experiences and macro-level structural forces at play in gentrification.

Washington, D.C.: A Hotbed of School Gentrification

Washington, D.C., emerges as a pivotal site for studying the intersection of gentrification and education, propelled by recent demographic shifts and economic disparities, partly accelerated by marketized education reforms, which have exacerbated racial tensions (Ruble, 2010). Since the early 2000s, the city has undergone rapid changes, drawing a wave of young, affluent, and white newcomers through extensive public and private investments (Asch & Musgrove, 2015). Once known as "Chocolate City" with a Black majority, the influx of white gentrifiers has reshaped its economic, spatial, and demographic landscape, earning it the new moniker of the "Cappuccino City" and designation as one of America's most gentrified cities (Hyra, 2017). These changes have exacerbated spatial disparities, with predominantly Black households facing economic challenges in areas East of the River. Conversely, regions west of the river, where many gentrifiers reside, have experienced significant development and investment, further intensifying economic pressures and displacement risks for Latinx residents in parts of Northwest D.C. and Black residents citywide (Washington DC Economic Partnership, 2021). The racialized "East of the River" signifier highlights the city's stark divisions, making it a compelling locale for studying how gentrification intersects with race, space, and education.

Washington, D.C.'s, education landscape is central to its gentrification narrative as the city utilizes its public school system to attract newcomers (Barras, 2010). The District of Columbia offers a robust marketplace of intra-district choice to any District of Columbia Public School or more than 100 public charter schools; nearly half of the city's 100,000 students attend a public charter school (Office of the State Superintendent of Education, 2023). Furthermore, Washington, D.C.'s comprehensive preschool programs may serve as an economic incentive for affluent families considering relocation to one of the nation's priciest cities (Greenberg et al.,

2020). City leaders' alterations to student assignment policies, favoring neighborhood schools and high-performing schools in specific feeder patterns, prompt questions about equity, particularly given spatially racialized school performance disparities between affluent and white, West of the River areas, and primarily Black, low-income East of the River areas (Brown, 2014; Coffin & Rubin, 2023). Moreover, the city's distinctive governance structure, involving multiple agencies with city and state oversight responsibilities, adds complexity to the study, necessitating exploration of the varied sensemaking of actors representing different institutions (National Research Council, 2015).

The city's local youth experience these dynamics as border crossers, navigating and inhabiting multiple social, cultural, and geographical boundaries within gentrified urban spaces (Ramírez, 2020). Many regularly traverse various physical and symbolic borders, such as those between gentrified and marginalized neighborhoods, and straddle multiple social interactions as they navigate schooling communities that may embrace or pathologize their social practices. These experiences give local youth valuable insights into the intricate social interactions and conflicts that gentrification produces.

The city's unique position at the crossroads of abundant resources and potential disparities renders it a microcosm for understanding the broader implications of the relationship between gentrification and educational equity. The racialized and spatialized nature of its transformations provides a rich tapestry for scholars and policymakers to unravel, offering insights that extend beyond the city's borders.

Lastly, the site selection for this dissertation is motivated by my experiences as Black man and gentrifier, working in Washington, D.C.'s education sector for 15 years. I have witnessed profound transformations that have reshaped my personal and professional

attachments to specific neighborhoods and schools. I have engaged in countless conversations with local youth and their families about the causes and consequences of gentrification. Moreover, I have observed colleagues at various local government agencies work diligently to ensure all families, especially those belonging to Black and other racialized communities of color, can access the resources they deserve and have a meaningful voice in district policymaking. However, I noticed that the prevailing neighborhood and school gentrification often failed to represent their perspectives adequately. Additionally, while gentrification in Washington, D.C., has garnered considerable scholarly attention, few studies have elevated the voices of the city's young people. By situating this research in a place I have come to love, I aim to broaden our understanding of school gentrification and amplify the incisive and nuanced stories that have shaped my understanding of this phenomenon.

Dissertation Overview

This dissertation utilizes qualitative data collected between 2019 and 2021 through three interrelated studies to scrutinize the policy narrative that gentrification fosters equity (Byrne, 2003; Whyte, 2010). It aims to highlight underrepresented perspectives and delve into the intricate dynamics between urban development, demographic shifts, and the educational encounters of diverse student populations. The first study, "'It feels like the city pushed us aside': Mapping Local Youths' Experiences of Gentrification and Education in Washington, D.C.," draws on data derived from participatory mapping activities and focus groups involving 23 Black and 7 Latinx local high-school-aged youth. It explores how these young people depict and utilize space, perceive gentrification's educational and environmental impacts, and construct narratives of belonging and justice in a gentrified city. The analysis delves into how racism, spatial disparities, and various forms of oppression mold the landscapes encountered by local youths, shaping the narratives they

construct about themselves and their surroundings. The findings highlight their complex understanding of gentrification as a source of both opportunities and challenges, with many conveying that city leaders view them as disposable. Through their words and maps, a counter-narrative emerges to essentializing discourses that undermine the agency and capacity of local youth to propose policy solutions for improving neighborhood and school dynamics central to their lives (Cammarota & Fine, 2008; Coles, 2023; Gordon et al., 2016).

The second study, "'A prisoner's dilemma: How longtime resident Black parents navigate school choice, gentrification, and antiblackness," uses retrospective interviews with 19 longtime resident Black parents. It investigates how the intertwined dynamics of race, place, and power influence their experiences of gentrification and decision-making (Bell, 2009; Lipsitz, 2007). The findings illuminate the tension between neoliberal school choice policies that assume all families operate in a minimally restrictive marketplace and the racial hostility and spatial disparities constraining Black parents' agency within a gentrified school choice landscape. Instead of empowering families and compelling schools to be more responsive, the study reveals that for many longtime resident parents, school choice bred precarity, offering them "a chance, not a choice" at securing academically rigorous and culturally affirming educational opportunities.

The third study, "Local Policymakers Sensemaking on Gentrification and Education: Working Towards Equity Across a Contested Landscape," examines how 21 elected officials and education administrators responsible for citywide education reforms process the multiple messages and sources of influence concerning the competing interests of longtime resident families and parent gentrifiers. The study explores how local policymakers conceptualize whether gentrification enables or constrains educational opportunities throughout Washington, D.C., emphasizing its impact on longtime resident families. Additionally, it investigates how

local policymakers' conceptions of race, space, and equity shape their sensemaking of gentrification. The findings challenge simplistic portrayals of all local policymakers as advocates for gentrification catering to parent gentrifiers. Instead, participants voiced a deep commitment to advancing transformative and adequacy notions of equity and centering marginalized families in their decision-making (DeCuir & Dixson, 2004; Rice, 2004). Transformative policymakers aimed to disrupt racially spatialized disparities, whiteness, and entrenched power dynamics, while adequacy policymakers sought to address inequities within the city's existing policy frameworks. The findings provide insights for urban policy agendas that prioritize the needs of longtime resident families and other racially minoritized, historically disenfranchised communities.

Altogether, this dissertation centers on the experiences of those at risk of being marginalized by gentrification, supplementing their voices with leaders who play a central role in structuring the local educational policy context. It explores how recent reforms may exacerbate the challenges longtime resident families confront as they pursue high-quality and humanizing schooling environments. In doing so, it deepens our understanding of contextual factors influencing perceptions and experiences of gentrification and the limitations of seeking educational equity through school gentrification. The final chapter of this dissertation enumerates its contributions to the field and outlines directions for future research.

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Study 1. "It Feels Like the City Pushed Us Aside": Mapping Local Youths' Experiences of Gentrification and Education in Washington, D.C.

Many policy circles have heralded gentrification as a catalyst for urban revitalization, characterized by targeted public-private investments and an influx of predominantly white, middle-class newcomers, termed gentrifiers, into previously disinvested urban neighborhoods (Byrne, 2003; Whyte, 2010). Building upon this broader reform agenda, researchers and policymakers in central cities across America have increasingly advocated for market-based education reforms to attract parent gentrifiers to urban schools, with the hope that they will spark positive transformations in chronically underperforming schools and districts (Billingham, 2015; Cucchiara, 2013). While a growing body of literature acknowledges the contributions that gentrifiers with school-aged children, known as parent gentrifiers, make to these schools, it also underscores the variable and sometimes negative impacts of their presence in urban education markets (Posey-Maddox et al., 2014a). This literature has prioritized the perspectives of parent gentrifiers and reflects what Billingham and Kimelberg (2013) describe as "a myopic perspective on the life cycles of middle-class urbanites" (p. 86). With limited studies centering on local youth, referring to the predominantly Black and Latinx children of longtime residents with deep community ties that extend before gentrification, lingering questions remain concerning how these young people navigate the increasingly pervasive process of gentrification, which is transforming their neighborhoods and schools.

The present paper addresses this gap through findings from a participatory mapping activity and post-mapping focus groups with 30 Black[2] and Latinx[3] public high school students in Washington, D.C., where marketized education reforms have been instrumental in gentrification. While extensive scholarship has studied gentrification in Washington, D.C., local youths' experiences amid these transformations have received less attention. Participatory mapping invites participants to visually represent their knowledge and experiences of their environment (Bryan, 2011). It is particularly effective with young people, fostering empowerment, spatial awareness, and cultural relevance, thereby enhancing research inclusivity and quality (Gordon et al., 2016; Literat, 2013). Grounded in place-based scholarship (Young, 1999), which recognizes young people's unique local knowledge, this research positions youth of color as expert informants about the spaces they embody and whose voices are crucial for envisioning equitable communities (Jenkins, 2022).[4] The conceptual framework draws on critical race and space perspectives, including critical spatial studies (Soja, 2010), borderland studies

[2] This paper follows Dumas (2016) by capitalizing "Black" to honor it as a self-determined identity for a racialized social group with a shared history. In contrast, I do not capitalize "blackness," "antiblackness," or "whiteness," as the meanings of these social constructions are ever shifting in order to maintain the social order of white supremacy (Liu et al., 2023).

[3] This paper adopts "Latinx" as a pan-ethnic term for individuals of Latin American, South American, Central American, or Spanish cultural descent, using 'x' to include diverse identities beyond the binary of man and woman. Scholars and activists regard "Latinx" as reclaiming identity from imposed European traditions in the Americas (Scharron-Del Rio & Aja, 2015; Reichard, 2015). "Latinx" emerged in the early 2000s as a gender-neutral alternative to "Latino/a" and "Hispanic." While some use "Latino/a" or "Hispanic" to refer to individuals from Spanish-speaking nations (Lopez, et al., 2023), others distinguish between them, associating "Latino/a" with those from Latin America and "Hispanic" with individuals culturally tied to Spanish-speaking heritage (Alcoff, 2005). Additionally, although the Census Bureau employs "Hispanic" to differentiate America's white population ("non-Hispanic White"), it proposed in 2023 to change how government surveys measure race and ethnicity in acknowledgment of varied self-identification preferences (Office of Information and Regulatory Affairs, Office of Management and Budget, Executive Office of the President, 2023).

[4] This paper uses the terms "space" and "place" interchangeably to refer to geographical locations or areas, with "space" often emphasizing physical dimensions and "place" highlighting the social and cultural significance attributed to a specific location. This usage aligns with critical geographic scholarship, where space" denotes a location's abstract, geometric aspect, and "place" encompasses the lived experiences, meanings, and social interactions associated with that space (Lefebvre, 2011). This research does not focus on delineating between the theoretical constructions of space and place but rather on understanding the broader socio-spatial dynamics within gentrifying contexts. Therefore, any disconnection between these concepts is not central to the present study's objectives.

(Anzaldúa, 2012), and Black Critical Theory (BlackCrit; Coles, 2019) to dissect the intricate intersections of race, space, and power within gentrified urban environments. These approaches illuminate how young people navigate and negotiate physical and symbolic borders while shedding light on the structural inequalities and power dynamics that shape their neighborhood and schooling experiences amidst gentrification (Green, 2015; Ramírez, 2020). Two research questions guide the investigation.

1. *How do local youth navigate and utilize public space in a gentrified city?*
2. *What narratives of belonging, displacement, and justice emerge from local youths' perceptions of gentrification's educational and environmental effects?*

The perspectives of these local youths encapsulate both the promise and peril of gentrification. While they welcomed the introduction of new and revitalized amenities, which enriched their social and leisure opportunities, gentrification also engendered a sense of marginalization. Policies aimed at attracting and retaining gentrifiers normalized the social practices of this coveted demographic and positioned local youths as the racialized other in their own communities. Despite the increasing enrollment of parent gentrifiers' children in the city's elementary schools, local youths felt gentrification had not enhanced their schooling experiences. In sum, the experiences of local youths reflect the complex interplay of social, spatial, and cultural conflicts inherent in gentrifying communities and shed light on the limitations of market-driven approaches to promoting educational equity.

Literature Review

Broadly, I situate this paper within the discourse on gentrification and displacement, with a focus on the experiences of local youth. The displacement discourse centers on two interconnected dimensions—physical and symbolic (Zuk et al., 2018). Physical displacement

involves the involuntary relocation of residents due to factors like rising rents and redevelopment efforts (Newman & Wyly, 2006). Symbolic displacement pertains to the erosion of longtime residents' cultural, social, and historical ties to their neighborhoods, which result from shifts in neighborhood dynamics and demographics (Marcuse, 1985). Both dimensions are integral to understanding the impacts of gentrification on communities and how local youth navigate these dynamics.

More specifically, this paper engages with two complementary literature bases that challenge the policy rhetoric suggesting gentrification benefits local youth uniformly (Diem et al., 2019). The first literature base examines the school-level effects of gentrification, primarily drawing from studies that center on parent gentrifiers, which has been the primary focus in exploring this phenomenon. The second literature base considers the neighborhood effects of gentrification on local youth. The tensions documented in this research underscore the complexity of gentrification's impact on educational opportunities and highlight the focus of this paper on theorizing the experiences of local youth within evolving urban landscapes.

School Gentrification

Three underlying assumptions support the policy rationale that an influx of middle-class families into urban education markets will enhance local youth's neighborhood and schooling experiences. First, it assumes that local youth and their families will benefit from the presence of gentrifiers through a "trickle-down" effect, wherein gentrifiers serve as role models and provide pathways to middle-class cultural capital and opportunity structures (Lipman, 2011). Second, the policy logic suggests that privatization, expansion of school choice, and increased accountability measures will incentivize parent gentrifiers to enroll their children in neighborhood schools, leveraging their social, cultural, and economic capital to advocate for better resources, teachers,

and academic standards, ultimately benefiting all students, particularly local youth (Siegel-Hawley et al., 2016). Third, it posits that environmental improvements, such as park restorations and increased availability of healthy food options, alongside reductions in neighborhood crime common in gentrifying areas, will positively impact local youths' social and emotional well-being, as well as their academic performance (Gould & Lewis, 2017).

While parent gentrifiers' material and financial capital have significantly transformed certain schools, how they deploy their capital and exacerbate inequalities between and within schools. Parent gentrifiers tend to concentrate in elementary schools with a critical mass of like-minded families (Posey-Maddox et al., 2014b). This concentration exacerbates school inequalities by reducing the number of schools that could benefit from parent gentrifiers' advocacy and contributions. Furthermore, this clustering tendency restricts opportunities for local youth to interact with the children of parent gentrifiers and exchange social capital. Parent gentrifiers' tendency to reside in the catchment zones of prestigious schools leaves fewer available seats for local youth, who often rely on charter school lotteries for placement (Billingham, 2015; Makris, 2018). Additionally, many parent gentrifiers opt out of the system before their children reach middle and high school, citing concerns about the increased racial and class diversity within the wider attendance boundaries of these schools as a threat to their children's futures (Butler, 2021; Mann & Rogers, 2023). This withdrawal not only divests their capital from secondary schools but also perpetuates ahistorical and racialized narratives that dismiss the structural barriers impeding the success of Black and low-income students and instead portray these students as inherently deficient.

Local youth and their families often encounter heightened marginalization in the schools where parent gentrifiers choose to enroll their children (Sattin-Bajaj & Roda, 2020). Parent

gentrifiers' often exclude them from their insular social networks (Stillman, 2012). Research conducted by Reay and colleagues (2007, 2011) in London indicates that when parent gentrifiers encourage their children to interact with local youth, they often seek out those whose families they perceive as embodying normative white middle-class values. They believe these interactions will help develop their children's "multicultural capacity" to engage with diverse communities. By reducing local youth to their exchange value for their children, such parent gentrifiers reinforce paternalistic attitudes toward marginalized communities and reflect an exotic gaze that ignores the richness and complexity of diverse communities (Butler & Sinclair, 2020; Ho et al., 2015).[5] This superficial engagement with diversity provides helpful context for research findings that highlight how parent gentrifiers' self-interests often lead to disproportionate struggles for local youth and their families in accessing accelerated learning opportunities (DeSena & Ansalone, 2009), advocating for specific curricular changes (Sherman & Schafft, 2022), or influencing the allocation of fundraising dollars (Cucchiara, 2013). Moreover, significant academic performance improvements for local youth attending gentrifying schools remain elusive (Pearman, 2019).

Posey-Maddox and colleagues' (2014a) conceptualization of school gentrification captures these dynamics, suggesting a critical mass of parent gentrifiers in urban schools leads to material improvements, cultural shifts within the school, and the exclusion of local youth and their families who were traditionally part of the school community. Other scholars have described school gentrification as a form of colonization, where reformers commodify diversity

[5] The term "exotic gaze" refers to looking at or perceiving people, cultures, or places considered unfamiliar or different from one's own, often through a lens of fascination or curiosity (Butler & Sinclair, 2020; Ho et al., 2015). It typically involves viewing these individuals or cultures as exotic or foreign in ways that emphasize their perceived strangeness or otherness. This gaze can be rooted in stereotypes, prejudices, or preconceived notions about the supposed exotic qualities of the observed subjects. It can also reflect a colonial or imperialist mindset, where the observer positions themselves as superior or more civilized than those they perceive as exotic. Overall, the exotic gaze can contribute to a community's objectification, fetishization, or dehumanization.

as a marketing tool and discard racially minoritized bodies, all in the pursuit of serving affluent white interests (Green et al., 2022; Ho et al., 2015).

Neighborhood Gentrification

Limited school-based interactions with gentrifiers highlight the need to explore how local high school-aged youths perceive and navigate the neighborhood effects of gentrification. Much previous research has focused on youths' access to neighborhood amenities such as retail establishments and public spaces. Findings suggest that while local youth appreciate new amenities, financial barriers limit access (Makris, 2015). Additionally, bureaucratic decisions may prioritize gentrifiers' access to public amenities, potentially restricting local youths' usage (Posey-Maddox et al., 2014a). Studies conducted in Washington, D.C. have shown public officials permitting municipal athletic facilities for recreational adult sports leagues for gentrifiers, thereby hindering local youths from using these areas at convenient times and favoring development projects that benefit gentrifiers while neglecting public spaces used by local youths (Modan, 2007).

As gentrifying municipalities prioritize economic development, they often overlook initiatives to maintain and expand public spaces, favoring revenue-generating projects like commercial developments and tourism-focused attractions (Vives Miró, 2011). Public parks, recreational spaces, and community gathering spaces vital for social cohesion and individual well-being may be neglected or replaced by commercial ventures. This shift in priorities can have significant consequences for local youth, potentially leading to social isolation or reliance on privately owned spaces like retail districts for recreation and social interaction. Researchers have suggested that local youth make commercial properties like malls their own through their

mere presence and enactment of social norms . Yet, these spaces require teens to navigate the expectations of retail management and security personnel (Matthews et al., 2000).

Moreover, property rights holders, including gentrifiers, wield significant influence over the experiences of local youths in gentrified areas through citizen-based policing. This practice entails residents or authorities with an economic interest in dictating space usage, monitoring and reporting perceived inappropriate behaviors like loud music and loitering to law enforcement or non-emergency authorities (Harris et al., 2020). Justifying increased policing to accommodate newcomers, who property rights holders anticipate will use desirable spaces more 'justly' and responsibly, citizen-based policing can subject local youth to increased levels of violence and crime (Hanhardt, 2013).

These pressures may contradict local youths' sense of belonging and right to the city (Ramírez, 2020). Despite the desire for safe and quality public spaces, the absence of such spaces signals their exclusion (Barrett, 2021). Furthermore, heightened law enforcement monitoring of local youth criminalizes the practices and processes central to their spatial attachments (Kinloch, 2010). These observations provide crucial context to understand why local youth in gentrifying areas fear both neighborhood crime and state violence (Convertino, 2022). As Shedd (2015) explains, "Safety means different things to different people, particularly to young people of color who disproportionately feel harassed by the police" (p. 31). Central to this study is understanding how local youth make sense of citizen-based policing and other threats to their right to the city.

Additionally, some local youth may perceive redeveloped areas as "white spaces" (Anderson, 2015, p. 10), which demand conformity to white gentrifiers' norms or avoidance. This phenomenon underscores Purcell's (2014) observation that in urban areas worldwide, property rights often outweigh the usage rights of inhabitants, with property value dictating

usage more than the inherent utility. This paper extends existing scholarship by examining how local youths make sense of these tensions, deepening our understanding of the contextual factors influencing their perceptions and experiences of gentrification and critically analyzing the policy rationale promoting gentrification as a solution to urban schools' persistent challenges.

Conceptual Framework

This paper employs critical spatial studies (Soja, 2010), borderland studies (Anzaldúa, 2012), and BlackCrit (Coles, 2019) to explore how the interaction of race, space, and power shapes local youths' sensemaking and lived experiences. By examining the intricate intersections of these frameworks, I aim to uncover how gentrification impacts young peoples' spatial and social realities and shed light on the complexities of their experiences within rapidly changing urban landscapes.

A foundational principle of critical spatial studies asserts that all spaces are socially constructed (Cresswell, 1996). A critical spatial lens unveils that cities are ongoing arenas of contestation shaped by intersecting and conflicting ideologies. Cities have a material interest in engineering spaces that represent a particular future for particular citizens who live specific lives. This vision often conflicts with the actions and ideals of the local actors who inhabit these spaces, which Lefebvre (2011) refers to as the "clandestine or underground of social life" (p. 3). These conflicting spatial representations lend to property owners and policymakers marking some bodies as safe and others as unwelcome. This contestation often favors property owners' rights over those of marginalized residents, resulting in varying degrees of inclusion and exclusion for different individuals (Purcell, 2014). Acknowledging these tensions proves helpful in contextualizing the differential status in gentrifying schools of the children of parent gentrifiers as "valued customers" (Cucchiara, 2013, p. 80) and local youth as dispensable.

In particular, the critical spatial concept of affective displacement is a valuable lens for this paper as it supplements the perspective's tendency to overlook emotional and affective responses to spatial changes. Butcher and Dickens (2016) conceptualize affective displacement as a feeling of no longer "feeling at home" or "fitting in" (p. 804). This tool helps comprehend how local youth might react to attempts to impose spatial representations on places to which they have deep emotional connections. Strong ties to a place can foster community solidarity and empathy, yet feeling disconnected from a place's cultural norms may lead to discomfort, unarticulated unease, or even embarrassment in adapting to new environments (Jones & Evans, 2012). As they navigate evolving cultural landscapes and contend with feelings of displacement and exclusion, local youths' affective responses profoundly shape their sense of belonging and interactions within gentrified neighborhoods (Convertino, 2022; Ramírez, 2020). However, while critical spatial studies broadly and affective displacement specifically attend to the contestation and conflicting ideologies that emerge within urban spaces and their associated emotional responses, this focus on spatial constructs gives short shrift to the interplay of cultural, social, and political factors that shape individuals' lives within gentrifying contexts.

I leverage borderland studies to bridge this gap and ensure the analysis attends to the liminal intersections of local youths' identities and experiences and the embodied geographies of displacement, belonging, and resistance within gentrified neighborhoods (Ramírez, 2020). This emphasis contrasts with affective displacement, which may focus more on the emotional response of individuals without always exploring their agency and adaptive strategies. Anzaldúa (2012) describes the borderland as an emotionally charged and dynamic zone where cultural norms, policies, and the built environment create boundaries, which dictate whose presence is desirable and whose the state should criminalize. The borderland illuminates the precariousness

many local youths experience as they negotiate gentrification's shifting neighborhood and school contexts and reveals the strategies they employ to resist cultural erasure and displacement (Ramírez, 2020; Rucks-Ahidiana, 2022). This framework also explores how local youth grapple with questions of belonging and displacement, moving through physical, social, and psychological borderlands, where they confront heightened vulnerability to hyper-criminalization and the erosion of their rights in gentrifying communities, which contest their presence (Harris et al., 2020).

I use the borderland analytic to conceptualize local youth as border crossers who perpetually confront cultural erasure and to interrogate the implications of gentrification's entrenched frontier myth. As depicted by Smith (1996), the frontier myth draws parallels between the displacement of indigenous peoples during America's 19th-century westward expansion and the contemporary racialized displacement of longtime residents. It portrays gentrifiers as pioneering "homesteaders," discovering and revitalizing neglected urban areas, signaling safety for others to follow. This myth rationalizes the displacement of longtime residents, framing gentrification as a natural progression. However, by centering the experiences of those at risk of displacement, a borderland analytic challenges the notion that gentrification is inevitable and that longtime resident communities are inherently disposable (Ramírez, 2020). Yet, while challenging the inevitability of gentrification, the borderland analytic lacks a sharp focus on the intricate racial dynamics at play. Accordingly, I integrate a BlackCrit perspective to emphasize how gentrification disproportionately harms Black and Latinx communities and reinforces racial power structures that dispossess them of land, resources, and cultural heritage.

BlackCrit, drawing from critical race theory (Bell, 2004; Ladson-Billings & Tate, 2006), provides a lens for analyzing the systemic racism inherent in gentrification processes (Jenkins,

2022). It sheds light on how gentrification disproportionately impacts Black and Latinx communities and perpetuates historical patterns of marginalization and exclusion (Rucks-Ahidiana, 2022). Furthermore, BlackCrit underscores the role of power structures in shaping urban landscapes, offering an analytical framework to examine how affluent white newcomers normalize their behaviors, efforts, and discursive practices in gentrifying schools and neighborhoods (Coles, 2019). This perspective highlights how the privileges and power afforded by dominant racial group membership enable white families to assert preferential treatment and legitimize their actions (Harris, 1993), facilitating the dispossession of marginalized communities' land, resources, and cultural heritage. BlackCrit provides a mechanism for interrogating how the commodification of gentrifying urban spaces to serve affluent and white economic interests engrains racial hierarchies and invisible norms central to local youths' sense of self and justice. I also utilize BlackCrit to analyze the experiences of Latinx youth. This decision reflects the recognition that each Latinx participant discussed gentrification's unique impact on Black residents. For instance, Jose's assertion that gentrification is "really about getting rid of the Black community" demonstrates an acute understanding of how antiblackness has shaped America's urban geographies.

Together, critical spatial studies, borderland studies, and BlackCrit offer a comprehensive framework for understanding local youth's perceptions of gentrification, which they may view as both a sign of revitalization and a struggle for their right to the city. This framework highlights the cultural vibrancy and resistance inherent in contested spaces, where youth leverage diverse cultural traditions to contest spatial changes and assert their presence. By focusing on local youths' spatial practices and agency, this framework underscores their role in redefining public spaces where boundaries become blurred. Moreover, it exposes structural inequalities

underpinning gentrification, including how the distribution of amenities and infrastructure reflects and reinforces existing power dynamics, influencing local youths' educational experiences and avenues for resistance. Ultimately, it facilitates examining how racial and spatial assumptions shape youths' perceptions of belonging and justice across contested landscapes.

Methods

Study Context

This paper presents findings from a participatory mapping activity and focus groups with Black and Latinx public high school students in Washington, D.C. Over the past two decades, targeted public-private investments and the marketization of public services, including public education, have fundamentally reshaped the city (Butler, 2021). Despite increasing diversity, with the return of white and affluent residents, particularly to areas north of the Anacostia River that splits D.C., racial and economic segregation persists across most of the city's neighborhoods and schools (Mann et al., 2020). Some city leaders have long aimed to attract parent gentrifiers through student assignment policies that prioritize neighborhood schools (Barras, 2010; Gibson, 2015). A practice that disproportionately benefits residents in northern parts of the city where the highest-performing schools, according to state accountability ratings, are (DC Policy Center, 2022). The country's most comprehensive universal preschool program and a robust educational marketplace, with nearly half its 100,000 public school students attending charter schools, may have accelerated gentrification in certain areas by attracting parent gentrifiers to the city and expanding school choice (Coffin & Rubin, 2023; Greenberg et al., 2020). Development projects, mainly in northeast and northwest D.C., have further increased the appeal of these areas compared to historically Latinx pockets of northwest D.C. and predominantly low-income Black neighborhoods "East of the River," which have experienced less investment than the rest of the

city (Hyra, 2017; Washington DC Economic Partnership, 2021). Amidst this segregation, local youth are border crossers, with many commuting from their underinvested communities to schools in affluent and gentrified neighborhoods and regularly encountering the physical and symbolic boundaries produced by gentrification, which signal who belongs and who does not.

Recruitment and Participants

I recruited participants through a variety of formal and informal networks. I contacted non-profit directors, state officials, local education administrators, and school leaders to recruit participants for this study. Two focus groups emerged from partnerships with civic leadership and youth activism groups, consisting of seven and five local youth, respectively. Additionally, I collaborated with two high schools in different D.C. areas, engaging seniors in civics electives. One focus group comprised five students from a traditional public high school East of the River while another involved three students from a public charter high school located in a gentrified northwest D.C. neighborhood. Neither school had experienced school gentrification with over 80 percent of their student populations being economically disadvantaged and over 90 percent students of color. Furthermore, two focus groups, each with two participants, resulted from the involvement of longtime resident Black parents who encouraged their children to participate. The remaining two focus groups, each with three participants, stemmed from local youth encouraging their friends to join. It is important to note that this sampling strategy did not include disconnected youth, such as school leavers, who may experience the effects of gentrification more intensely due to their displacement from conventional opportunity structures.

Participants in this study did not receive compensation and consisted of local youth who self-identified as Black or Latinx and attended a traditional public high school or a public charter high school in Washington, D.C. In total, 23 Black and 7 Latinx students participated in the

study. Most attended a traditional public high school outside their Ward of residency, had prior experience in public charter schools, and identified as Black girls from low-income families, as indicated in Table 1. A slight majority of participants lived East of the River (Wards 7 and 8). Despite being located in gentrifying neighborhoods, most youths schools' had not seen a substantial increase in affluent and white students—approximately half attended schools where white students comprised less than ten percent of the total student population. While I did not inquire about participants' ages, all were in Grade 10 or higher, with three having graduated from high school within three months of their participation. This manuscript uses pseudonyms to protect participants' confidentiality.

Table 1. *Participant characteristics*

Race/ethnicity	
Black	23
Latinx	7
Gender	
Female	17
Male	13
Other	0
Ward of residency	
Ward 1	4
Ward 2	3
Ward 3	0
Ward 4	2
Ward 5	2
Ward 6	2
Ward 7	8
Ward 8	9
Enrolled grade	
College Freshman	3
12th Grade	12
11th Grade	9
10th Grade	6
Enrolled high school by sector	
DCPS	17
Out-of-boundary DCPS high school	11
In-boundary DCPS feeder high school	6
Public charter school	13

Enrolled high school by neighborhood proximity	
Outside their Ward of residency	22
Within their Ward of residency	8
Enrollment history by sector	
Previously attended a DCPS and public charter school	16
Only attended a DCPS school	10
Only attended a public charter school	4
Family social class	
Low-income	19
Middle class	11
Percentage of white students attending enrolled high school	
0% – 10%	14
11% – 39%	8
40% – 60%	8

Data Collection

Data collection occurred from April 2019 to March 2020, with each local youth participating in a mapping activity followed by an immediate focus group discussion. Due to COVID-19 in-person meeting restrictions, mapping activities and focus groups that I convened through youth groups and local high schools were virtual and included both Black and Latinx youth. Four other data collection sessions occurred in physical locations like coffee shops, a library, and a participant's home. Two of these groups included Black and Latinx youth, and two only comprised Black youth. During the 10 to 15-minute mapping activities, I initiated rapport-building discussions on topics like daily activities and pop culture before transitioning to inquiries about participants' maps. The duration of focus group discussions varied: virtual sessions with youth groups and high schools lasted 45 to 60 minutes, and in-person discussions ranged from 60 to 120 minutes, reflecting participants' high enthusiasm and eagerness to share their perspectives.

Participatory mapping empowers local youth to articulate their lived experiences and perceptions of space, uncovering the social constructions and contestations inherent in urban environments (Literat, 2013; McKnight & Kretzmann, 2012). It is a dynamic tool for visualizing

the liminal zones where youth negotiate complex social, cultural, and spatial dynamics. Through participatory mapping, youth can depict the diverse ways they interact with and occupy space, reflecting the myriad cultural and identity intersections in borderland contexts (Gordon et al., 2016). This inclusive process facilitates documenting spatial practices, narratives, and experiences often overlooked by conventional mapping methods, thus fostering a more holistic understanding of youth engagement with their surroundings (Herlihy & Knapp, 2003; Kwan, 2007). Moreover, when integrated with critical racial and spatial perspectives, such as the theoretical framework that guides this study, participatory mapping becomes a powerful instrument for illuminating the spatial manifestations of marginalization, discrimination, and resistance within uneven geographies (Bujang, 2005; Harley, 1988; O'Looney, 1998). By amplifying historically marginalized voices, this methodology challenges narratives perpetuating local youth's disposability and erasure (Bryan, 2011). Instead, through this approach, I sought to position local youth as experts in understanding the spaces they encountered and recognizing the interplay of their social and spatial contexts (Teixeira, 2015).

The mapping activity began with local youth Independently creating maps depicting significant sites connecting them to D.C., including places of residence, school attendance, and leisure activities from their past and present. Immediately following the mapping activity, I facilitated focus group sessions using participants' maps and a semi-structured interview protocol (Merriam, 1998). Participants described their personalized maps and discussed their educational and neighborhood backgrounds, sense of belonging throughout the city, and views of gentrification. I asked about participants' social networks and leisure activities to identify the places where they felt most at ease.

Initially, I planned to meticulously discuss each map point by point during the focus groups. However, I soon realized this structured approach was unnecessary, as most participants offered information-rich responses without it. The mapping activity played a crucial role in increasing youths' comfort levels and encouraging critical thinking about gentrification, which led to lively discussions where explicit references to the maps were brief. Instead, I primarily used the maps to draw out responses from the few quieter participants. I anticipate that the maps would be of greater utility working with youth over a sustained period (e.g., several meetings or a semester) rather than a single engagement.

Digital platforms such as Mural.co and Padlet were crucial in overcoming the challenges of conducting virtual focus groups, particularly as an outsider with limited time to build rapport with participants. Mural.co facilitates real-time collaboration by providing a virtual workspace where participants can contribute ideas, offer feedback, and visually organize information. Padlet is an online platform for creating digital boards where users can add multimedia content. To initiate the virtual focus groups, I prompted participants to visually indicate their level of agreement with general questions such as "Is gentrification a good thing?" This approach helped ease participants into the conversation and increased their receptivity to answering targeted questions.

The focus group sessions fostered collective meaning construction among participants, encouraging the sharing of personal narratives (Clydesdale, 2007). The school and community data collection settings resembled "brave spaces" (Arao & Clemens, 2013, p. 141), where participants openly listened, challenged ideas, and displayed mutual respect and empathy. I did not observe racialized tensions or discomfort within these racially heterogeneous groupings. Instead, local youth appeared energized to voice their opinions on topics central to their lives.

Similarly, data collection activities within friend groups benefited from existing trust and rapport, facilitating open discussions.

Data Analysis

I employed an iterative data analysis approach, which commenced during data collection, to make sense of the focus group transcripts and participants' maps (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007). This approach followed Saldaña's (2016) framework, Throughout the process, I documented my thoughts and impressions after each focus group and during data analysis in analytic memos. These memos helped me refine emerging themes and compare rival explanations (Peshkin, 1988).

First, I imported focus group transcripts into NVivo qualitative coding software and created an Excel workbook that connected the youths' maps and pseudonyms. Then, I used inductive coding to highlight emergent focus group themes, such as youth associating gentrification with luxury apartments, and to capture descriptive details about participants, such as their enrolled school type. Subsequently, I coded the transcripts against a deductive coding shell, which captured key ideas related to the research questions, existing literature, and the critical race and space conceptual framework (Goetz & LeCompte, 1984). Next, I consolidated overlapping inductive and deductive codes into nine primary, 81 secondary codes, and seven tertiary codes (Appendix B-1). Primary codes represented the initial labels or categories I applied to the focus group data. Secondary codes emerged as more refined subcategories or themes within primary code. Tertiary codes captured deeper insights into secondary code themes.

I incorporated the primary and secondary codes into the mapping workbook and noted the maps corresponding to these themes. Although the mapping analysis yielded limited utility due to the scant labeling on many maps, the maps were helpful in triangulating and

contextualizing participants' statements. Additionally, three participants who expressed interest in ongoing collaboration provided feedback on analytic memos and initial drafts of the findings. Their input through member checking affirmed that the analysis aligned with their experiences, leading to minimal revisions.

Researcher Positionality

Throughout the research process, I maintained reflexive field notes to critically assess the potential impact of my positionality on the study (Probst & Berenson, 2014). Reflexivity represents a dialectical process involving the reconciliation of (a) researchers' ideological biases and theoretical and methodological choices, (b) significant structural and historical forces influencing the phenomena of interest, and (c) participants' interpretations (Anderson, 1989). I disclosed to participants my experiences living throughout D.C. as a young Black man, gentrifier, and policymaker at D.C.'s Office of the State Superintendent of Education. Keeping in mind Thorne's (1993) observation that "to learn from children, adults have to challenge the deep assumption that they already know what children are 'like,' both because, as former children, adults have been there, and because, as adults, they regard children as less complete versions of themselves" (pg. 225), I strived to approach the research with openness and humility. While I cannot definitively determine my impact on participants, understanding community dynamics and cultural references helped me empathize with their experiences. Furthermore, as each focus group progressed, affirming responses to participants' candor contributed to their willingness to participate and trust that I would interpret their narratives thoughtfully.

Findings

Participants' stories and maps provide insight into local youths' complex perceptions of gentrification, their struggles for a sense of place, and their vision for a fairer city. While many

youths appreciated the new amenities brought by gentrification, they also confronted feelings of displacement and alienation in these rapidly changing environments. A racialized view of gentrification as a mechanism to "make the city whiter" influenced their spatial experiences and sense of belonging across different neighborhoods. Emphasizing the need for affordable housing, access to healthy food, and better educational opportunities, they expressed hope and determination to redefine the city's priorities and create a more inclusive environment for all residents.

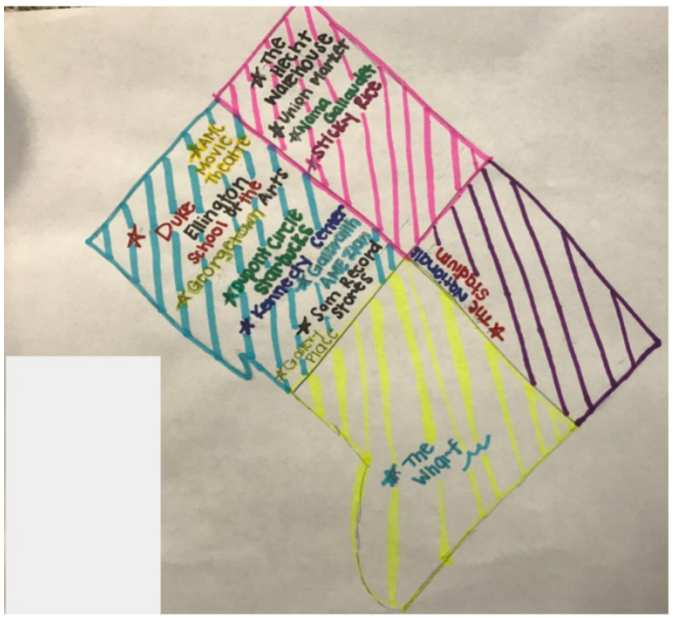
In what follows, I detail these findings in two sections, framed by my research questions. First, I examine three participants' maps, which typify the varied ways local youth engaged with public spaces. Then, I explore local youths' narratives of comfort and belonging across Washington, D.C., focusing on their perceptions of changes to the physical landscape, views on social justice, and proposals for policy reforms to serve local youth and longstanding residents better.

How Local Youth Navigate and Use Space

Participants' maps reveal three key insights into local youths' relationships with the spaces they inhabit. Firstly, residing primarily in underinvested areas East of the River and pockets of northwest D.C., many youths turned to public spaces and commercial institutions in gentrified areas due to the scarcity of such amenities in their immediate neighborhoods. Secondly, while some youths found leisure in gentrified neighborhoods, many perceived historically low-income areas and inner-ring suburbs as safer and more convenient alternatives. Lastly, safety concerns arising from police harassment in gentrified areas and community violence near their homes significantly shaped how local youth navigated space and spent their leisure time, impacting their overall well-being and sense of security.

The Promise of New Amenities. Many participants appreciated the new amenities in gentrified areas (Makris, 2015). They spoke fondly of coffee shops and fast-casual restaurants in revitalized neighborhoods, like Starbucks and Chipotle, viewing them as dependable, non-discriminatory, and with minimal citizen-based policing. For instance, I met Leslie and her best friend Dawn at a Dupont Circle Starbucks, a location Leslie marked on the top left quadrant of her map, as seen in Figure 1. During our meeting, Leslie and Dawn mentioned that this coffee shop was their favorite, prompting me to observe that her map did not feature a coffee shop in her southeast D.C. neighborhood. I asked if she liked any coffee shops closer to home, to which she responded negatively. This exchange led to an extensive conversation between the two girls about the pressing need for more high-quality, affordable food options in their communities.

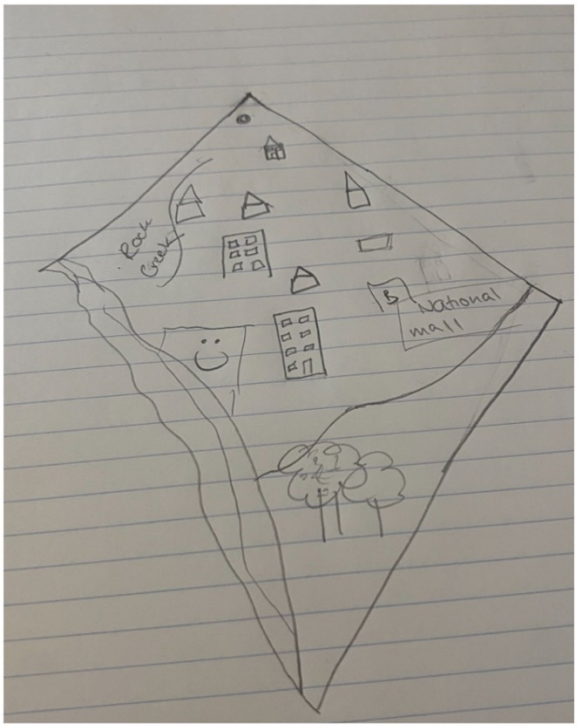
Figure 1. *Leslie's personalized map of Washington, D.C.*



Similarly, Issac's map (see Figure 2) reveals the deliberate omission of institutions in his southwest D.C. neighborhood. His preference for museums and parks sprinkled west of the river, including the National Mall and Rock Creek Park, reflected his desire to avoid the perceived risks of his neighborhood, explaining, "There's not a lot of reason to be outside over there."

Through these narratives, Leslie and Isaac shed light on the complex dynamics of urban living, where access to resources and perceptions of safety vary across neighborhoods.

Figure 2. *Issacs's personalized map of Washington, D.C.*



These findings contrasted with scholarly work associating Starbucks and similar businesses with gentrifiers imposing their presence on urban spaces (Zukin et al., 2009) and local youth, particularly young men, feeling business owners discriminated against them (Perez, 2004).

Moreover, many local youths reported frequenting museums and parks throughout the city, including gentrified areas. Iyana mentioned, "We often hang out at museums and the zoo. I go to the National Portrait Gallery a lot. Not really to look around, though. We like sitting in the atrium." Leslie added, "Yeah, a lot of people go to the zoo. We'll also do the tourist thing and walk around the [National] Mall." These spaces are integral to D.C.'s extensive network of Federal attractions, including 160 monuments, 30 national parks, 17 Smithsonian museums, the National Zoo, the National Mall, and numerous local parks (Destination DC, 2022). This finding

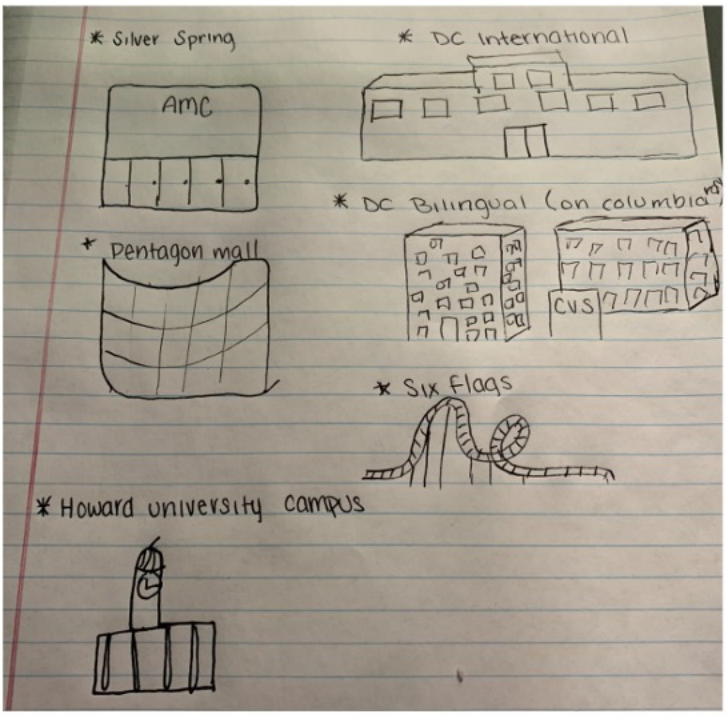
highlights the convergence between the "affluent urban lifestyle" projected to attract businesses and gentrifiers (Cucchiara, 2013) and how local youth actively utilize some public spaces.

The absence of public parks and recreational facilities in their underinvested neighborhoods led local youth to utilize such spaces in gentrified areas. Iyana explained, "I just like to be outside and sit, and there's this park up the street, but it's always something going on over there, so my mom doesn't like me going. And I wish we had a place to hang out over here because we really don't." Similarly, Joel continued, "Really, I'm always looking for a nice [basketball] court. There are a couple of good runs over here. It is what it is; [gentrifiers] don't really bother me."

Belonging and Safety in Communities of Color. Still, many local youths sought leisure activities outside gentrified neighborhoods (Makris, 2015). For instance, the only D.C. landmarks on Christine's map in Figure 3 were her middle and high school in the gentrified Columbia Heights neighborhood and the Historically Black College, Howard University. In addition to Howard University, a Historically Black College in the Shaw/U street area, the social sites of significance on Christine's map were mostly in inner-ring suburbs, including Pentagon City, Virginia; Prince George's (P.G.) County, Maryland and Silver Spring, Maryland. For Christine and many other participants, these areas were a more convenient and safer place to meet friends. According to Jenny, "We go to the P.G. mall a lot or walk around downtown Silver Spring. They're easy to get to on the Metro, or, if our moms are dropping us off, they aren't that out of the way for them." In addition, these areas are attractive to local youth because of their proximity to public transportation. The Pentagon City Mall, Mall at Prince George's, and

downtown Silver Spring are community anchors for Metrorail transit stops. Most participants reported having close friends or family who lived in these communities.[6]

Figure 3. *Christine's personalized map of Washington, D.C.*



Local youths' preference for leisure time in historically low-income neighborhoods pushes against majoritarian narratives depicting these areas as unsafe (Ramírez, 2020). Desmond, for instance, remarked:

> I feel safer going into Benning Road than going into northwest because I feel like I know many people and the places that are over there, like basketball courts. And I feel like, in the Black community, we're taught to act properly in situations, like in public, and when you're at home, you can act how you want. So, I feel more at

[6] Many of D.C.'s displaced longtime residents have moved to neighboring P.G. County, which gained more than 3,700 new residents between 2013 and 2014 (Hernández, 2015). The average household income for these newcomers ($42,000) was significantly below the county's average ($72,000) (U.S. Census Bureau, 2015).

> home in southeast than I do uptown. I feel like it's more of a tighter bond with neighbors. It feels more like family.

This perspective aligns with scholarly research that uses a preferences-based framework to contextualize residential segregation and suggests that many Black and Latinx households choose racially isolated neighborhoods due to ongoing experiences of racism, which include concerns about reprisal and hostility from the white majority (Bobo & Zubrinsky, 1996). Desmond's comments also suggest an adeptness at assessing risks derived from his practical experiences, illustrating the "cultural wealth" inherent in longtime residents. This nuanced comprehension of social dynamics and potential sources of risks equips local youth with the ability to make well-informed decisions through sources of knowledge conventional frameworks and schools often overlook (Moll et al., 1992).

Navigating Around Violence. Safety concerns influenced how some local youths navigated their surroundings, particularly those who spent most of their time at home or a friend's house. These youths grappled with a myriad of factors that shaped their daily lives. On the one hand, they feared encountering gentrifiers and experiencing police harassment in revitalized neighborhoods. This heightened surveillance and law enforcement scrutiny fostered fear and distrust among them that they were unwelcome outsiders. Racial biases in majoritarian narratives and policing practices worsened their sense of vulnerability. On the other hand, aligning with Rucks-Adhidiana's (2022) argument that gentrification prioritizes wealth over the well-being of low-income communities of color, local youth also faced challenges stemming from selective (dis)investment. The development of new amenities and infrastructure catering to affluent newcomers and the neglect of local youths' needs perpetuated racialized spatial inequalities—limited access to amenities amplified youths' feelings of disconnection. The

omnipresent threat of gun violence, coupled with the inaction of city leaders, reinforced local youths' perception that the city viewed them as disposable relative to economic profit.

Ashley's succinctly captured the harsh realities of this dilemma for her and her friends, stating, "I cannot remember when we last ate out. We're usually just at somebody's house. There's nothing to do around here but get into some mess, and I'm also not trying to deal with those white people uptown." Her remark underscores local youth's scarcity of dining-out experiences and reliance on private spaces for socializing due to the lack of accessible community spaces. Her hesitation about engaging with the "white people uptown" is another illustration of local youths' distrust and unease towards newcomers who they perceive as encroaching on their communities. Similarly, Iyana echoed these sentiments, sharing, "There's this park up the street, but there's always something going on, so my mom doesn't like me going. And I wish we had a place to hang out here because we really don't." Her comment about the park highlights the pervasive sense of insecurity and the absence of safe recreational spaces for local youths. Her longing for "a place to hang out" emphasizes the vital role of community spaces in fostering belonging and connectedness, which city leaders and developers often sacrifice in gentrifying neighborhoods to accommodate gentrifiers' interests (Modan, 2007; Raia-Hawrylak, 2014).

An exchange between Serena and Megan further vividly portrays the pervasive safety concerns that plagued many local youths:

Serena: I will say there's no peace here. No peace.

Megan: Right, you never know what's going to pop off.

Interviewer: like gun violence?

Serena: Yeah, you could be anywhere in the city, and it's just no peace.

Megan: That's exactly why I stay in the house.

Serena: I don't feel safe anywhere. The most unsafe I feel is probably walking on the road to get back from school.

Serena's poignant remark, "There's no peace here," encapsulates an atmosphere of unease and insecurity. Megan's agreement illustrates the unpredictability of their surroundings, where the threat of violence looms large. This conversation resonates with broader statistics that demonstrate the grim reality of violence in the city. During the 2019-20 school year, D.C. witnessed 171 homicides, with 63 percent occurring east of the river, in Wards 7 and 8, where Serena, Megan, and most of this study's participants resided (D.C. Policy Center, 2022). These statistics challenge the notion that gentrification is a solution to urban violence and raise questions about the priorities of city leaders and their commitment to protecting local youth.

Furthermore, this conversation aligns with echoed survey data from D.C.'s Office of the Student Advocate (2020), which revealed that most public-school students in the District feel uncomfortable, concerned, afraid, or in danger during their school commutes. These distressing experiences have far-reaching consequences and can potentially lead to traumatic and adverse childhood experiences that profoundly impact youths' engagement in school and overall well-being (Felitti et al., 1998).

In sum, local youths' utilization of space sheds light on the intricate interplay between resource accessibility, safety perceptions, and the impact of gentrification on well-being. Participants' maps reveal the spatial dynamics of youths' engagement with their surroundings. Residing in underinvested areas, many youths turned to public spaces and commercial institutions in gentrified neighborhoods. However, they often experienced a sense of alienation in these spaces and preferred the familiarity of historically low-income neighborhoods and inner-

ring suburbs. Simultaneously, safety concerns arising from surveillance and policing practices in gentrified spaces and community violence near their immediate neighborhoods significantly influenced how local youths navigate space and pursue leisure activities. In the next section, I delve deeper into the narratives of belonging, displacement, and social justice conveyed to local youths through their spatial experiences.

Local Youths' Narratives of Belonging, Displacement and Social Justice

Overall, local youth acknowledged the tangible improvements brought about by gentrification, such as the emergence of sleek new buildings, the removal of dilapidated structures, and the introduction of enhanced amenities like more revitalized parks and trendy restaurants. Nevertheless, while a few found these spaces comfortable to navigate, these changes did not translate into a sense of comfort or belonging for most. This discomfort was particularly pronounced among local youth who did not attend high school in gentrified neighborhoods, as they may have had less direct exposure to gentrifiers, and among those who viewed gentrification through a racial lens, seeing it as a project to serve affluent and white residents. For these local youth, cultural erasure was a chief concern, contributing to their perception of gentrification as an individual and collective struggle for their sense of place.

Making Sense of Physical Changes. Local youths provided nuanced perspectives on gentrification's causes and effects on the urban environment that highlighted the striking disparities in resources and opportunities between gentrifiers and local youths. Their remarks underscored the racialized nature of gentrification, with many recognizing its role in displacing Black residents and reshaping the city's demographics. Moreover, their narratives shed light on how the proximity of local youths' schooling experiences to gentrifying neighborhoods can influence their feelings of acceptance and belonging in these areas.

I asked participants to define gentrification, and almost immediately, nearly all of them began discussing the explosion of development in pockets of the city. For instance, Donovan explained, “Gentrification is about a lot of new apartments. They just built two big new [apartment] buildings down the street from my house. And up the street, there’s at least one other building and a grocery store.” His classmate Megan added, “Gentrification is about people moving into broken-down places and making them nicer and more expensive.” As noted throughout gentrification scholarship (DC Policy Center, 2022), these glittering new buildings altered the built environment and symbolized the difference between gentrifiers and local youth. Dawn said, “I used to tell my mom I wanted to live in the apartment building next to mine because it is so nice. But it’s expensive, and I don’t think those places really offer rent assistance.” Other local youth struggled to comprehend why gentrifiers were willing to pay much higher rents than their own to live in luxury condominiums, questioning, like Chris, “the types of people that would spend that much money on an apartment.”

Luxury apartments were also reminders of what youth did not have. Ashley resided in Southeast D.C. within an older building adjacent to luxury condominiums and across the street from the Washington Nationals Major League Baseball Stadium. As we talked, she became increasingly agitated as she compared the opulent exteriors of the neighboring buildings to her apartment, which, in her view, had “not been renovated this century.” She recounted her front door remained unhinged for weeks, and the heating system proved unreliable during the winter, lamenting, “It’s just me, my mom, and my little brother, so what’s [our landlord] going to do? It’s not like we can just move in next door.” The literature is replete with similar stories of longtime resident families without the capital to ensure developers and local leaders appropriately meet their needs (Pattillo, 2007). This excerpt also underscores the transient nature of (in)stability for

many local youths (Pearman, 2019). Maurice, Ashley's classmate, shared a contrasting perspective. He appreciated the aesthetics of new developments, remarking, "Some of these apartment buildings are so shiny, even the grass looks shiny." Like Maurice, many local youths voiced positive feelings about how gentrification transformed the physical landscape. However, amidst these sentiments, as Ashley's comments demonstrate, were sporadic reminders of their outsider status, which hindered youths' full access to and appreciation of these changes.

Many local youths demonstrated a keen awareness of the racial dimensions inherent in gentrification, consistent with prior studies (Kinloch, 2010). They interpreted gentrification as a deliberate strategy to homogenize the city's demographic makeup, with many describing it as an attempt "To make the city whiter." Leslie, for example, explicitly stated, "They're just trying to get more white people in here and get rid of all the Black people." When I asked Leslie to expound on this idea, her friend Megan suggested a racial motive underlined the city's urban development agenda. She posited, "If this wasn't all about race, how come we ain't get none of this stuff when it was just us here." Jaylen articulated a sense of marginalization, feeling as though the city deliberately displaced Black residents to accommodate the influx of wealthier, saying, "I feel like the city pushed us aside, in a sense. It's like they said, 'We don't want Black people here.'" Participants like Darius implicated developers and real estate agents in this process and accused them of actively displacing Black residents through property acquisition and redevelopment initiatives. He expressed frustration, saying, "To do all this renovating, property developers, real estate people, come and push people out of their homes or buy up land and property and force people out of their homes and move." Darius' assertion highlights the perceived complicity of powerful economic actors in perpetuating racial inequality and exclusion within gentrifying neighborhoods. By attributing the displacement of longtime residents,

particularly Black communities, to the deliberate actions of these influential figures, Darius underscores the systemic and insidious nature of gentrification. Moreover, his comments reflect a central critique that critical geographers have made, which argues that gentrification is not merely a natural process of urban renewal but a calculated effort to reshape neighborhoods along racial lines (Smith, 1996; Soja, 2010). This process tends to favor the economic interests of affluent newcomers over the longstanding communities of color, which puts them at risk of further economic marginalization.

Citizen-based policing played a central role in shaping local youths' comfort levels across the city (Shedd, 2015). Participants generally perceived white residents as being disorderly. For instance, when discussing the affluent and well-established Georgetown neighborhood, Desmond conveyed, "If I go into Wisconsin Avenue, I feel like I always get asked, 'Do you live here?' Or, I feel like someone's always watching me." In response to a question about whether he felt most comfortable in affluent West of the River areas or historically under-resourced East of the River areas with per capita higher rates of violent crime, Ja remarked, "white people are crazy, so I would be on edge in places like Georgetown or Chevy Chase." Ja's preference for navigating East of the River areas is telling. It highlights the "Otherness" local youth experience in affluent spaces, where opulent homes, upscale amenities, and conspicuous police presence communicate to local youth that they do not belong (Barrett, 2021). It also illustrates the local knowledge and cultural insights that local youth like Ja possess, enabling them to move through spaces that urban pathologies deem as hostile adeptly.

In contrast with this discourse, some youth were less aware of the racialization of gentrified neighborhoods, which they did not perceive as white spaces. Ja offered the following

explanation of why he felt more comfortable in Chinatown, a redeveloped downtown area neighborhood in northwest D.C.:

> I would say with Chinatown. I feel safe. With the understanding that I am Black, so anything can happen. So it's not necessarily just the crackheads or teens who want to be cool. You also gotta look out for Metro Police and D.C. police. But there's a lot of culture in downtown D.C.

Located in the heart of downtown D.C., Chinatown has witnessed significant commercial and residential development over recent years, with more than 39 million square feet of development between 2001 and 2020. Ja's comments imply that he identifies with the area's cultural character despite its changes. Chinatown serves as a melting pot where, on any given day, the 7th and H St. Northwest intersection may feature Black Israelites proselytizing, dancers and drummers performing for onlookers, tourists taking pictures under the Friendship Archway, one of the largest ceremonial arches outside of China, and gentrifiers commuting to work with artisanal coffee in hand—as police cars monitor the activity from a short distance. Although Chinatown has not been without its challenges, including a significant decline in its Chinese American population from over 3,000 residents in 1970 to less than 300 in 2015 (Wang, 2015), the amalgamation of diverse social groups suggests that residents do not police local youth as severely as they do in more established areas like Georgetown and Chevy Chase.

Notably, students residing in underdeveloped neighborhoods who expressed comfort in gentrified areas attended school outside their Ward of residency. Pursuing this line of thought, attending school in these neighborhoods may have enhanced local youths' sense of legitimacy and acceptance. This idea aligns with critical geographic scholarship emphasizing the role of educational institutions as sites of identity formation and social reproduction (Collins &

Coleman, 2008). Regularly moving through gentrified areas, these young people may have had greater exposure to the gentry's spatial practices and cultural norms, enhancing their familiarity and sense of belonging. Attending schools with greater socioeconomic diversity than their by-right neighborhood high schools may also facilitate their comfort, as these youths are, on average, more likely to interact with diverse peers.

However, it is important to approach this assertion with caution. While the correlation between attending school in gentrified areas and feelings of comfort suggests a potential relationship between educational experiences and social acceptance, it is essential to recognize that focus group discussions did not explicitly address this point. Additionally, an equal number of participants attending schools in gentrifying areas did not report feeling a sense of belonging. Still, this tension highlights the complexity of factors influencing individuals' perceptions of their surroundings and sense of belonging. While educational experiences may shape social acceptance, other factors such as community dynamics, socioeconomic status, and personal experiences contribute to local youths' belonging across neighborhoods.

Local youth viewed the confrontation that precipitated the #DontMuteDC movement as a poignant symbol of gentrifiers' efforts to reshape the city's cultural and political fabric, with nearly half of the participants evoking the controversy. The hashtag #DontMuteDC emerged in 2019 in response to a gentrifier's complaint that temporarily resulted in the cessation of go-go music[7] played on speakers outside a MetroPCS/T-Mobile phone carrier and record store on the corner of 7th and Florida Avenue Northwest (Summers, 2021). Specifically, a resident of a nearby luxury apartment complex, the Shay, filed a complaint about the "loud thrum of go-go

[7] Go-go music is a subgenre that originated in Washington, D.C., in the 1970s (Hopkins, 2012). The music has influences from West African, Caribbean, Afro-Latinx, soul, R&B, hip-hop, and funk. Go-go is emblematic of a distinctive Black cultural identity in D.C., Maryland, and Northern Virginia but has not achieved commercial success outside of the region (Summers, 2021).

emanating from the store" with several District agencies, including the Metropolitan Police Department and T-Mobile's corporate headquarters (Lang, 2019). The corner of 7th and Florida holds significance as the intersection of several historically Black neighborhoods, including Logan Circle, LeDroit Park, U Street/Cardozo, and Shaw, all of which have experienced significant Black resident displacement since 2000. For many local youth and longtime residents, go-go music blasting outside the Florida Avenue MetroPCS is a cultural landmark. This intersection also marks one end of the U Street Corridor, a "cultural destination district" (D.C. Office of Planning, 2004, p. 1) known for its vibrant nightlife and dining scene. Dawn's words eloquently capture the anger and frustration many local youths felt regarding #DontMuteDC:

> Go-go music is very important to my friends, their parents, and mom. They love D.C. very badly. They were born in Washington, D.C. They do everything here, but they can't afford to live here. So, on the one hand, they don't get to make decisions if they aren't paying taxes. But on the other hand, like, you just moved here, be respectful. Just because something is different doesn't mean you need to change it—that's crazy.

The #DontMuteDC controversy underscores the complexity of urban spaces that local youth must navigate, where the commodification of Blackness and the realities of Black life are incongruent. Bars, restaurants, and real estate developers have used the U Street Corridor's early 20th century 'Black Broadway' history as a marketing tool to combat "certain negative iconic Black Ghetto stereotypes" (Hyra, 2017, p. 84), aiming to appeal to white gentrifiers and business interests. However, this commodification reduces longtime residents and local youth to objects of an exotic gaze, perpetuating a "gentrification aesthetic" aligned with newcomers' interest in embodying a trendy urban lifestyle (Bridge, 2006; Ho et al., 2015; Zukin et al., 2009). The

silencing of go-go music, a cultural cornerstone for many longtime resident Black Washingtonians, symbolizes the disposability of a cherished aspect of their community.

Despite their deep roots in the city and contributions to an increasingly marketized cultural heritage, incidents like #DontMuteDC convey to local youth that their presence in gentrifying spaces is unwelcome. This disruption triggered anger and frustration among local youth, revealing signs of their affective displacement (Butcher & Dickens, 2016). They perceived city leaders' apparent prioritization of gentrifiers' preferences as emotionally distressing and symbolic of efforts to suppress their spatial practices to protect the economic interests that gentrifiers represent. Furthermore, such incidents signaled to local youth that Black cultural expression is unnatural and requires policing and suppression in gentrifying neighborhoods, underscoring broader patterns of antiblack racism and exclusion.

Majoritarian Narratives of Gentrification. Contrary to these prevailing views, a few youths echoed majoritarian narratives and attributed gentrification and its ensuing marginalization to community dynamics and shortcomings. These young people did not blame the phenomenon on nefarious racial or economic forces but instead perceived a lack of cohesion and personal accountability within their communities as primary factors. For instance, when asked about gentrification's causes, Max commented, "I mean, that's what happens when people don't take care of their own shit." Here, Max referred to the blight in underinvested neighborhoods, which depresses real estate values that developers exploit in revitalization efforts. Such remarks suggest a belief in neoliberal narratives that attribute longtime residents' perceived lack of individual responsibility as justification for turning over their communities to affluent newcomers who will use space better (Smith, 1996). Maurice's comments about the loss

of local small businesses reflect a similar ahistorical frame that overlooks structural inequalities and racialized power dynamics inherent in gentrification processes. He explained:

> If the community supported each other, then maybe they'd have better stuff…some communities don't support each other enough. Like, say you got a Black-owned corner store [in an area where] everybody beefing. Nobody goes to the black business, and nobody's there when it's having sales, so it's not making any money. Yet, they don't want the Black business to sell, and when it has no choice but to sell, no one from the community wants to buy it. It's the same thing when people get mad about someone selling their house to a white person for more money than they could ever imagine. I wasn't helping them make no money, so how can I be mad at them.

While many young people may center their outrage for inequality on uneven state investments, this exchange reminds us that others may center their critiques on social ills they encounter daily. Maurice's words also echo a crucial premise of gentrification's policy logic: longtime residents have caused social problems that gentrifiers must "fix" (Smith, 1996). Several of Maurice's peers challenged his person-centered critiques. Despite these appeals, at that moment, he did not seem interested in acknowledging how historical and persistent power structures perpetuate inequality (Ladson-Billings & Tate, 2006). Finally, when asked about the corner store's provision of healthy, affordable food options, he hesitated, expressing uncertainty with, "I mean, I guess not, I don't know," before redirecting the conversation. This moment underscores the complexity of seeking to hold on to institutions youth may associate with belongingness and practical considerations. Maurice criticized the community's lack of support for the corner store while also hesitantly acknowledging its shortcomings in providing nutritious options—another critical

dilemma of gentrification for marginalized communities (Whittle et al., 2015). Youth may feel compelled to support local institutions, even if they lack quality products, or may hope for market forces to bring about change, which could risk further displacement.

Max and Maurice's viewpoints highlight how some local youth may internalize antiblack narratives that blame their communities for their challenges. Such perspectives align with majoritarian storytelling frameworks, which downplay systemic racism and other forms of oppression and instead promote the idea that non-dominant groups are responsible for their social inequities (Solórzano & Yosso, 2002). Interestingly, the few participants conveying majoritarian stories attended lower-performing traditional public high schools and had only attended in-boundary schools in low-income areas. None reported spending leisure time in gentrified neighborhoods. Although this study's findings offer little support for the policy logic that positions social mixing between gentrifiers and local youth as crucial for solving urban poverty, the observation that youth who more readily interacted with gentrifiers—albeit informally—did not hold majoritarian views is noteworthy and raises prudent questions for future research. In general, these observations are a reminder of the complexity of young people's interpretations of gentrification and underscore the centrality of antiblackness within these discussions.

Reimagining a More Just City. In youths' reflections on policy recommendations to enhance the lives of the city's young people, we witness the borderland. In this liminal space, poverty, housing insecurity, food insecurity, and other forces of systemic oppression intersect with educational inequality. For instance, Jaylen pointed out, "There's not a lot of healthy food over here. The nearest grocery store is far and overpriced for what it is. Uber Eats doesn't really even deliver over here." His friend Desmond added:

> [We need] more affordable food options and more programs to get food to students, especially during the summer, breaks, and weekends. I used to know this guy who was hungry a lot because his refrigerator was always, you know, empty—there are a lot of kids around here like that.

Jaylen and Desmond's advocacy for increased affordable food options and hunger relief programs during school breaks resonates with scholars who have argued that addressing systemic issues like hunger is vital for promoting equitable educational opportunities (Rothstein). Desmond's anecdote about a friend's empty refrigerator further illuminates the pervasive experiences of many youths who struggle to access basic needs. In this borderland context, hunger symbolizes the relative disadvantage endured by many students in a city where many other residents, particularly white newcomers with transient connections to place, enjoy abundant resources, including grocery stores stocked with healthy options and social programs to buoy their needs. Drawing this comparison highlights how the borderland functions as a physical and metaphorical space that reflects the uneven distribution of resources and opportunities in urban environments. While gentrified neighborhoods serve as zones of affluence and comfort for some, they simultaneously reinforce the marginalization of borderland communities like Jay and Desmond's, which perpetuates cycles of poverty and exclusion.

The mixed sentiments expressed by youths regarding their neighborhood public schools unveil the intricate challenges inherent in efforts to enhance educational outcomes in gentrifying environments. While many acknowledged the presence of caring adults and high-quality teachers in their local elementary and middle schools, they also drew attention to significant hurdles such as high teacher turnover rates, limited resources, and inconsistent student expectations. For instance, in recounting her transition from a non-gentrified neighborhood public school to a

selective enrollment high school in a gentrified area, Dawn observed that some of her middle school peers ended up "roaming the streets" due to a lack of support within the school system. Instead of attributing her peers' outcomes solely to individual shortcomings, she underscored the responsibility of schools to provide adequate support and opportunities for all students, regardless of their circumstances. Dawn articulated:

> I feel like schools sometimes don't give kids enough resources. I look at how some kids I went to middle school have turned out, and I would just see them roaming the streets. I feel the school could have done more to keep them in school, so they aren't just doing nothing out there all day."

Dawn's perspective challenges prevailing notions of school reform and competition. While advocates of marketized school reforms may seek to exploit frustrations like Dawn's to justify privatization efforts or to argue for more competition to incentivize accountability, her viewpoint suggests a fundamental need for something more foundational—learning environments that reach students at the margins. The findings documented here and elsewhere (Lipman, 2011), which suggest that reforms to attract affluent families are unlikely to meet this constituency's needs, highlight the incongruence of pursuing inclusivity within the neoliberal policy frameworks evident in gentrifying communities.

Youths' reflections on their schooling experiences also unveiled the physical and emotional toll of commuting to high schools deemed to offer high-quality curriculum, resources, and personnel but situated far from their neighborhoods. Juan, for instance, described his daily basketball season routine, stating:

> We had to be at practice at like 6 in the morning. It wasn't that crazy for a lot of kids because they didn't live that far away. But for me, I have to be up at like 4:45

> or 4:30 am to get ready, then leave the house at 5:30 to get there on time, then go to class all day, then go home and do homework. It's crazy, and as a student, I'm not supposed to complain.

Juan's demanding schedule, characterized by early mornings and long commutes, leaves him with minimal time for sleep, homework, and leisure. Moreover, this commute starkly contrasts the relative convenience of his peers, who enjoy access to quality education within their immediate vicinity. Juan's sacrifice vividly illustrates the glaring disparities in access to educational resources faced by him and other border crossers who must undertake arduous journeys to access what others have readily available just down the street.

Similarly, Serena expressed the emotional strain of traversing disparate environments daily. Moving from the structured and organized setting of her school to the disorderly atmosphere of her neighborhood posed an ongoing challenge. Serena's reflection, "just going from the relative calmness and organization [of school] to the mess of coming over here, it's a lot...It bothers my mom a lot more than it bothers me, she acts as frazzled, but it can really get to you if you let it," portrays the toll that this jarring contrast exacted on her mental well-being, impacting not only herself but also her family, as evidenced by her mother's visible distress. This emotional burden underscores the struggles of local youth who must navigate the complex intersection of education, community, and identity in gentrifying areas. Serena's experience illustrates the borderland, where the structured environment of school clashes with the often-disorderly realities of home life. This disconnection can intensify the emotional and psychological strains of residing amid gentrification and challenge local youths' capacity to strive for success.

Despite the unequal terrain and the perception that local leaders overlooked their needs, participants remained resolute in believing that the city could evolve into a more equitable and inclusive environment for all residents, especially its youth. As Desmond articulated, “I think overall, we just need to redefine how and where we put our resources. We need to realize that it will be a lot of hard work to do it, but I think it’s worth it.” This sentiment found resonance among other youths, who underscored the imperative of reassessing resource allocation and dedicating themselves to the arduous task of effecting meaningful change. Through their unwavering optimism and determination to challenge prevailing power dynamics, local youth present a compelling vision for the future of their city—one that prioritizes equity, justice, and collective well-being.

Discussion and Conclusion

This paper employed participatory mapping to examine how local youth navigate the complexities of gentrification. This method was a helpful tool for gaining insights into how young people perceive, interact with, and embody rapidly evolving and often unequal urban landscapes. Moreover, pairing focus groups with participatory mapping encouraged local youth to engage in analytical and reflexive thinking concerning the racialization of space, spatial practices, and power dynamics that shaped their neighborhood and schooling experiences. Through this critical introspection, participants demonstrated their resolve to assert their rights to the city (Barrett, 2021; Ramírez, 2020). The documented exchanges among participants underscore the potential of mixed spatial methods in fostering youths’ empowerment, self-efficacy, and collective efficacy (Teixeira, 2015). My positionality, constant self-reflection, and comfort interacting with students of color helped me swiftly establish rapport, ensuring participants felt at ease and willing to share throughout the research endeavor. Nevertheless, it’s

crucial to recognize that cultivating such rapport, particularly in participatory research that involves young people, demands significant time, resources, and emotional investment, especially in sustained endeavors to nurture community action (Gordon et al., 2016).

The findings of this paper challenge the prevailing logic of school gentrification reform, which places parent gentrifiers and market forces at the forefront of efforts to improve local youths' schooling and neighborhood experiences. Contrary to the proximal contact thesis positing that gentrifiers will enable local youth to acquire valuable cultural capital, evidence of such exchanges was sparse. As the literature documents (Pearman & Swain, 2017), local youth often attend schools with few affluent peers, limiting their exposure to such individuals within their social circles. This paper's insights further support existing criticisms that gentrifiers' resources and investments predominantly channel into select, favored schools, which leads to some schools potentially benefitting from a concentration of resources and leaving others underinvested (Posey-Maddox et al., 2014a). As noted by Green and colleagues (2022), this trend perpetuates disparities within the education system, with local youth perceiving minimal improvements despite the gentrification-driven changes in their neighborhoods. Moreover, the challenges related to commuting to high-performing schools far from their communities shed light on the complex trade-offs' local youths face in their pursuit of quality education. This aspect underlines the need for a more nuanced approach to school gentrification reform, one that considers the diverse realities and needs of all students, particularly those from marginalized communities impacted by gentrification.

This paper contributes to the existing research exploring how local youth interpret neighborhood transformations amidst gentrification. Echoing findings elsewhere (Makris, 2015; Raia-Hawrylak, 2014), local youth were not passive bystanders to gentrification. Instead, many

actively asserted their place within gentrified neighborhoods through their daily routines, social interactions, and spatial practices. Notably, many perceived certain gentrified commercial districts as inclusive spaces where they felt a sense of belonging and were not racially othered. Within these areas, they believed that gentrifiers, developers, and law enforcement entities had not erased the cultural practices, traditions, and memories integral to their identities, contrary to the displacement practices often found in gentrifying spaces (Addie & Fraser, 2019; Butcher & Dickens, 2016). This proactive engagement with contested spaces underscores the convergence between the affluent urban lifestyle sought by businesses and gentrifiers and how local youth navigate and inhabit these environments (Smith, 1996). Local youths, acting as border crossers, actively negotiated these spaces, drawing from their diverse cultural backgrounds to navigate and redefine the boundaries of inclusion and exclusion within these rapidly changing urban landscapes (Blackburn, 2005). Such spaces reflect the aspirational ideals of cultural diversity inherent in neoliberal development agendas, where gentrifiers can pursue their aesthetic preferences while longtime residents maintain their spatial customs (Bridge, 2006). While physical and symbolic displacement may persist within these spaces, they offer glimpses of the potential for urban revitalization that does not, inherently, culturally "Other" existing residents.

This paper's findings also portray gentrification as a double-edged sword for local youth, heightening their risk of displacement amidst revitalization efforts. Despite efforts to enact the spatial practices central to their claims to space, many local youths still faced pervasive experiences of antiblackness and exclusion as they traversed the city (Ramírez, 2020). Navigating racially charged social and symbolic boundaries in both school and leisure compounded youths' "Othering" feelings that they do not belong (Ho et al., 2015). Consistent with other critical spatial studies, dominant spatial practices and citizen-based policing

reinforced the perception among local youth that reformers and property owners viewed them as an unwelcome nuisance (Butcher & Dickens, 2016; Harris et al., 2020; Kinloch, 2010; Laniyonu, 2018). This observation aligns with the extensive literature on the strained relationship between people of color, especially Black Americans, and law enforcement in the United States, underscoring the importance of ensuring that policy discussions regarding gentrification's impact on crime reduction acknowledge the well-documented and often deadly history that leads many people of color to perceive the police as a threat rather than an ally (McKittrick, 2011; Shedd, 2015).

The varied perspectives of local youths regarding the drivers of gentrification highlight the significance of capturing a diversity of viewpoints. Many youths attributed the phenomenon to local leaders, emphasizing its uneven and racialized impact on low-income communities of color (Ramírez, 2020). Reflecting sentiments conveyed to Kinloch by youth in Harlem, New York (Kinloch, 2010), numerous participants in this study viewed gentrified spaces as exclusionary and portrayed them as deliberate efforts by city leaders to "whiten" the urban landscape. This perception speaks to the racialized nature of gentrification, where historically Black and Brown neighborhoods experience rapid demographic shifts driven by investment, development, and gentrifier preferences (Green, Latham-Sikes, et al., 2022; Rucks-Ahidiana, 2022). It also highlights the erasure of longtime residents' communities and cultural heritage in the face of urban renewal and redevelopment initiatives. However, it is crucial to note that all participants did not share this same outlook on gentrification. Some young people articulated majoritarian narratives that attributed gentrification to preexisting community deficits and downplayed the role of systemic racism in shaping urban inequities. This divergence in

viewpoints underscores the complexity of gentrification discourse and the need for nuanced analyses that consider historical legacies, power dynamics, and intersecting social identities.

The nuanced insights from young people regarding neighborhood and school gentrification and their perception that city leaders overlook their needs, emphasize the limitations of development strategies reliant solely on adult perspectives. Engaging local youth in policy discussions is crucial for accurately depicting their educational experiences and empowering them to hold schools and policymakers accountable (Gordon et al., 2016). Further exploration of the political agency of youth in gentrifying areas may provide valuable insights into their interactions with local leaders and institutions and their advocacy efforts.

This paper prompts several lines of inquiry for future research to better understand the relationship between gentrification and education. The findings demonstrate a need to explore why the anticipated benefits of marketizing public education to parent gentrifiers have yet to materialize in high schools. While it's true that the children of many gentrifiers have yet to reach high school age, this paper aligns with existing scholarship suggesting that commodification efforts have not overcome the perception that parent gentrifiers risk jeopardizing their children's future by enrolling them in predominately Black and Latinx urban high schools (Lareau & Goyette, 2014). Further research should explore the attitudes and behaviors of children from gentrifying families attending urban high schools to understand better how they engage with classmates from minoritized backgrounds. This inquiry could reveal whether these students, echoing patterns observed among their parents (Ho et al., 2015; Posey-Maddox et al., 2014b), maintain insular social circles or manifest attitudes that marginalize peers from diverse socioeconomic or racial backgrounds. Additionally, while centering the perspectives of local youth aligns with Slater's (2006) call to focus gentrification research on interest groups at risk of

marginalization, it is essential to complement their insights with perspectives from other underrepresented groups to deepen our understanding of this complex phenomenon and inform more inclusive policy and planning efforts.

Finally, the limitations of this paper suggest directions for future research. For instance, participants were not compensated for their involvement, and the sampling was limited to local youth actively engaged in high school. This approach did not capture the perspectives of school leavers who could provide unique insights into gentrification's adverse implications, given their potential experiences of displacement and disruption in educational pathways. Future research could benefit from including disconnected youth to capture a more comprehensive understanding of the impacts of gentrification on youth transitions and educational trajectories. While participants' maps were a catalyst for their engagement, their limited analytical utility presents an opportunity to delve deeper into the effectiveness of mixed-spatial methodologies in understanding how youth relate to their environment. For instance, incorporating participatory mapping into an action research course or an extended service project may prove more beneficial in fostering discussions and enriching understandings.

As this paper focused on Washington, D.C., as its unit of analysis, its explicit focus was not comparing perceptions of specific communities. However, youths' diverse interpretations of specific neighborhoods suggest the importance of developing a typology of belonging and Othering within gentrified spaces. This exercise, particularly theorizing the unique social, spatial, racial, and power dynamics of socially cohesive spaces, can contribute valuable insights to efforts to enhance community well-being. Similarly, although this research was not a case study of specific school sites local youth encountered an absence of culturally responsive schooling options as documented in other gentrified school choice markets (Diem et al., 2019; Posey-

Maddox et al., 2021). Investigating these young people's protective strategies in navigating challenging school environments remains critical. Like Tatum's (2003) query of "Why are all the Black kids sitting together in the cafeteria" (p. 1), understanding how the specific pressures of school gentrification prompt racially minoritized youth to seek out like-minded peers to cope with marginalization could offer valuable insights for developing interventions to foster inclusivity and a sense of belonging in gentrifying school communities.

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Study 2. "A Prisoner's Dilemma": How Longtime Resident Black Parents Navigate School Choice, Gentrification, and Antiblackness

Neoliberal education reforms like school choice expansion are increasingly popular policy tools in cities undergoing gentrification, a process of municipal change through targeted public-private investments and affluent newcomers moving to previously disinvested neighborhoods. Arguments that school choice and other market-based principles improve schooling in gentrifying communities rest on four assumptions. First, parents are rational and objective consumers who make value-maximizing decisions in a minimally restrictive educational marketplace (Apple, 2006). Second, exercising school choice enables historically marginalized families to 'escape' low-performing neighborhood schools (Good, 2017). Third, expanding school choice may increase the willingness of affluent, predominantly white families with school-aged children—known as parent gentrifiers—to relocate to emerging neighborhoods (Pearman & Swain, 2017). Fourth, parent gentrifiers' capital contributions will engender better-resourced and more rigorous school environments that are more accountable to all families (Diem et al., 2019).

However, these assumptions overlook the complexities inherent in school choice-making, echoing the dynamics of a prisoner's dilemma. Like in the classic game theory scenario, where individual rationality may disregard opportunities for cooperation and broader collective outcomes, school choice policies relying on rational choice models risk neglecting broader considerations, such as the racial, spatial, and political context in which families make decisions. This observation is particularly salient in gentrifying neighborhoods, where the arrival of gentrifiers' can profoundly alter the educational landscape. When parent gentrifiers prioritize individual gain without considering the broader societal implications, it can exacerbate inequities

in educational access and potentially worsen gentrification's impact on marginalized communities. Despite these implications, most studies at the intersection of gentrification and education have focused on the perspectives of parent gentrifiers, emphasizing their ability to access preferred schools and steer the transformation of gentrifying schools (Hankins, 2007; Posey-Maddox et al., 2014) rather than exploring the experiences of those at risk of marginalization (Quarles & Butler, 2018).

Approaches that recognize the inherent connections between gentrification, education, and racialized power dynamics underscore the importance of school gentrification research centering families at the margins, particularly the longtime resident Black parents who resided in gentrifying neighborhoods before redevelopment and whose children must live and often suffer, under these policies (Dumas, 2014; Nguyen et al., 2017; Slater, 2015). Black Critical Theory (BlackCrit) asserts that while neoliberal policies may assume the elimination of racism as a barrier to equal treatment, the persistence of antiblackness remains central to societal perceptions and opportunity structures (Coles, 2019; Dumas & ross, 2016). Simultaneously, critical geographers of education emphasize the inseparable relationship between education reforms and urban restructuring (Buras, 2011; Lipman, 2011), arguing that such reforms contribute to the erasure of racial histories and place-making in historically marginalized neighborhoods, creating conditions conducive to capital influx and gentrification (Pedroni, 2011; Vives Miró, 2011). These observations challenge the notion of using market-driven choice reforms to promote educational equity, as the pursuit of equity may clash with broader objectives of reimagining urban spaces within a global marketplace (Johnson, 2013; Makris & Brown, 2017).

I build on this research depicting the co-constitutive relationship between race, place, and power (e.g., Butler & Sinclair, 2020; Delaney, 2002; McKittrick, 2011) to examine how these

dynamics shape longtime resident Black parents' school choice-making in Washington, D.C., a critical site of gentrification, market-based education reforms, and cycles of racialized disinvestment (Butler, 2021; Ruble, 2010). Each study participant had lived in the city for 20 or more years and had at least one child enrolled in a city charter or traditional public school during the 2019-20 or 2020-21 school years. Specifically, through semi-structured retrospective interviews with 19 Black longtime resident parents, this paper asks:

1) *How do longtime resident Black parents conceptualize Washington, D.C.'s gentrified school choice marketplace?*
2) *How do longtime resident Black parents assess schools and make school choices?*

In what follows, I situate school choice within the broader neoliberal paradigm shift (Johnson, 2013; Lipman, 2011) and review existing literature on how Black parents navigate school choice (Cooper, 2005; Posey-Maddox et al., 2021). Subsequently, I delineate the theoretical framework of this paper, drawing upon insights from critical racial and spatial theories. Specifically, I emphasize the significance of critical geographies of education (Butler & Sinclair, 2020; Nguyen et al., 2017) and BlackCrit (Dumas & ross, 2016) to interrogate how antiblackness and the racialization of space permeate longtime resident Black parents' school choice-making (Scott & Holme, 2016). Moreover, within the racially spatialized political economy of gentrified school settings, these theories provide a means of comprehending how social meanings and racial identities become attached to specific geographical locations, shaping the distribution of resources, opportunities, and power in urban environments (Gulson, 2006; Warren & Coles, 2020).

From here, I outline the methodology utilized in this paper and present its findings. This study collectively examines the theories of action underlying school choice, foregrounding the

limitations of initiatives that are inattentive to the intricate interplay between embodied experiences, spatial contexts, and antiblack racism. These factors shape how Black longtime resident families exercise agency in the educational marketplace and access quality educational opportunities. Of note, throughout this paper, I use the term "parents" to denote participants' biological relationships with the children for whom they make school choices. Nevertheless, I acknowledge that a network of adults with diverse kinship ties also influences many Black youths' educational decisions and experiences (Gerstel, 2011). Following Dumas' (2016) approach, I capitalize "Black" to honor it as a self-determined identity representing a racialized social group with shared histories and cultural connections. I do not capitalize "blackness" and "antiblackness" as these terms are constructs and, accordingly, are not rooted in shared experiences. I do not capitalize "whiteness" to acknowledge its status as a social construct that is constantly shifts to maintain the social dominance of white supremacy (Liu et al., 2023). The decision not to capitalize "white" reflects a critical examination of the constructed nature of racial categories, challenging prevailing systems of privilege and exclusion in racialized societies.

Literature Review

This paper draws on insights from three distinct bodies of literature. The first body of literature encompasses interdisciplinary scholarship that examines how gentrification, neoliberalism, and school choice are intertwined. The second body of literature focuses on broader research concerning parents' school choice-making processes when selecting. Lastly, the third body of literature delves into Black parents nuanced and distinctive experiences navigating school choice. By integrating these diverse strands of literature, I aim to explore the unique

challenges and dynamics longtime resident Black parents encounter in a rapidly gentrifying school choice marketplace.

Neoliberal Urbanism and Gentrified School Choice

The prevailing gentrification and school choice discourse reflect neoliberal thinking and a push to design cities for financial capital accumulation (Fainstein, 2010; Harvey, 2005). Neoliberalism promotes market processes and the privatization of public services as the most efficient allocation of resources, shifting away from the state's role in addressing racism and providing social services (Peck & Tickell, 2002). Instead, it entrusts the promotion of diversity and opportunity to the market. A rising ideology of neoliberalism, thus, celebrates the participation of racially diverse groups in market sectors and suggests that individuals who do not achieve upward mobility in the market are responsible for their outcomes, attributing success or failure to personal choices and abilities within the competitive framework of neoliberalism (Coles, 2019). This individualization of responsibility obscures the state's role in perpetuating systemic racism and other structural barriers that limit opportunities for marginalized groups (Hackworth, 2007). Moreover, by framing diversity and inclusion as market opportunities, neoliberal multiculturalism may lead to superficial or tokenistic diversity initiatives that fail to challenge underlying power structures or address the root causes of racism.

The convergence of gentrification and neoliberal ideologies has profoundly impacted the nature and accessibility of education in urban environments. Gentrification often physically displaces longtime residents, particularly Black communities. As parent gentrifiers increasingly opt for public schools, they leverage capital to secure access to well-resourced and high-performing neighborhood schools (Kimelberg & Billingham, 2013), disadvantaging longtime residents outside sought-after catchment zones. Capital accumulation in gentrifying schools can

exclude longtime resident families from social networks and parent engagement activities, catering to parent gentrifiers (Stillman, 2012). Privatized alternatives like charter schools can further strain public education resources, exacerbating disparities in educational quality and accessibility (Buras, 2011). In this consumer-driven environment, families may prioritize individual interests to secure educational "value" without considering the role that schools have historically played as social and cultural community anchors, particularly among Black communities and other racialized minoritized groups (Butler, 2021; Ewing, 2018). Despite these adverse effects, some reformers argue that longtime residents should embrace affluent residents because these newcomers believe they will "fix" longstanding issues and improve neighborhood economic conditions (Dumas & ross, 2016). This argument reinforces paternalistic attitudes toward Black communities as inherently deficient and in need of external intervention for improvement. Centering the narrative on the perceived benevolence of affluent newcomers overlooks the agency and resilience of longtime resident Black parents, a central focus of this paper.

How Parents Make School Choices

School choice proponents assert that parents will systematically evaluate all available options and weigh multiple attributes in a minimally restrictive marketplace to select "good schools" for their children if given the opportunity (Viteritti, 2010). Although rational choice reasoning retains significant influence over school choice policymaking (Debs et al., 2023), critics argue that this limited view of school quality underestimates the social, spatial, and interpersonal factors that parents value (Bell, 2009). In scrutinizing the set of schools families' consider, which Bell (2009) calls "the choice set" (p. 191), researchers have found that parents prioritize a diverse set of school attributes, encompassing academic performance, location,

accessibility, and demographics, with further consideration given to factors that may alleviate additional costs or constraints like aftercare (Glazerman & Dotter, 2017; Harris & Larsen, 2015)

The literature on school gentrification, primarily focusing on white and affluent parents, sheds light on the limited applicability of rational choice theories (Freidus, 2019). For instance, while many white parent gentrifiers express support for racial diversity, they often hesitate to enroll their children in majority-minority schools (Pearman & Swain, 2017). Preferring a "right mix" of diversity (Hernández, 2019), some white parents may entirely dismiss predominantly Black and Brown schools (Mann & Rogers, 2023). These findings underscore that, even for families without racial and spatial barriers to navigate, selecting the "best" school involves non-academic factors and individual preferences that are more complex than merely opting for the school with the highest standardized performance outcomes.

Due to the insufficient exploration of their experiences, our understanding of how Black parents navigate gentrification and school choice remains limited. Notably, even among the few studies addressing this question, many still prioritize the experiences of white families (Posey-Maddox et al., 2014), with others focusing on the class-based alignments and conflicts of middle-class parents of color (Debs et al., 2023). Additionally, there is a scarcity of analyses considering the influence of spatial factors on how Black parents navigate gentrification and school choice (Alvarado & Butler, 2023; Herelle, 2022). Emphasizing the perspectives of white and affluent parents obscures the intersecting impact of space, race, and class as parents navigate school selection in gentrifying settings.

How Black Parents Make School Choices

Broader research on Black families' efforts to secure quality education for their children casts doubt on the assumption that Black families can readily access "good" schools in school

choice markets ((Ellison & Aloe, 2018; Neild, 2005). These studies reveal how racism and other forms of oppression limit Black parents' freedom of choice in the marketplace (Pattillo, 2015). Instead of operating within a minimally restrictive marketplace, Cooper (2005) offers an in-depth examination of how the intersection of race, class, gender, and other identity factors influences Black mothers' decision-making, resulting in "positioned choices" (p. 175) that are rich in emotion, values, and cultural significance. Findings indicating that all parents' prior school experiences shape their decision-making (Rhodes et al., 2023) underscore the challenges Black parents encounter as their own schooling experiences become entangled with the historical racial trauma inflicted upon Black bodies. This trauma persists through an educational system rooted in ideals of the inferiority of the Black family (Powell & Coles, 2021).

In sum, the literature highlights that Black families' considerations in school choice extend beyond rational perspectives that predominantly emphasize academic performance (Kafka, 2022). For example, a school's physical location is crucial for families reliant on public transportation, navigating inflexible work schedules, or harboring concerns about commuting through specific neighborhoods (Pedroni, 2011). Like white parents, some Black parents, particularly those who are affluent, prioritize school demographics to safeguard against racialized harm and expose their children to high-achieving and diverse populations (Hernández, 2019; Lareau et al., 2021).

Black families' school selections are often the result of trade-offs involving considerations of physical security, social and emotional safety, and academic rigor (Posey-Maddox et al., 2021). They may grapple with anxiety surrounding their choices, opting for institutions with more robust academic climates at the expense of diversity or prioritizing diversity to ensure their children's social-emotional safety (Hailey, 2022).

This anxiety often persists, contributing to what Rollock et al. (2015) term "managed trust" in educational institutions, rooted in Black parents' awareness of systemic inequities (p. 98). It manifests in their reliance on social networks over official state data to assess school quality and their vigilant oversight of their children's school experiences to preempt potential harm (Herelle, 2022). For instance, middle-class Black parents emphasize maintaining high academic standards among their children's teachers (Nygreen, 2019). Regardless of socioeconomic background, Black parents encounter negative perceptions and stereotypes from teachers when they seek to actively engage with their children's education (Posey-Maddox & Haley-Lock, 2016). It is noteworthy that even when equipped with resources schools value, these parents may encounter dismissal or rejection of their engagement efforts (McCarthy Foubert, 2022). Some longtime residents may endure these challenges, viewing their engagement in hostile schools as a political act of resistance and advocacy for their children and similar families (Chambers & Michelson, 2020; Greene, 2013).

This analysis contributes to the scholarship on Black parents' school decision-making by examining how rapidly changing neighborhood and school conditions shape their perceptions and experiences of the educational landscape. Highlighting the risks associated with pursuing equity through color-evasive neoliberal policy frameworks, it emphasizes the importance of ensuring that school choice systems address Black families' distinct racialized and spatialized challenges.

Conceptual Framework

This analysis integrates critical geographies of education (Nguyen et al., 2017) and BlackCrit (Dumas & ross, 2016) to examine how Black longtime resident parents navigate a gentrified school choice marketplace. By bridging these perspectives, I aim to elucidate how the

schooling decisions of longtime resident Black parents intersect with spatial dynamics and antiblackness, acknowledging the visceral geographies they evoke. Stemming from broader post-structural research traditions (Delaney, 2002; Kobayashi & Peake, 2000), these theoretical frameworks aim to deconstruct and challenge dominant narratives, analyze the interplay of social forces within complex systems, and, as Lipsitz (2007) theorizes, "disassemble the fatal links that connect race, place, and power" (p. 14). Together, they provide a comprehensive framework for understanding how systemic racism, power disparities, and historical legacies shape the built environment, land utilization, and resource accessibility, particularly impacting marginalized communities in evolving urban landscapes.

Critical geographies of education underscore the multifaceted nature of education as a profoundly geographic and political issue (Butler & Sinclair, 2020; Gulson & Symes, 2007). Rooted in critical spatial scholarship (Foucault, 1995; Lefebvre, 2011), they scrutinize how educational systems' spatial organization and resource distribution perpetuate or challenge educational inequalities, emphasizing the significance of geography in shaping educational access and attainment. Moreover, critical geographies highlight the role of schools as identity-shaping places within communities (Nguyen et al., 2017).

In the context of gentrification, where shifts in neighborhood demographics and socioeconomic dynamics often lead to changes in school populations and resources (Pearman, 2020), place attachments can provide insights into how residents navigate these transitions (Jones & Evans, 2012). These emotional bonds, involving feelings of belonging, identity, and rootedness to a specific place, can help explain why some parents resist leaving their neighborhood schools despite changes in demographics or perceived declines in academic quality (Nickson, 2022). It also sheds light on why other parents may relocate their children to

different schools that more closely align with their sense of community and identity. For longtime resident parents, strong place attachments may compel them to advocate for preserving neighborhood schools as inclusive spaces that reflect the diversity and cultural identity of the community. Conversely, parent gentrifiers' prioritization of schools they perceive to offer better academic opportunities may contribute to tensions over resources and representation within educational institutions.

BlackCrit, emerging from critical race theory (CRT; Ladson-Billings & Tate, 2006), centers on combating antiblackness's pervasive and systemic oppression (Dumas & ross, 2016). While CRT recognizes racism as a systemic issue, it falls short in fully addressing the specificity of anti-black racism and its role as both a social construct and an embodied experience of suffering and resistance (Coles, 2019). BlackCrit aims to challenge dominant narratives that marginalize Black experiences and perpetuate racial injustice through counter-narratives that elevate Black experiences (Powell & Coles, 2021). With its focus on antiblackness, BlackCrit connects the historical roots of Black oppression to contemporary urban contexts (McKittrick, 2011). This analytical approach illuminates how gentrification's transformations are deeply rooted in the historical commodification of Black land and bodies, where developers reimagine historically Black neighborhoods and schools to serve affluent and white constituencies (Jenkins, 2020). Acknowledging this dynamic, we must scrutinize how antiblackness operates to fully grasp Black longtime residents' school choice processes within gentrified environments.

In integrating critical geographies of education with an exploration of antiblackness, I delve into the racialized meanings and representations inherent in the school options available in Washington, D.C. This analytical approach aims to illuminate the decision-making processes, experiences, and strategies of Black longtime residents when it comes to selecting schools. By

merging these perspectives, we gain insight into their exercise of agency (Alinia, 2015; Vincent et al., 2012). Understanding how Black longtime resident parents negotiate, adapt to, and reshape educational environments within gentrified settings provides a deeper understanding of their role in shaping the educational pathways of their children.

Methods

Study Context

This paper explores how longtime resident Black parents experience school choice amidst gentrification in Washington, D.C. Racial tension and cycles of disinvestment have shaped Washington, D.C.'s history, including the removal of Black ally dwellings from Georgetown in the 1920s and 1930s and the displacement of over 20,000 Black residents through the District of Columbia Redevelopment Act of 1950 (Ruble, 2010). Similarly, the Federal Housing Administration's discriminatory grading system, most notably from the 1930s to 1960s, contributed to racially segregated neighborhoods and disparities throughout the city (Asch & Musgrove, 2015).

Despite this history, Washington, D.C., once known as 'Chocolate City,' was the first major American city with a Black majority. Black residents have controlled the city's political power structure since Congress reinstituted home rule in 1973 (Prince, 2014).[8] However, the city has undergone rapid economic, spatial, and demographic changes since 2000, with the influx of predominantly white and affluent gentrifiers leading some to rename it the "Cappuccino City" (Hyra, 2017, p. 1).

[8] The Home Rule Act of 1973 granted D.C. residents the power to elect a mayor and city council to manage local affairs, enact laws, and oversee various municipal functions, like other cities in the United States. However, certain powers, particularly those related to budget approval and oversight, remain under the purview of the U.S. Congress.

The "Cappuccino City's" social and economic inequities reflect its history of displacement and discriminatory policies. Black residents experience lower incomes, higher unemployment rates, and limited access to quality educational alternatives and housing (U.S. Census Bureau, 2022). The city comprises eight Wards, with Wards 7 and 8 predominantly comprised of Black households with median incomes significantly below the city's average. Many Washingtonians use the racialized "East of the River" signifier to describe these areas due to their distinctly Black and low-income composition, though these areas are likely to be the city's next frontier of gentrification. Conversely, moving west of the river, the city becomes increasingly white and affluent. For instance, Ward 3, located in upper northwest, D.C., where most households are white and high-income, exemplifies this trend. Most of the city's more than 200 million square feet of new development between 2000 and 2020 have benefited West of the River neighborhoods (Washington DC Economic Partnership, 2021).

Consistent with these demographic shifts, the city's public schools serve an increasingly diverse student body. Most of the city's 99,000 students are Black (67%), and the share of Hispanic/Latino (19%) and white (10%) students has grown steadily in recent years, including a 74 percent increase in the percentage of white pre-kindergarten through grade 12 students between 2013 and 2023 (EdScape, 2023).

An extensive choice system and the country's most comprehensive universal preschool program have attracted parent gentrifiers to the city and stimulated its growth (Glazerman & Dotter, 2017; Moser, 2013). While research has yet to establish a definitive causal link, the introduction of the universal preschool program in 2008 aligns closely with the city's waves of gentrification experienced in the 2010s. Most District students do not attend one of DCPS's 98 by-right traditional public schools. Instead, 72 percent of public-school students attend an out-of-

boundary DCPS or charter school through the city's unitary lottery system (Coffin & Rubin, 2023). However, despite these choices, student assignment policies privilege high-performing schools in specific feeder patterns, resulting in disparities that disproportionately affect Black and low-income students (D.C. Policy Center, 2022). For instance, the feeder pattern for Jackson-Reed, the city's most prestigious by-right high school located in upper northwest D.C., underrepresents Black and low-income students. In contrast, residents hold schools East of the River, where most Black and low-income students reside, in considerably less high esteem.

A robust public transportation system has been instrumental in connecting families across the city to high-performing schools. The Kids Ride Free program, designed to support students' access to educational opportunities and extracurricular activities by eliminating transportation costs, allows students enrolled in District schools—public, private, parochial, or homeschool—to travel for free on Metrobus, DC Circulator, and Metrorail within the District (District of Columbia Department of Transportation, 2022). This level of transportation accessibility is crucial in an educational landscape where over 70 percent of public-school students attend out-of-boundary schools (Coffin & Rubin, 2023).

Study Design

This paper draws from retrospective interviews with a purposeful sample of 19 longtime resident Black parents during the 2019-20 and 2020-21 school years, including 14 mothers and five fathers. I recruited participants by leveraging my connections within D.C.'s education sector. I distributed eligibility details directly to career bureaucrats, school leaders, and parent advocacy groups. I recruited ten participants via listservs within these networks. These participants suggested five parents who they believed met the criteria and were willing to share their experiences openly, whom I recruited through snowball methods. Finally, four local youth

from a related study encouraged their parents to participate. To be eligible for participation, parents had to self-identify as Black or African-American, have at least one student enrolled in a city charter school or traditional public school, and have relocated to D.C. before 2001 when efforts to attract affluent newcomers gained momentum (Gibson, 2015).

Given the widespread implementation of school choice programs, this paper includes a socioeconomically diverse sample of Black parents to highlight, where applicable, how family demographics influence the school selection process. Table 1 outlines participants self-identified demographic characteristics. The sample consisted of middle- and upper-class residents, referred to as affluent parents throughout the paper, and working-class and low-income longtime residents. Ten participants resided East of the River, where gentrification was in its early stages, while nine lived West of the River, in neighborhoods experiencing advanced gentrification. The children of participants attended a mix of city charter and traditional public schools, evenly distributed across various grade levels. Additionally, most participants had multiple children, with 11 having their oldest child in high school, allowing for reflections on their decision-making processes throughout the K-12 spectrum.

Table 1. *Sample summary*

Total Black Parent Sample	19
Mothers	14
Fathers	5
Ward of Residency	
Ward 1	1
Ward 2	2
Ward 3	0
Ward 4	2

Ward 5	2
Ward 6	2
Ward 7	6
Ward 8	4
Parent's Socioeconomic Class (Self-Identified)	
Upper-middle class	4
Middle class	7
Working class	6
Low-income	2
Education (Highest degree attained)	
Graduate	7
Bachelor's	8
Associate/some college	1
High school	3
Oldest Child's School Type	
Charter	8
Traditional public	10
Private	1
Oldest Child's Grade Band	
High school (9-12)	11
Middle school (5-8)	4
Elementary school (PreK-4)	4

Notes. At the time of data collection, fourteen participants had multiple children enrolled in a Washington, D.C., traditional public or charter school, including ten parents with children in numerous grade bands. Documenting key details about participants' oldest child helped to ensure the analysis captured various choice-making experiences.

Each semi-structured interview lasted between 60 and 90 minutes. I conducted three interviews at participants' homes and two at neighborhood coffee shops. Sixteen interviews were

virtual because of the Covid-19 pandemic. Gentrification's impact on a school choice marketplace encompasses diverse facets, such as housing, community dynamics, educational quality, and social interactions. Employing a semi-structured interview protocol enabled me to delve thoroughly into these various dimensions, responding to emergent lines of inquiry and capturing a holistic depiction of participants' decision-making processes (Merriam, 1998). I used open-ended questions to explore how racialized spatial structures and perceptions influenced participants' decision-making and schooling experiences (Bhattacharya, 2017). Each interview was audio-recorded and subsequently transcribed by a third-party vendor. To ensure accuracy and completeness, I meticulously reviewed each transcription. The ensuing findings and analysis utilize pseudonyms for all participants as shown in Table 2. It uses pseudonyms for school names in cases where their identification could compromise the participant's anonymity.

Table 2. *Participant characteristics*

Name	Gender	Family Social Class (Self-Identified)	Ward	Oldest Child's School Type	Oldest Child's Grade Band
Imani	F	Low-income	8	Traditional public	High school
Alicia	F	Middle class	6	Traditional public	High school
DeSean	M	Working class	4	Charter	Elementary school
Gloria	F	Working class	2	Charter	Elementary school
Dea	F	Upper-middle class	4	Traditional public	Middle school
Sydney	F	Upper-middle class	2	Charter	High school
Jessica	F	Middle class	7	Traditional public	Middle school
Jasmine	F	Low-income	1	Traditional public	High school
Crystal	F	Middle class	7	Traditional public	Middle school
Jeff	M	Working class	8	Traditional public	High school
Harriett	F	Middle class	7	Charter	High school

Name	Gender	Family Social Class (Self-Identified)	Ward	Oldest Child's School Type	Oldest Child's Grade Band
Erin	F	Middle class	8	Charter	High school
Shaina	F	Upper-middle class	7	Charter	High school
Marcus	M	Working class	8	Traditional public	Middle school
Jermaine	M	Middle class	5	Charter	Elementary school
Makayla	F	Working class	7	Traditional public	High school
Chris	M	Middle class	6	Charter	Elementary school
Megan	F	Upper-middle class	5	Private	High school
Naomi	F	Middle class	7	Traditional public	High school

Data Analysis

I employed an iterative data analysis process that commenced during data collection. Each interview underwent multiple rounds of coding, combining both inductive and deductive approaches, guided by Saldaña's (2016) framework. The initial inductive coding phase captured descriptive characteristics, including participants' backgrounds, biographical information, school quality preferences, and the factors influencing their choices, such as sources of information, perceptions of city schools and neighborhoods, and interactions with school and district staff. In a subsequent deductive coding phase, I applied predefined categories derived from the critical geographies of education and BlackCrit conceptual framework and existing research on school gentrification and school choice, focusing on the experiences of Black parents and longtime residents. These deductive codes covered a range of topics, including participants' attachments to their surroundings, perceptions of neighborhood and school changes within the context of gentrification, valued school attributes, perceived agency in the marketplace, the interplay of race and space in shaping choices, and the trade-offs encountered within schools. Consolidating

overlapping inductive and deductive codes into designated categories streamlined the coding process. Since inductive codes often aligned with themes derived from the theoretical framework and research questions, I merged most with corresponding deductive codes. I integrated the remaining 17 inductive codes into primary deductive categories. This final coding scheme comprised ten primary and 75 secondary codes, including the 17 inductive codes (Appendix B-2).

Researcher Positionality

When discussing gentrification in D.C., acknowledging my positionality is crucial. As a Black gentrifier who moved to the city in 2010 and has remained since, conversations about gentrification evoke complex feelings regarding my presence. Furthermore, I have worked in various roles in the city's education sector. During data collection, I was employed at the D.C.'s State Education Agency, the Office of the State Superintendent of Education, which afforded insights into the choice-making context and access to participants. I openly shared my concerns about gentrification's marginalizing and displacing effects with participants and related participants' narratives with my observations from working with longtime resident families. Participants' willingness to share and their non-verbal cues suggested appreciation for my openness and empathy towards their experiences. Throughout the project, I maintained reflexive field notes to examine how my positionalities influenced the research process, which included documenting how preconceptions evolved and my interpretation of participants' responses to me (Anderson, 1989; Probst & Berenson, 2014).

Findings

The findings below underscore the resilience longtime resident Black parents demonstrate in their school choice-making and the racial and spatial obstacles they confront

within Washington, D.C.'s complex educational landscape. Constrained by a system that favors neighborhoods that are increasingly affluent and white, many participants perceived the city's educational marketplace as offering more of a "chance" than a genuine choice, particularly as gentrification pushes them out of prestigious catchment zones in historically Black areas. Although some parents managed to secure seats in schools they deemed suitable for their children, they attributed it to a stroke of luck, given the scarcity and unequal distribution of culturally affirming and rigorous schools across the city. Furthermore, most parents who found "good schools" did so through extensive trial and error, contending with challenging, unresponsive, or even hostile schooling environments, which they felt mirrored the typical experiences of Black families. Factors such as geography, antiblackness, and socioeconomic status emerge as pivotal influencers shaping parents' decisions as they navigate considerations of physical and emotional safety, perceptions of school environments, and neighborhood dynamics to secure educational opportunities for their children.

Conceptualizing the Gentrified School Choice Marketplace

Parents navigating the complexities of the District's educational marketplace noted inherent tensions in their decision-making processes. Jessica's, a middle-class mother, insight that the city's choice system amounted to "a chance, not a choice" encapsulated the disillusionment felt by many longtime resident parents living outside prestigious catchment zones, which were increasingly inaccessible due to gentrification. Crystal, another middle-class parent, echoed this sentiment, emphasizing the hurdles of gaining admission to desired schools when not in the "right" neighborhoods:

> If I want my kid to go to that high school, and if he's not in that feeder elementary school, and if he doesn't go through that feeder middle school, I know there's a

> chance he might not get in there. Yes, D.C. has many options, but if you don't live in the right neighborhood and you have to rely on the lottery to get into the right school, that's not a fair chance.

Similarly, addressing the challenges of accessing the city's top-performing by-right school across town, middle-class Harriet remarked, "If [Jackson-Reed] is all the way in upper northwest, and the kids in southeast all want to flock to it that isn't logistically fair, is it? There aren't enough seats, and the people in northwest get to go to it by-right, so then we end up somewhere else."

Many participants resonated with these concerns about relying on the lottery system to enter high-performing schools, describing their struggle, as articulated by an upper-middle class parent, Dea, as akin to "fighting for scraps" to secure limited seats for out-of-boundary families. This sentiment led some to label the My School DC lottery as a tool of a "rigged" system, eroding confidence in its fairness despite the appearance of transparent practices. Moreover, participants expressed skepticism about the policy assumption that they could influence schools by "vot[ing] with their feet" (Buckley & Schneider, 2009, p. 278), recalling instances when district leaders dismissed their concerns.

Imani, a low-income mother, recalled her frustrations of not being listened to when her fourth-grade son started to receive an intervention for "struggling learners" that she thought he didn't need. When she sought clarification about the decision, she encountered dismissive responses from school authorities. When Imani questioned the basis for the decision, the white principal simply referred to standardized test data despite her son performing at or above grade level. District administrators met her attempts to seek further clarity with bureaucratic obstacles and excuses about interim leadership. Feeling increasingly marginalized, Imani expressed her dismay, noting, "I'm probably the only parent in my son's class that has gone to college. Like, I

know where this is going and what they need to be prepared for middle and high school. The principal was white. No one was listening. It all felt very racialized." Despite her insistence that her son was performing at or above grade level, her inability to affect change reflects the structural barriers that hinder Black parents' ability to exercise meaningful choices in a purportedly "choice" marketplace. This reliance on standardized testing, a practice fraught with well-documented racial biases (Au, 2022), underscores how Black students disproportionately face the label of "struggling learners" due to the inherent racialization of academic achievement, which perpetuates a narrative of Black inferiority (Dumas, 2016). The dismissive attitude of the white principal and other education administrators further exemplifies how decision-making bodies lacking diverse representation may discount and sideline Black voices in crucial decision-making processes. Stereotypes regarding Black parents' educational attainment, socioeconomic status, and parenting capabilities can undermine their credibility and agency with power brokers in educational settings, impeding their ability to effectively advocate for their children's needs (Greene, 2013; Vincent et al., 2012).

These racialized dynamics and dismissive response underscores how antiblackness operates in educational settings, perpetuating power asymmetries and leaving some feeling disempowered and voiceless (Chambers & Michelson, 2020). Jasmine, another low-income mother, echoed this sentiment, further highlighting the systemic challenges faced by Black parents in advocating for their children's educational rights:

> I felt very powerless. I have a lot of knowledge and experience but no power—no social capital. It didn't matter. I know people, but I don't know the people behind the people—the people you need to get things done.

Witnessing school leaders readily respond to the demands of white parent gentrifiers compounded some parents' frustrations and deepened their belief that the system did not serve their interests. Reflecting on this idea, DeSean, a working-class father, remarked, "Where the school is has gentrified very quickly, so, like, they just got rid of the Black principal and replaced him with a white one. I feel like when white families come in, they sign up for PTA, become president, and get all the power." The replacement of Black school leaders with white ones in gentrifying areas reflects a broader pattern of exclusion and displacement of Black voices in gentrifying school communities, where the presence of parent gentrifiers often coincides with shifts in school leadership and decision-making power (Freidus, 2020; Syeed, 2018). For DeSean and many other longtime resident parents, these shifts in leadership demographics not only symbolize the erasure of Black influence but also reinforce perceptions of systemic bias and that school leaders are more accountable to parent gentrifiers' concerns, deepening their mistrust in the school choice marketplace. As a result, longtime resident Black parents may become increasingly skeptical of the school choice process and the purported benefits it offers.

This distrust helps to explain why few longtime resident parents conveyed a preference for traditional public or charter schools. Instead, parents sought whichever school, regardless of type, would afford their children the best opportunities; most parents had a child enrolled in both sectors and expressed dissatisfaction with both alternatives. For instance, parents like working-class Makayla highlighted concerns about the accountability structures for charter schools, indicating a preference for traditional public schools. Reflecting skepticism about the charter school's expansion and oversight. She explained, "We provided the charter sector a blank check to open as many charters as they like; it's destructive, and no one seems to care." Makayla's comments reflect concerns about the charter sector's intentions, where, despite advocates

framing it as a lifeline for Black families and other marginalized communities, charter expansion without adequate oversights allows for the possibility of replicating the exploitative and marginalizing practices such families seek to avoid.

On the other hand, Crystal raised questions about charter leaders' intentions and marketing strategies, emphasizing parents' challenges when navigating school choice options. She suggested, "You can't just be throwing these schools up, and then the parents are like refugees, going from school to school chasing opportunities and enrolling their kids because they have slick marketing tools." Crystal's symbolic portrayal of parents as "refugees" highlights the anxiety and displacement experienced by families forced to navigate a complex and opaque school choice process. These insights emphasize parents' complex considerations when choosing between traditional and charter schools and the need for accessible school quality and school functioning information about the factors longtime residents value (Noonan & Schneider, 2022).

Chris, a middle-class father, exemplified a more neutral group of parents, expressing an open-minded approach to choice-making. He stated, "I wasn't hell-bent on my kids attending a charter school. If I visit a traditional public school and they give me what I want, I'll go to that school. If I'm not satisfied and another school—traditional or charter—catches my attention, I'll go there. I don't have a preference." Reflecting on her decision to enroll her children in traditional public schools across town, another working-class parent, Gloria, affirmed, "I have no qualms about sending my children to school outside of my neighborhood. I have zero regrets. And I can see that this was the best choice for them." However, despite this flexibility, most parents closely monitored their children's educational experiences. They remained prepared to explore other options if their children expressed dissatisfaction or school leaders failed to address their concerns (Vincent et al., 2012).

Chris and parents like him exemplify the archetypal rational choice consumers—observant, well-informed, and aware of alternatives. Still, many parents did not feel like contented consumers with ample choices. Megan, an upper-middle class parent, for example, felt trapped in what she called a "prisoner's dilemma." She explained, "'A prisoner's dilemma,' that's the phrase I use for school choice in D.C. How much do you really want to try? Suppose you're not getting the school you want. In that case, it's probably not going to get better, so there's only one move to make, which is leaving, and wherever else you end up might not be any better." Megan's characterization of the school choice process as a "prisoner's dilemma" provides a poignant illustration of the systemic barriers faced by Black families in their quest for educational equity. The term "prisoner's dilemma" originates from game theory, describing a scenario where individuals face a choice between cooperating for mutual benefit or acting in their self-interest to avoid adverse outcomes (Flood et al., 1950). In the context of school choice in Washington D.C., Megan's use of this metaphor suggests that regardless of their decisions, Black families are operating in a system that fails to prioritize their needs and aspirations. Instead of a responsive marketplace ripe with humanizing educational settings, Megan and other longtime resident parents described the frustration of searching for justice within an inherently unequal system where Black families disproportionately face limited access to high-quality schools.

Still, a few middle- and upper-middle class parents, sought to make the system work for them like parent gentrifiers. For instance, Jessica, explained that rather than "trust" in the lottery, she leveraged her social capital to secure a spot at her top choice. She elaborated:

> There's a back door to everything, and I wasn't going to go the lottery route when I knew the school was cherry-picking. I would ask myself; how could my family

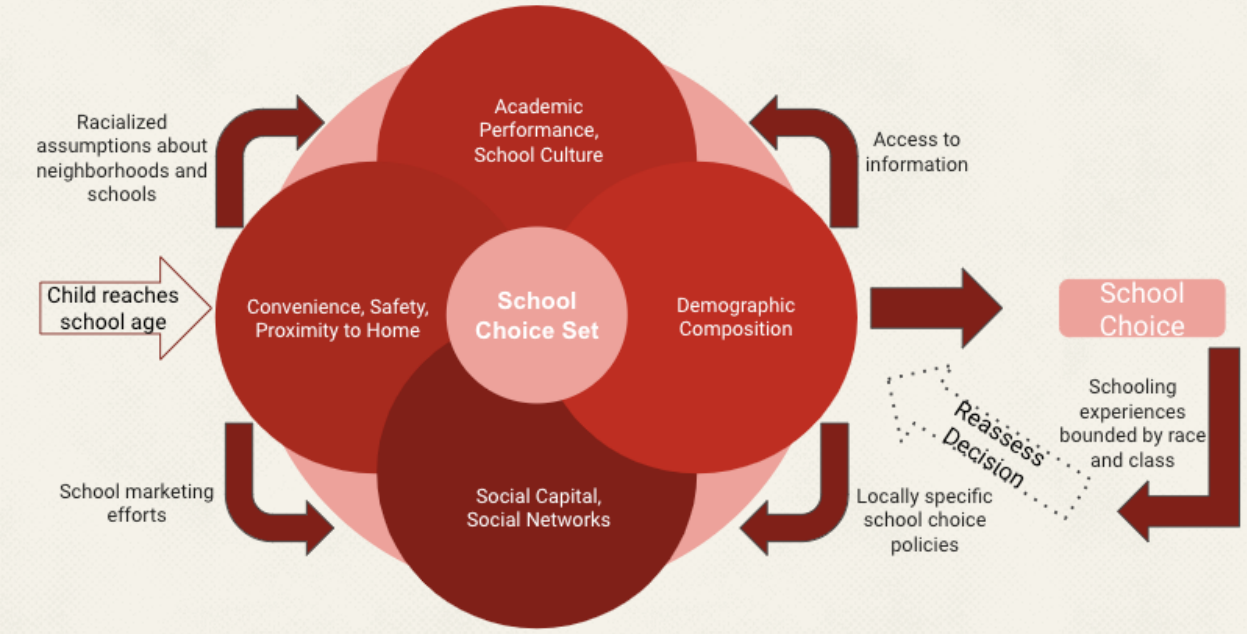
> contribute to the school community? I would call and say I'm on this or that advisory board or I would meet with the principal and ask the right things, compliment the school, flatter them. Next thing you know, I'm getting a call before the lottery is even over, "Ma'am, we've got a seat for you."

Jessica's resourcefulness, presumably securing an enrollment slot through her informal networks, reveals a troubling reality deeply ingrained in the education landscape's antiblackness. In a system purportedly designed to provide equal opportunities for all students, the ability to secure coveted school placements through social connections is a privilege that white supremacy often renders inaccessible to Black families and is inherently unequal (e.g., Sattin-Bajaj & Roda, 2020). This approach to choice-making, while reflective of neoliberalism's competitive dynamics, reinforces an insidious narrative that Black families must rely on individual resourcefulness rather than equitable systems to access quality education. Jessica's comments also corroborate other longtime residents' critiques that the educational marketplace is neither fair nor equitable.

Making Schooling Decisions

This section outlines the key factors that longtime resident parents consider when making schooling decisions. While academic excellence was necessary, participants' narratives depart from traditional decision-making models that prioritize quantifiable metrics. As depicted in Figure 1, parents emphasized an array of non-academic factors, particularly those that related to positive racialized environments and physical and emotional safety. Additionally, the section highlights the impact of space and race on decision-making, with factors such as proximity to home, transportation accessibility, place attachments, and racialized perceptions of neighborhoods playing significant roles.

Figure 1. *How longtime resident Black parents' make school choices*



Balancing academic excellence and racialized school environments. Most parents sought to balance academic aspirations with considerations like school culture, racial composition, disciplinary policies, and extracurricular activities. Imani, for instance, emphasized the importance of college preparedness, explaining, "A heavy emphasis on college was really important for me." Additionally, discussing her satisfaction with getting into one of the city's "top" high schools, middle-class Alicia noted the importance of preparing students for alternative education pathways, "In addition to the college prep stuff, [her daughter's school] offered a couple of extra programs like hospitality to help prepare students if they didn't see college as an option."

Alongside academic considerations, parents grappled with the racialized dynamics present within schools. For instance, Dea expressed dissatisfaction with a predominantly white

charter school staff's disciplinary approach, highlighting the harm it inflicted on her son and other Black students:

> Our academic experience was amazing, but what I didn't like was the way the predominantly white staff yelled at these Black kids. Some of these Black children have parents in prison, and you're rating them, labeling them, based on their behavior each day. I didn't like what that was modeling for my son. He had a great education. But I took him out anyway.

This comment illustrates the delicate balance Black longtime resident parents must navigate when evaluating a school's academic quality against its racialized environment. Dea's critique underscores the systemic nature of antiblack racism in educational institutions, where Black students are disproportionately disciplined and stigmatized (Coles, 2019; Wallace, 2018). Her recognition of the spatial dimensions of schooling and its impact on students' lived realities challenges the prevailing narrative that academic excellence should outweigh concerns about racialized environments. From her perspective, regular confrontations with white staff could lead Black children to develop a spatial perception of Jones School that is linked with feelings of fear and repression, potentially impacting their academic success (Warren et al., 2022). By withdrawing her child, Dea resisted the normalization of racialized disciplinary practices in hopes of protecting her child from the visceral effects of antiblackness within the school environment (Jenkins, 2022).

Sydney's rejection of a prestigious middle school over concerns about its repressive practices similarly reflects the importance of creating educational spaces that promote holistic development and resist oppressive structures (Warren & Coles, 2020). Sydney explained:

> I don't want them [her children] wearing uniforms. I don't want them having double blocks of reading and math. I want them to have a balanced, enriching experience. I want it to be joyful when they enter the building. Ultimately, we didn't choose it because we felt the structure is oppressive.

Sydney's decision highlights the desire for learning environments that affirm children's humanity and joy, asserting her agency in seeking educational spaces aligned with her values and aspirations (Powell & Coles, 2021).

In a broader sense, parents strongly desired to find schools offering an exceptional education while acknowledging their humanity and fostering a sense of belonging. Jessica exemplified this sentiment when she commended the welcoming leadership team at her daughter's Northwest, D.C. elementary school, noting, "They're welcoming, and I think it helps. You can read the body language and tell they're really trying to bring everybody together and make [Black parents] comfortable." Jessica's words highlight the significance of school inclusivity and the importance that Black longtime resident parents place on feeling a sense of belonging within the school community. This emphasis on inclusivity speaks to notions of schools as generative sites of identity formation (Collins & Coleman, 2008), suggesting that a welcoming atmosphere resonates deeply with parents like Jessica, affirming their cultural identity and fostering positive educational experiences for their children.

Conversely, Makayla's experience sheds light on how antiblackness can permeate choice settings, which pushes parents to reevaluate their decisions. Recounting ongoing disputes with a principal that prompted her to withdraw her son from a highly-rated neighborhood elementary school in Northwest, D.C., she explained:

> I'm on the PTA, and I'm fighting with the principal all year, and nothing's getting done. There's some issue on the playground, and then the next day, I'm at the pickup line, and the principal approaches me and says, "Either you write a letter withdrawing your complaint, or I'm going to suspend your child for five days."

The principal's dismissive attitude towards Makayla's concerns and readiness to resort to punitive measures demonstrates the antiblack racism that many Black parents encounter (Posey-Maddox, 2017). Such responses convey a lack of accountability and disregard for Makayla's agency in advocating for her child's well-being. The principal's ultimatum implies a coercive dynamic, wherein trying to force Makayla into choosing between silencing her complaints or facing punitive consequences for her child echoes historical patterns of suppressing Black voices and seeking control over Black bodies in educational spaces (Brown & Rodríguez, 2009). Nevertheless, despite facing resistance, Makayla's unwavering advocacy underscores the determination and agency exhibited by many participants in navigating antiblackness within school environments.

Physical and emotional safety. Research has documented how Black communities often bear the brunt of systemic injustices, including higher rates of crime, poverty, and environmental hazards (Rothstein, 2017). Given this reality, it is unsurprising that physical safety emerged as a significant concern in parents' school choice-making, particularly within urban environments where the specter of antiblackness looms. These concerns encompassed two interrelated dimensions of neighborhood security: actual security, based on empirical data like crime rates and police presence, and perceived security, reflecting individuals' subjective feelings of safety within their neighborhoods.

Recognizing that unjust geographies place their children at heightened exposure to neighborhood violence during their school commutes (Hopson et al., 2014; Ramírez, 2020), many longtime resident parents navigated environmental safety concerns through their intimate knowledge of neighborhood dynamics. These localized and spatial understandings, cultivated through lived experiences, profoundly shaped participants' perceptions of security. For instance, in guiding his daughter through potential risks, Jeff, a working-class father, underscored the necessity of candid discussions, reflecting the fusion of emotional care and practical vigilance in parental decision-making. He aptly captured this approach, stating, "I have conversations with her about what to look out for and just being cautious." Jeff's acute awareness of social dynamics, community networks, and potential hazards informed a nuanced understanding of risk. This pragmatic wisdom, often overlooked in traditional research and policy discourses (Gaventa, 1993), empowers longtime resident parents to discern between genuine threats and perceived dangers for their families. Furthermore, Jeff's adeptness in assessing risks within his environment illuminates the resilience ingrained in communities grappling with elevated crime rates. Longtime resident parents demonstrated a remarkable capacity to adapt and make informed choices, drawing insights from their lived realities.

Still, parents' physical safety concerns were not unfounded. Shortly after emphasizing her daughter's need to feel a sense of belonging across various city spaces, Sydney recounted a distressing incident: "The other day, Lauren was coming home on the metro, and a man tried to kiss her. These are the kinds of things she's got to deal with trying to traverse one of these upper northwest high schools." Sydney's account elicits strong emotions of fear, worry, and frustration regarding the complexities of addressing safety issues in urban environments. This incident, set against the backdrop of broader antiblackness contexts, where Black individuals, particularly

women, and girls, are disproportionately vulnerable to harassment and violence in public spaces (Epstein et al., 2017), underscores the racialized aspects of safety concerns influencing longtime resident parents' decisions about their children's schooling.

Some parents incorporated local crime statistics into their decision-making process, ultimately choosing schools in what they perceived as safer neighborhoods. Meanwhile, Harriett's children endured a lengthy daily commute on the school bus, a decision driven by her concerns about the ecological effects of poverty. She elaborated:

> Part one is environmental. I don't care what you do to renovate this school; you're still going to encounter somebody smoking a blunt on the bus, or some paraphernalia outside of the school, or whatever is happening on the street. You don't encounter that in upper northwest over there West of the Park. Right. So, it's one environment. Part two is the population. If you're in a school where you have a lot of families with lot of needs, economically and socially, then that may make learning harder because it's hard being poor.

Harriett's decision highlights the complex interplay of visceral geographies and antiblackness in shaping longtime residents' choices. The presence of substance abuse and paraphernalia on public transportation evokes feelings of discomfort and apprehension, creating a hostile environment from which Harriett seeks to shield her children. Moreover, Harriett's reference to the socioeconomic composition of schools reflects her perception of poverty's pervasive impact on city schools. Acknowledging the challenges faced by schools with a high concentration of low-income families demonstrates her understanding of the systemic inequities that disproportionately longtime resident communities—these challenges, which gentrification compounds, further exacerbate educational disparities.

Geography and Spatial Understandings. Geography and spatial perceptions emerged as pivotal influencers that shaped parents' choices. Some parents, driven by practical constraints, preferred schools near their residences. In contrast, others ventured beyond their immediate neighborhoods, assuming affluent areas with positive neighborhood reputations would yield similarly positive schooling experiences (Jenkins, 2020).

Illustrating the impact of geography on school selection criteria, some parents emphasized metro accessibility when choosing schools for their middle- and high-school-aged children's independent commutes. For parents with younger children, proximity to transportation hubs ensured everyone could get to where they needed to go on time. Chris explained, "Because my son was in daycare by the time my daughter was getting ready to start school, proximity was a big deal. I take the metro to work, so anything metro accessible was a big deal."

Furthermore, beyond these practical transportation considerations, the spatial dynamics of race profoundly influenced decision-making on the viability of schooling options. Place attachments and racialized understandings of neighborhoods, particularly concerning racial composition and socioeconomic status, were central to longtime resident parents' assessment of the schools in those areas (Jenkins, 2022).

For instance, some parents, like Sydney, emphasized the importance of accessing feeder patterns in predominantly affluent white neighborhoods, reflecting notions of whiteness as property that schools in these areas confer significant educational advantages (Harris, 1993). Concerning her decision to only apply for West of the River schools that fed into the city's highest-performing by-right high school, she explained, "Getting in the right feeder pattern is so important. I looked at all the schools that feed into Jackson-Reed; you can pick any of them, and that's where we applied. Luckily, she got in, and we were set." Marcus, a working-class parent,

shared a similar sentiment, reflecting confidence in the educational prospects of schools located "West of the River," stating, "It is what it is; I knew we'd be fine if we got her in [a school] West of the River".

Conflicting understandings of these narratives emerge through a BlackCrit lens. On the one hand, emphasizing West of the River schools as markers of educational excellence perpetuates systems of antiblackness by implying that predominantly Black neighborhoods or schools located elsewhere are inferior (Coles, 2019). On the other hand, parents' inclination to consider schools outside their immediate neighborhood reflects their broader claims to the city and desire for their children to both access high-quality schools and feel a sense of belonging throughout the urban landscape (Alvarado & Butler, 2023; Nickson, 2022). Noting her connectedness to the city, Sydney stated, "This is their city, and they should be comfortable going anywhere in it." Sydney's assertion of her connection to D.C. underscores the importance of education for longtime residents to assert agency and resist the erasure of their communities' identities in the face of gentrification (McKittrick, 2011).

Diversity, race, and social class. Most longtime resident parents, irrespective of their socioeconomic status, tended to prioritize similar factors in their decision-making process. However, there was a notable exception among those who sought schools with the "right mix" of racial and socioeconomic diversity and, in doing so, expressed views closely aligned with the prevailing school gentrification discourse (Hernández, 2019).

Middle- and upper-middle class parents, in particular, articulated a desire for schools where a "significant" portion of parents came from socioeconomically advantaged backgrounds, aiming to immerse their children in middle-class environments. This sentiment reflects a neoliberal mindset that views education as an individual investment to align their children's

educational experiences with desired social and economic outcomes (Davies & Bansel, 2007). For instance, middle-class Erin emphasized preserving the values she instilled at home. She stated, “I’m not saying it’s right or it’s okay. I put a lot into raising my kids. So, I don’t want what I do at home to be compromised when they go to school.” Mirroring broader societal narratives that equate success with individual effort and merit, market-driven approaches to education heighten pressures for families to use education to secure and perpetuate social privilege.

Erin’s insistence on safeguarding her children’s educational experiences without compromise, particularly concerning socioeconomic status, may perpetuate uneven educational geographies. This individualistic mindset can marginalize those who do not fit within the parameters of neoliberal success narratives. By prioritizing schools with predominantly advantaged student bodies, longtime resident parents like Erin inadvertently concentrate resources and opportunities in already privileged communities (Sattin-Bajaj & Roda, 2020). Although not explicitly articulated, Erin’s remarks echo an essentializing narrative that schools serving low-income students, which often have high concentrations of Black students, lack moral standards compared to the values she instills at home (Warren & Coles, 2020). Within a system where most students are Black, seeking to avoid predominantly Black schools also feeds narratives that position blackness as inherently inferior or deficient. By promoting neoliberal ideals of success, which evaluate performance solely on individual effort and disregard historical and systemic factors, middle-class longtime resident Black parents risk reinforcing antiblack ideologies. Therefore, while Erin’s emphasis on a school’s composition may stem from a desire to provide her family with the best opportunities, it is imperative to acknowledge how her decision-making process may contribute to racialized inequalities within the marketplace.

Shaina, an upper-middle class mother, was drawn to her daughter's school because of its increasing number of socioeconomically advantaged families and the advocacy she anticipated from this group. She explained, "I knew [they] would fight hard for the school because they had the time to do it. They had the money to do it, and they had the means to do it." Shaina's choice reflects the spatial dynamics of gentrification and how affluent families reshape educational geographies. Despite her affluence, she speculated that school leaders might not readily acknowledge or value her and other longtime residents' engagement efforts. This belief underscores the racialized power dynamics within educational institutions. Where on the one hand, the voices and contributions of Black families may get marginalized, and on the other hand, parent gentrifiers enjoy significant influence in shaping school policies and practices. Nevertheless, Shaina's expectation of advocacy from parent gentrifiers indicates a visceral enthusiasm and confidence in the emotional and practical advantages of an engaging school community and its potential to foster a sense of belonging and agency.

While Shaina's interest in advantaged families did not explicitly convey a racial dimension, Jessica emphasized the potential benefits of attending a predominantly white school (Joseph & Feldman, 2009). She explained, "When he goes to school, he has a certain level of exposure to white people, and I think it's a benefit for him to understand how certain people behave and interact so he can know how to maneuver around them in the future." Jessica's perspective reveals an emotional investment in the racialized landscape of society, reflecting a broader societal narrative where access to social advantages and opportunities is often contingent upon one's proximity to whiteness (Pearman & Greene, 2022). Implicit in her statement is the notion that interaction with white peers will equip her son with a social toolkit, enabling him to navigate societal structures dominated by white individuals more effectively. However, while

Jessica's emphasis on understanding how white people behave shows her awareness of racism's endemic power, this reasoning perpetuates the very systems of antiblackness from which she seeks to shield her son. Jessica's reasoning that exposure to white students will confer an advantage on her son highlights the broader socio-political considerations that influence parents' decision-making, where racial dynamics and power structures play a pivotal role in the distribution of social capital (Saporito & Lareau, 1999).

Highlighting discrepancies in resource allocations, Marcus, a working-class father, observed, "When you have white people in the school, they're gonna get the resources and the teachers, and you benefit a little bit from that, even though they still gonna treat you like a Black parent when you bring a concern." Marcus' comments underscore the racialized trade-offs that Black parents make as they select schools, where, in a gentrified school choice marketplace, longtime resident families must make compromises based on racial inequities out of necessity. His recognition of these trade-offs suggests a visceral awareness, borne out of lived experiences, of the inherent injustices in urban educational settings. Moreover, Marcus' commentary illuminates the systemic nature of antiblackness within schools, where Black parents may face discrimination and marginalization despite efforts to promote diversity (Pattillo, 2015). This acknowledgment also underscores the asymmetrical power dynamics present in educational settings, where white students may receive preferential treatment in resource allocation and attention compared to their Black counterparts. In navigating these dynamics, seeking diversity emerges as a potential avenue for mitigating disparities in resource distribution, even if Black families are not the primary or intended beneficiaries.

In contrast, some parents preferred predominantly Black schools to avoid the racial discord Marcus and other parents described. Naomi, a middle-class mother, said one factor that

drew her to her daughter's high school was the cadre of Black parents. Bluntly, she said, "We're really happy, Jade likes it, plus we're not the only Black people at the PTA meeting anymore."

These experiences exemplify the racialized trickle-down effects of neoliberal urbanism, where the racialized distribution of opportunity and market-driven competition for limited educational resources forces longtime resident parents to consider the material consequences of school demographics strategically.

Discussion and Conclusion

This study explored the complex schooling decisions of longtime resident Black parents, revealing the many factors guiding their preferences. Participants' narratives surfaced the intertwined racial and spatial obstacles parents confront in navigating an urban education landscape undergoing gentrification. Balancing academic excellence with concern for their children's safety and well-being, many parents opted for high-performing schools in gentrified neighborhoods despite the hazards of long commutes. However, rather than finding refuge, they often faced unwelcoming and unresponsive staff, intensifying their feelings of exclusion.

This study builds on existing research on gentrification and school choice. It challenges the broader logic of school choice as a tool to empower historically marginalized families and highlights the drawbacks of marketizing education to promote equity. While school choice policies have helped cities revitalize historically underinvested neighborhoods, transforming schools into commodities and parents into consumers is susceptible to reproducing existing disparities. Gentrifying parents, buoyed by their economic advantage, often wield disproportionate influence in this marketplace (Hankins, 2007; Sattin-Bajaj & Roda, 2020). The phrase "a chance, not a choice" captures the unequal nature of school choice for longtime resident Black parents. Unlike parent gentrifiers and other advantaged families, who may have

the resources and social capital to make the system work for them and exercise genuine choice in selecting schools, many longtime resident Black parents often found themselves relegated to a system where factors beyond their control dictated their choices. As Cooper (2005), these parents made "positioned" choices influenced their social status, neighborhood dynamics, economic circumstances, and resource availability. Despite claims of fairness, experiences with the city's lottery system revealed deep-seated skepticism, with many perceiving it as emblematic of a rigged system that undermines parents' agency and community connections (Makris, 2018).

Furthermore, the disjuncture between school choice rhetoric and its reality exposes how neoliberal urbanism and antiblackness shape the choice-making context. Despite promises of parent empowerment many families encountered significant constraints in exercising meaningful choices. As critical geographers have described (Green, 2015; Nygreen, 2019), racialized spatial disparities in resource allocations contributed to a landscape where access to quality education remains unevenly distributed. Similar to observations Cucchiara (2013) made, parents struggled to advocate for their children's educational needs, particularly in comparison to their perception of school leaders as responsive to white parent gentrifiers. While neoliberal education reforms often prioritize accountability mechanisms like the publication of performance data to enhance transparency and ensure schools are responsive to families (Lipman, 2013; McDermott, 2011), the documented mistreatment of Black families within the system illustrates how the pervasive influence of antiblackness in education can undermine the effectiveness of such measures (Buras, 2011). In alignment with critiques of color-evasive policymaking (Welton et al., 2015), choice frameworks that fail to address families' unique spatial and racial challenges risk perpetuating disparities that disproportionately affect longtime resident Black parents and other marginalized families (Dumas, 2016).

These recurring offenses evoked visceral feelings and conveyed to longtime residents throughout the marketplace that they were not valued customers. In some instances, dehumanizing encounters strengthened parents' resolve to resist racial bias, asserting their right to thrive in their children's schools. Meanwhile, other parents felt trapped in what they interpreted as a "prisoner's dilemma," where none of their alternatives were optimal. This skepticism mirrors broader issues across urban educational markets, where historical disparities in access to high-quality schools erode parents' confidence in the system (Posey-Maddox et al., 2021; Rollock et al., 2015).

The findings challenge the prevailing policy discourse, which characterizes parents prioritizing non-academic factors as "low information" choosers (Yettick, 2016). While rational choice theories prioritize selecting top-performing schools (Buckley & Schneider, 2009; Chubb & Moe, 1990), this paper demonstrates that such metrics fail to account for the hostility many Black families experience, even in high-performing schools. As Bell (2009) observed, the assumption that families will make "better" choices if equipped with "reliable" academic performance data ignores the social and historical factors that bound choice-making. By prioritizing these "unconventional" factors, parents resisted dominant narratives on choice and school quality that often downplay the significance of Black families' visceral experiences (Khalil, 2010). Safety, in particular, was a paramount concern for parents, influenced by attachments to specific places, understanding of neighborhood dynamics, and awareness of their children's social and emotional needs. Longtime resident parents' ability to discern actual threats from perceived ones underscores their capacity to make well-informed decisions, drawing on overlooked sources of knowledge.

Moreover, the paper reveals the intersectionality of race and class in shaping educational opportunities (Smith & Stovall, 2008). As Makris (2018) documented, low-income and working-class parents lacked access to social networks that could help them navigate the system and find the right school for their children. Affluent longtime residents seeking to leverage their social capital akin to white parent gentrifiers highlight the complexities of choice for Black families (Debs et al., 2023; Pattillo, 2015). While their social standing offered certain benefits, it did not guarantee equal access or shield them from the effects of antiblack racism. However, their pursuit of advantage inadvertently contributed to the socioeconomic stratification of schooling by concentrating their resources in select schools—much like parent gentrifiers. This perpetuation of segregation reinforces structures of white supremacy, wherein their language and practices inadvertently reinforce narratives of racial hierarchy and exclusion (Diamond & Gomez, 2023). These affluent parents may reflect what Roda and Wells (2013) characterize as a "fractured habitus" (p. 288), whereby they hold civic-oriented values but make schooling decisions to benefit their children. These insights are crucial for informing educational policies that empower Black parents and students within evolving urban landscapes marked by gentrification.

Moving forward, researchers should prioritize continued interrogation of the policy logic underpinning school choice in gentrifying contexts. Although the school choice movement, in part, is rooted in notions of parent empowerment and community engagement, in many gentrifying contexts, these principles often take a backseat to pervasive market ideologies characterized by individualistic choice narratives and efforts to cater to affluent parents (Scott, 2013). Moreover, while many charter schools in gentrifying jurisdictions aim to accommodate

the needs of longtime residents, urban education markets frequently lack the supply to fully meet this demand.

Additionally, this paper's limitation suggest several directions for future research on how longtime residents navigate gentrified school choice markets. This research took a retrospective approach to understanding how historically minoritized parents' made sense of market dynamics. As such, it did not explicitly relate participants' experiences to specific city- or sector-wide policies or practices. Future studies should investigating the role of charter authorizers and district policy frameworks in guiding schools on how to engage with families can uncover the policy conditions that contribute to the dissatisfaction and frustration parents described regarding their schooling options. This focus may illuminate specific policies and practices that hinder or promote inclusivity within choice systems and the fair treatment of vulnerable families. As this study did not focus on parents' decisions at a particular year of school, future studies that track longtime residents' choices for a specific school year or grade level can reveal a more detailed understanding of how parents ascribe different meanings to racial and spatial obstacles at varying points along the elementary and secondary school continuum. Participants limited trust in academic performance data suggests a need to examine the (mis)alignment between the school outcomes accountability systems promote and the factors that parents value. We should question the efficacy of engineering statistically desegregated schools in gentrified spaces, even those where some students have high-performance outcomes if those spaces are socially and culturally hostile to non-white and non-affluent bodies (Noonan & Schneider, 2022; Warren & Coles, 2020).

Other salient limitations concern the study sample. While a significant portion of the research sample consisted of working-class and low-income parents, explicitly focusing on

economically disadvantaged families could enhance our understanding of how these families navigate the challenges of school and neighborhood gentrification. Furthermore, gender-related disparities in decision-making processes underscore the necessity of centering Black fathers in future research. Despite their limited representation in the sample, Black fathers tended to exhibit a more open-minded and adaptable approach on average compared to mothers. This finding is particularly significant considering that mothers often bear the primary responsibility for educational decisions (Cooper, 2005) and may harbor more visceral concerns about physical safety (Epstein et al., 2017). Therefore, prioritizing the inclusion of Black fathers' perspectives is essential for gaining a comprehensive understanding of parental decision-making dynamics in education (Allen, 2013).

Finally, this research underscores the urgency of addressing systemic injustices perpetuating educational inequity in urban areas. Policymakers must cultivate a responsive educational marketplace that empowers Black parents and other historically marginalized families with meaningful choices rooted in equity and social justice to ensure every child can thrive and succeed.

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Study 3. Local Policymakers Sensemaking on Gentrification and Education: Working Towards Equity Across a Contested Landscape

Since the early 2000s, city leaders and private developers have increasingly collaborated to transform American cities by marketizing public services, arguing that it will foster enhanced efficiency, innovation, and choice for consumers (Hwang & Lin, 2016; Makris & Brown, 2017). The resulting public-private investments, aimed at exploiting rent gaps to revitalize historically marginalized neighborhoods, accelerate gentrification by enticing commercial institutions and middle- and upper-income newcomers, known as gentrifiers, to these areas (Smith, 1996; Vives Miró, 2011). This socioeconomic restructuring engenders economic and social displacement pressures for longtime residents, lower-income racially minoritized residents with deep ties to the community, many of whom endured periods of disinvestment or neglect (Marcuse, 1985; Zuk et al., 2018). While gentrification is rooted in neoliberal logic emphasizing free market capitalism (Hackworth, 2001; Lipman, 2011), its disproportionate displacement of Black[9] families and other people of color also marks it as a racialized project (Rucks-Ahidiana, 2022; Summers, 2021). Despite the purported race-neutrality of its policy prescriptions, understanding gentrification through a racial lens enables policymakers to ensure their responses address the racialized impacts on communities and prioritize equitable solutions that center families at risk of marginalization (Green et al., 2022; Smith & Stovall, 2008).

Amid the rise of gentrification, a burgeoning body of research examines its impact on public education. This scholarship sheds light on the actions of middle-class newcomers, termed parent gentrifiers, who relocate to once-neglected urban neighborhoods and enroll their children

[9] This paper capitalizes “Black” to honor it as a self-determined identity for a racialized social group with a shared history. In contrast, this paper does not capitalize “blackness,” “antiblackness,” or “whiteness" to underscore the mutating and contested nature of racial categories (Liu et al., 2023).

in local schools (Pearman & Swain, 2017; Posey-Maddox et al., 2014). These parents adeptly navigate evolving educational policies in gentrifying markets, including neighborhood school preferences, expanded school choice, and alternative programs (Billingham & Kimelberg, 2013; DeSena, 2006). They often wield considerable influence on the schools they select, leveraging their resources to instigate change, a role some view as pivotal for school and neighborhood transformation (Cucchiara, 2013). However, research also indicates that their presence can exacerbate urban educational inequalities (Freidus, 2019; Pearman & Greene, 2022).

Although cities, including their schools, are constructed spaces influenced by racial and political dynamics, the literature lacks sufficient exploration of how local policymakers—referring to the education administrators and elected officials responsible for planning and adopting system-wide education reforms—conceptualize the relationship between gentrification and education. While some emerging research considers the equity implications of decisions made by school leaders (e.g., principals) in gentrifying areas, depicting them either as exacerbating the marginalization of longtime resident families (Green et al., 2023) or prioritizing their needs (Roda, 2020), such portrayals often oversimplify local policymakers' role as singular advocates for gentrification. Accordingly, local policymakers' roles as policy mediators whose decisions can either promote equity or exacerbate existing inequities within gentrified school systems are undertheorized (Diem et al., 2019; Green et al., 2022). Sensemaking, a process central to interpreting complex information or situations, is essential for understanding how local policymakers navigate gentrification's inherently political and power-laden dynamics in their pursuit of educational equity (Spillane et al., 2002; Weick, 1995).

Recognizing the pressing need to investigate further how local policymakers perceive the interplay between gentrification and education, this paper analyzes interviews conducted with 21

education administrators and elected officials in Washington, D.C., a pivotal locale for market-based education reforms and gentrification (Butler, 2021). Additionally, Washington D.C.'s intricate oversight structure allows for examining the sensemaking of education policy actors from various institutions jointly responsible for city and state oversight functions. The paper's conceptual framework draws upon critical racial and spatial theories, such as Critical Race Theory (CRT; Bell, 2004; Delgado & Stefancic, 2017) and critical geographies of education (Butler & Sinclair, 2020; Nguyen et al., 2017) to illuminate the inherent connections between race, space, and power dynamics in schooling. These theoretical perspectives are particularly pertinent for exploring the relationship between gentrification and educational equity, where policymaking intersects with historical racial and spatial contexts, and policy implementation intersects with broader community claims to neighborhoods (Good, 2017; Johnson, 2013). Two research questions guide the investigation:

1. How do local policymakers make sense of educational equity and gentrification?
2. How do local policymakers' sensemaking of race, space, and power shape their understanding of the relationship between educational equity and gentrification?

The paper's findings challenge the literature's oversimplified portrayal of local policymakers and reveal how an adequacy view of equity (Rice, 2004) guided the actions of some policymakers while others exhibited transformative approaches (Dixson & Rousseau, 2005). Participants' strategies offer researchers, activists, and reformers insights into creating inclusive educational environments and balancing the needs of longtime residents and newcomer families.

Literature Review

This section provides an overview of two key literature areas underpinning this paper. The first area discusses the intersection between gentrification and education, highlighting its

connections to neoliberalism. The second area explores existing research on the factors shaping local policymakers' decision-making, focusing on their sensemaking. Notably, this review of relevant literature encompasses studies involving school leaders and investigates how they, along with local policymakers, respond to the marketization of education and demographic shifts. These interconnected bodies of literature offer valuable insights for this paper, especially considering the scarcity of research on local policymakers' sensemaking regarding educational changes in gentrifying contexts.

Gentrification and Education

Posey-Maddox et al. (2014) coined the term "school gentrification" to describe a process where parent gentrifiers enroll their children in urban public schools, leading to improvements in facilities, programming, and the overall school climate while excluding racially and economically minoritized students and families. The centrality of parent gentrifiers pervades the policy logic underlying school gentrification.

The rise of neoliberal educational reforms concurrently with gentrification emphasizes choice, competition, and accountability (Johnson, 2013). These reforms manifest in various ways, such as expanding school choice, implementing targeted school marketing campaigns, and altering school assignment patterns (Lipman, 2011). Education is commodified, with schools treated as neighborhood amenities aligned with broader urban development trends (Billingham, 2015). Positioning schools as such may incentivize parent gentrifiers to reside in specific neighborhoods, which can catalyze changes to neighborhood demographics (Pearman & Swain, 2017). Closing or reconstituting "failing" schools in favor of charter schools or other public-private alternatives may also encourage parent gentrifiers to relocate to revitalizing neighborhoods (Pearman & Greene, 2022). This reform logic assumes that once enrolled in the

public school system, parent gentrifiers will advocate for improved resources, better teachers, and higher expectations, benefitting both local youth and gentrifier children (Posey-Maddox et al., 2014).

Recent research challenges the notion that parent gentrifiers enhance educational opportunities for all families, noting that it may exacerbate segregation between and within schools (Billings et al., 2017; Posey-Maddox et al., 2014). Parent gentrifiers' capital contributions often favor specific schools, limiting opportunities for other families and disrupting existing funding sources (Aggarwal, 2014; Posey-Maddox, 2012). Parent gentrifiers may hoard opportunities within schools and exclude longtime residents from social networks and parent engagement groups (Henry & Hankins, 2012; Sattin-Bajaj & Roda, 2020). Limited evidence supports the assumption of improved academic performance among local youth attending gentrified schools (Keels et al., 2013; Pearman, 2019). Schools in gentrifying areas must also wrestle with an inherent tension between actively recruiting white and affluent families and protecting the interest of longtime resident families, with school leaders navigating strategies to address both (Green et al., 2022; Roda, 2020). Nevertheless, centering parent gentrifiers as catalysts for school and neighborhood revitalization risks perpetuating an uneven system where they receive preferential treatment and longtime resident families receive less consideration (Siegel-Hawley et al., 2016). School and district leaders may treat parent gentrifiers as "valued customers" (Cucchiara, 2013, p. 80) who "work the system" (DeSena & Ansalone, 2009, p. 70) to secure special accommodations for their children and further resource allocation disparities.

Individual choices regarding where to live and which schools to select and the local policymakers who establish boundaries for reform within racially marketized landscapes, thus, actively influence school gentrification. Local policymakers' critical role in determining resource

allocations and making decisions about school operations and closures that can exacerbate existing inequities in urban schools or foster inclusive learning environments is central to this paper's motivation.

How Local Policymakers Make Decisions

Sensemaking theories explore the intricate cognitive processes that influence how policy actors navigate the complexities of policy decisions (Weick, 1995). They center on interpreting stimuli to construct meaning and "structure the unknown" (Waterman, 1980, p. 41). In gentrifying contexts, local policymakers' educational decisions are shaped by various factors, including macro-level policies, institutional norms, local context, and preexisting beliefs (Coburn, 2001; Gawlik, 2015; Spillane, 2000). Engaging in sensemaking, they interpret new information, such as federal, state, and local policies that establish formal parameters for policymaking (Diem & Welton, 2020; Sutherland, 2020). Local policymakers are also street-level bureaucrats (Lipsky, 1980). As such, they engage in sensegiving, which involves the translation of their understandings into policies, conditions, and activities that influence how others interpret events, issues, or changes (Sutherland, 2020; Wong, 2019). Importantly, these processes are not race-neutral but are deeply intertwined with and shaped by racism, racialization, power, and oppression (Green et al., 2022). In gentrifying contexts, such race-conscious policymaking often results in decisions that give short shrift to the needs of Black longtime residents and other minoritized constituencies, perpetuating pathologies that portray them as underserving of social welfare (Addie & Fraser, 2019; Desmond, 2012; Smith, 1996).

Federal and state accountability pressures often prioritize enhancing the academic performance of racially minoritized students, ostensibly in pursuit of equity goals aimed at reducing social disadvantages. However, these efforts may not adequately address students'

intersectional identities. Instead, they may uphold a performative equity framework intertwined with neoliberal logic (Brathwaite, 2017). For instance, researchers have observed schools and districts prioritizing optics such as improved test scores and academic rankings to maintain competitiveness without addressing students' diverse racial and linguistic needs (Diem et al., 2016; Welton et al., 2015). Such approaches convey essentializing narratives that minimize the worth of students from marginalized backgrounds, suggesting they have inherent deficiencies that do not warrant intervention (Solórzano & Yosso, 2002). By narrowly focusing on enhancing academic performance metrics, such reforms may fail to address the systemic barriers and inequalities marginalized communities face, undermining fundamental principles of equity centered on fairness, justice, and inclusion (Allbright et al., 2019).

Moreover, researchers argue that the federal government's support for marketizing education encourages cities to pursue a "politics of disposability" (Lipman, 2015, p. 60), wherein broader political and economic systems marginalize and ultimately discard low-income families and people of color. This concept underscores the systemic neglect and disregard for the well-being and rights of these communities, often leading to policies and practices that perpetuate inequality and reinforce social hierarchies (Good, 2017). Lipman (2015) contends that this "disposability" is evident in policies such as school privatization and public institution closures, which disproportionately affect marginalized communities while prioritizing market-driven interests. For instance, she highlights how the Department of Education's emphasis on high-stakes accountability, school choice expansion, and turnaround models contributed to the closure of all public elementary schools in a predominantly minority neighborhood in Chicago, favoring alternative educational approaches. According to Lipman (2015), this loss of community anchor institutions exacerbates neighborhood destabilization and sets the stage for future real estate

development (see also, Heck, 2015). Similarly, Johnson (2013) demonstrates how federal pressures to overhaul schools state reformers defined as failing prompted officials in Austin, Texas, to adopt "shock therapy" (p. 232) reform tactics, disregarding community input and exacerbating racial inequities. These interventions seek a 'clean slate,' exploiting crises to impose top-down, market-driven approaches, eroding public control and ultimately leaving behind collective trauma (Johnson, 2013; Klein, 2007).

As local policymakers navigate the complexities of their decision-making processes, the interplay of local social forces and personal beliefs further shapes their sensemaking. These dynamics contribute to what scholars describe as a "zone of mediation" (Oakes et al., 2005; Welner, 2001), delineating the boundaries within which policymaking occurs. Sutherland's (2020) case study of school board members' interpretations of federal accountability policies illustrates how local context often conflicts with federal and state messaging, highlighting the significance of the local environment in shaping policymakers' interpretations. Additionally, researchers have shown how this "zone of mediation" influences leaders' responses to demographic changes, with district leaders prioritizing stakeholder acceptability and technical feasibility over addressing historical racial segregation (Grooms, 2019; Holme et al., 2014).

Local policymakers' personal experiences and beliefs are also crucial in shaping their responses to demographic shifts (Spillane et al., 2002). Racially minoritized school leaders and those comfortable addressing racial issues are more inclined to foster inclusive environments, while others may resort to color-evasive responses that fail to address systemic inequities (Evans, 2007; Green et al., 2023). By exploring how local policymakers interpret and respond to macro-level forces, market-driven reforms, and demographic changes, this paper aims to uncover whether their sensemaking tendencies lean towards simply meeting minimum standards or

actively challenging and transforming inequitable systems, shedding light on their commitment to advance equity and justice in education.

Conceptual Framework

This paper's theoretical framework integrates critical spatial and racial theories, with an emphasis on CRT (Bell, 2004; Delgado & Stefancic, 2017) and critical geographies of education (Butler & Sinclair, 2020; Nguyen et al., 2017). CRT, which focuses on race and racism as central organizing principles of social inequality, informs this analysis. It emphasizes the permanence of race and racism, whiteness as property and privilege, critiques of color-evasive policymaking, and interest convergence. Critical geographies of education expand the analysis to consider how spatial dynamics interact with sensemaking processes (Collins & Coleman, 2008). Together, these theoretical lenses provide a framework for understanding how the spatialization of race, referring to the process of race becoming embedded in physical spaces, shaping social interactions and access to opportunity, and the racialization of space, physical spaces themselves imbuing racial meanings and significance, manifest in local policymakers sensemaking on gentrification and educational equity (Lipsitz, 2007)

The concept of the permanence of race underscores the enduring impact of racial inequalities on policy outcomes, including those related to education (Delgado & Stefancic, 2017). By acknowledging the persistent influence of race on societal structures, policymakers may be more attuned to the racial disparities within gentrifying neighborhoods and schools directly linked to inequalities in educational opportunities and outcomes. I draw on notions of racial permanence to explore how policymakers' narratives and decisions may reflect entrenched patterns of racial framing or recognition, shaping the distribution of resources and opportunities across the school choice marketplace (Bell, 2004).

Similarly, the principle of whiteness as property offers insights into how local policymakers navigate issues of privilege and power within gentrifying spaces, including neoliberal education reforms. By framing success solely as the result of individual effort and talent, neoliberalism overlooks historical and systemic factors contributing to racial disparities in wealth, education, and opportunities (Slater, 2015). Acknowledging how whiteness operates provides a mechanism for interrogating the implications of historical policymaking and the neglect of policies and interventions aimed at addressing systemic racism and promoting equity within gentrifying neighborhoods and educational systems (Harris, 1993). Moreover, local policymakers understanding the privileges whiteness affords may critically examine their decision-making process and seek to challenge systems of white privilege perpetuating racial inequities in education (Evans, 2007). By investigating how local policymakers allocate resources, engage with community stakeholders, and prioritize policy interventions, this paper considers how their actions contribute to or challenge systems of white Supremacy in schooling.

Critiques of color-evasive policies further inform this analysis by highlighting how neoliberal approaches to governance often fail to address marginalized communities' specific needs and experiences (Bonilla-Silva, 2018). These critiques observe that neoliberal policies claiming race neutrality may overlook the racialized impacts of social forces like gentrification, perpetuating the erasure of Black and other marginalized populations (Green et al., 2022). From this view, examining how neoliberal ideologies inform policymakers' sensemaking uncovers how color-evasive policies contribute to the reproduction of racial and spatial inequalities in gentrifying communities (Carbado, 2013). It also considers that local policymakers questioning the effectiveness of color-evasive approaches may seek more targeted, culturally responsive, and

race-conscious responses that work towards inclusive and just educational settings (Diem & Welton, 2020).

Furthermore, I apply the principle of interest convergence to analyze how policymakers' interests align with or diverge from the interests of different vital constituencies, which their decisions affect. Interest convergence posits that racial progress is contingent on marginalized racial groups' interests aligning with dominant groups' interests, particularly white elites (Bell, 1980). More specifically, this theory suggests that the implementation and adoption of racial justice forms hinge on their alignment with the self-interest of those in power rather than solely due to moral or ethical considerations. It encourages scholars to look beyond the stated goals of education reforms and consider their broader social, economic, and political contexts. When looking at the intersection of gentrification and education, interest convergence suggests local policymakers may be more likely to pursue policies to redress racial disparities if these reforms also serve the economic or political interests of those in power, like developers and parent gentrifiers (Makris, 2018). Moreover, interest convergence highlights the complex interplay between racial justice, economic interests, and political power in shaping education policy, providing valuable insights for efforts to promote equity and justice within educational systems. By examining whose voices local policymakers privilege in decision-making and who benefits or loses from policy outcomes, I look to foreground underlying power dynamics and opportunities for coalition-building to advance more equitable policies.

Finally, critical geographies of education expand the analysis to consider how spatial dynamics intersect with local policymakers' decision-making. This approach helps identify spatial injustices and their policy remedies across gentrifying educational landscapes (Jenkins, 2022; Nguyen et al., 2017). For example, a critical geographic approach considers how urban

development, housing, and transportation policies contribute to gentrification and affect educational access and equity (Green et al., 2022). This perspective also sheds light on the role of the state and other powerful institutions in shaping spatial dynamics and educational outcomes (Collins & Coleman, 2008; Soja, 2010). Recognizing how gentrification reflects racial capitalism, prioritizing profit accumulation at the expense of longtime residents perceived as disposable by the state, underscores the consequences of policies that prioritize economic interests, such as property development and tax revenue generation, over the well-being and educational needs of marginalized communities facing displacement and marginalization (Addie & Fraser, 2019; Rucks-Ahidiana, 2022). From this perspective, the erasure of school communities serving historically underserved communities under gentrification perpetuates racially spatialized inequalities through neoliberal policy frameworks that reallocate resources and opportunities to accommodate incoming gentrifiers' preferences and interests (Good, 2017; Johnson, 2013). Applying a critical geographic lens to local policymakers' sensemaking processes shows how racially spatialized dynamics shape the production of (un)just educational geographies (Ramírez, 2020).

Sensemaking Context: Washington, D.C.

Since the early 2000s, Washington, D.C., has undergone rapid demographic shifts driven by public and private investments in high-end condominiums and amenities to attract new residents (Hyra, 2017). This influx, predominantly consisting of young, affluent, and white gentrifiers, has transformed the city's physical and cultural landscape, establishing D.C. as one of the most gentrified cities in the U.S. (Prince, 2014). Consequently, nearly 60,000 Black residents left D.C. between 2000 and 2020 (U.S. Census Bureau, 2022) and the city reached a non-Black majority for the first time in more than fifty years in 2011 (Asch & Musgrove, 2015).

This transformation has exacerbated racially spatialized inequalities that are evident in the city's development priorities and disparities in median income and net worth between Black and white households (Golash-Boza, 2023). Significant development has occurred in predominantly white areas, including neighborhoods across Wards 1 through 6 (Washington DC Economic Partnership, 2021). However, little development has benefited Wards 7 and 8, located east of the Anacostia River, colloquially called "East of the River," where most of the city's Black and low-income residents reside.

Responses from Black residents to these changes vary, with some welcoming improvements (Golash-Boza, 2023) while expressing concerns about the closure of community anchor institutions and the impact of white residents (Heck, 2015; Howell, 2015) and others seeking to reclaim their city (Summers, 2021). The educational landscape has been crucial in attracting newcomers, with education administrators actively recruiting white parents to the public school system (Barras, 2010). The city's comprehensive preschool programs serve as a significant economic incentive for families, particularly those considering relocating within the District (Greenberg et al., 2020). However, changes in student assignment policies have favored predominantly white and affluent families, which has further exacerbated disparities in educational access (Coffin & Rubin, 2023).

The complex educational governance structure in Washington, D.C., involves multiple agencies, emphasizing the need to explore the perspectives of local policymakers representing various institutions. The Council of the District of Columbia (D.C. Council), the legislative branch of the District of Columbia government, authorizes the Deputy Mayor for Education (DME), the Office of the State Superintendent of Education (OSSE), and the State Board of Education (SBOE) to oversee the city's educational sector (National Research Council, 2015).

The DME coordinates, develops, and implements the mayor's education vision.[10] OSSE serves as the District's State Education Agency and is key in coordinating city-wide educational initiatives and resources. Although the SBOE lacks direct policymaking authority, it significantly shapes education policy by reviewing and approving educational proposals from OSSE and other agencies. Additionally, the Office of the Student Advocate (OSA) provides advocacy, support services, and resource referrals to students and families. It mainly focuses on education rights, special education services, and school-related disputes. The office also engages with the community to gather feedback and collaborate on initiatives to improve educational outcomes for all students in the District.

The District of Columbia Public Schools (DCPS) and the D.C. Public Charter School Board (PCSB) are instrumental in managing public schools and providing families with diverse educational options. Despite the city having one of the nation's most robust educational marketplaces, with over 70 percent of public-school students enrolled in a school outside their ward of residency and nearly 50 percent enrolled in a charter school, racial and economic segregation persists in the city's schools (Coffin & Rubin, 2023). Black students form the majority in both sectors, particularly in charter schools where they comprise 71 percent of the student population, compared to 56 percent in DCPS during the 2021-2022 school year (Office of the State Superintendent of Education, 2023). Hispanic representation is notable but lower (22% in DCPS and 17% in charters). White students are 17 percent of DCPS and seven percent of the charter school population. Nearly half of the city's public schools have student bodies that

[10] The mayor plays a significant role in shaping educational governance in Washington, D.C. The mayor's responsibilities include appointing the chancellor of the District of Columbia Public Schools, who oversees the public school system, and the State Superintendent of Education, who leads OSSE. The mayor also has a substantial influence on the education budget, including school allocations and educational programs. Furthermore, the mayor helps shape education policies, initiatives, and reforms through the DME in collaboration with other key interest groups and the D.C. Council.

are at least 90 percent Black, with these segregated schools primarily located East of the River (Office of the State Superintendent of Education, 2023). Conversely, white students are increasingly becoming the majority in elementary and middle schools situated in gentrified neighborhoods, particularly in areas known as "West of the Park," referring to the city's predominantly white and affluent Upper Northwest neighborhoods.

Washington, D.C., offers a unique setting for exploring the complex relationship between gentrification and education. It is a city of contrasts that showcases both prosperity and marginalization. The thriving charter sector is a testing ground for evaluating the extent to which market-driven reforms enhance students' access to educational opportunities and foster inclusive learning environments. Alongside this educational vitality, the city's rich Black heritage has become a commodity that developers leverage to attract white newcomers, which contributes to the displacement of Black residents (Hyra, 2017). Importantly, the city's governance structure allows for a sensemaking analysis of how policymakers from state and local institutions interpret and respond to these evolving dynamics. These tensions highlight the looming risks posed by neoliberal reforms, which may further marginalize Black residents and other longtime community members despite the city's abundant resources.

Methods

Data Collection

This qualitative study involves analyzing data obtained from semi-structured interviews conducted with a purposeful sample of 21 elected officials and education administrators actively engaged in the planning, legislation, and execution of school governance in Washington, D.C. Among the publicly elected participants were three members from the D.C. Council and six members from the SBOE. The participating education administrators included twelve director-

level or higher staffers from OSSE, DME, DCPS, and PCSB, along with three senior staffers from the D.C. Council. Each participant had at least three years of experience working within the D.C. government, with many holding positions across multiple D.C. government agencies. During the data collection phase, I worked at OSSE. I utilized my professional network within the District government to purposefully select an initial sample of 10 participants directly involved in designing and implementing city- or sector-wide education reforms (Merriam, 1998). These initial participants served as key informants (Yin, 2014), who subsequently recommended an additional 11 local policymakers with critical insights on gentrification and education from various branches of the District government.

I conducted semi-structured interviews that were 60 to 90 minutes between February 2020 and January 2021. Interviews were audio-recorded and professionally transcribed. Semi-structured interviews allowed for responsiveness to emerging lines of inquiry (Seidman, 2019). Six interviews in February 2020 occurred face-to-face; the remaining 15 were virtual due to the COVID-19 pandemic. The interview protocol delved into participants' personal and professional backgrounds, conceptions of educational equity, gentrification, and school choice; perceptions of gentrifiers and longtime resident families' access to spaces; and their views on the District government's role in gentrification. Questions also explored institutional and individual factors shaping participants' valuation, assessment, and evaluation of competing interests, information, and policy alternatives. The semi-structured interview protocol facilitated deeper probing into various dimensions of participants' sensemaking, foregrounding conceptions of race and space. To set the research context, I collected publicly available archival documents from 2001 to 2021, including newspaper articles, state education data and reports, and hortatory policy statements. I

compared these documents to interview data to validate emergent themes and contextualize interpretations across data sources (Merriam, 1998).

Data Analysis

I employed an iterative data analysis process, which began during data collection. Each interview underwent multiple rounds of inductive and deductive coding (Saldaña, 2016). The initial inductive coding phase captured descriptive characteristics. The subsequent deductive coding phase applied predefined categories from existing research at the intersection of gentrification and educational, key dimensions of sensemaking, and the critical spatial and racial theoretical framework. This approach covered participants' backgrounds and personal beliefs, their general approach to decision-making, perceptions of gentrification, school choice, educational equity, place attachments, and understanding of the interplay between race and space.

During the inductive coding phase, I also filtered policymakers' narratives through an equity typology that included five distinct lenses: libertarian, liberal, democratic liberal, adequacy, and transformative (Allbright et al., 2019; Guiton & Oakes, 1995). These perspectives ranged from prioritizing equal resource distribution and outcomes based on merit or effort to challenging racism and structural oppression while empowering marginalized communities (Fraser, 2010; Kornhaber et al., 2014). For instance, the adequacy view combines the liberal focus on inputs and the democratic liberal emphasis on outcomes but does not explicitly address systemic oppression (Rice, 2004). Transformative equity seeks to dismantle historically and spatially constituted power relations that mediate social life and perpetuate school oppression. It highlights marginalized communities' capacity to challenge systems that hinder their liberation (Delgado-Bernal, 2002)

The final coding scheme consolidated overlapping inductive and deductive constructs into eight primary and 62 secondary codes (Appendix B-3). The findings use pseudonyms for all participants to safeguard their confidentiality and does not link participants' race and agency to bolster anonymity further.

Researcher Positionality

As this research focuses on understanding neighborhood and school gentrification among Washington, D.C. local policymakers, my experiences as a D.C. education administrator and Black gentrifier greatly influenced my ability to connect with participants and conduct research effectively. I moved to D.C. during the Great Recession in 2010 and held a leadership position within a division at OSSE at the time of data collection. This role provided initial access to many participants, including close colleagues. Preexisting rapport and mutual respect with these peers allowed for open sharing, with them feeling comfortable confiding in someone who, as one participant suggested, "gets it." I referenced specific policies, interventions, and personnel to validate their comments, offer counterpoints, and clarify complex ideas.

My familiarity with the statutory landscape, political dynamics, and influential policy figures was appreciated by participants I did not know, allowing us to delve into deeper discussions without spending time on basic context-setting. I transparently communicated to participants that my research motivations stemmed from concerns about gentrification's impact and the perception that the existing research did not adequately reflect my observations of the dogged efforts of local policymakers across the D.C. government to support marginalized residents' access to resources and meaningful involvement in policymaking. I kept self-reflective field notes throughout to track participants' responses to these discussions and my presence and

to monitor how preconceptions about the phenomena under study evolved (Anderson, 1999; Probst & Berenson, 2014).

Findings

Despite their varied backgrounds and roles, local policymakers voiced a firm dedication to advancing educational equity, emphasizing the significance of prioritizing longtime residents and local youth in policymaking while acknowledging the challenges posed by gentrification for these groups. Although the dedication to advancing educational equity was consistent across participants, regardless of agency or status, differences surfaced regarding policymakers' philosophical approaches to equity and the strategies employed to address educational inequities. While most respondents articulated notions of transformative equity, others exhibited a perspective of adequacy. Transformative policymakers advocated for a comprehensive reevaluation of District policies to confront the spatialization of race, whiteness, and entrenched power dynamics. Conversely, adequacy policymakers operated under the assumption that both D.C.'s educational system and gentrification could positively impact all students.

The subsequent sections first delve into local policymakers' sensemaking on educational equity and then explore how these perspectives shaped their decision-making to foster educational equity within the city's gentrified school choice marketplace. The findings reveal how racial, spatial, and power dynamics informed policymakers' conceptions and approaches throughout.

Sensemaking of Educational Equity

This section delves into how local policymakers' prior experiences shaped their commitment to educational equity and influenced their perspectives on the adequacy of the city's

equity efforts versus the need for transformative restructuring to support and empower longtime resident families.

The role of personal experiences. In exploring local policymakers' perspectives on equity, it's evident that their lived experiences profoundly shaped their understandings of and approaches to addressing systemic inequities. Participants of color often draw from personal encounters with injustice, framing equity within the context of improving the lives of historically marginalized students and families. For example, Amala, an education administrator who grew up in DC, shared her journey of developing an awareness of spatial injustice as a "border crosser" (Anzaldúa, 2012), experiencing a disconnect between her East of the River neighborhood and West of the Park high school:

> I was able to get into that school because my grandmother happened to be the lunch lady. So, my first taste of injustice and inequity was getting on the bus for the first time. I had to take two buses to get to that school. Crossing Military Road, it felt like a whole new world, even though I knew I was in the same city. Everything was entirely different, from housing to grocery stores to parks' play areas. I remember thinking, "Why are things only like this here on this side of the city?"

Other participants of color positioned themselves as "cultural workers" (Giroux, 1992), grounding their understanding of equity in critiques of taken-for-granted educational practices and policies that may act as barriers to families on the margins (Khalifa et al., 2013). Gibran explained:

> When my son was in first grade, he was getting suspended every day. It was a daily occurrence at that school, requiring my immediate attention. The second

> suspension, indefinite this time, left me feeling helpless. Despite being an educated woman with the flexibility to go to the school, thanks to years of volunteering, I was at a loss for words. This experience led me to delve deeper into understanding education and how to help others not feel helpless in a space that is supposed to be for us, especially in a city that, at that point, was still majority Black.

Conversely, white participants tend to connect their notions of equity to their professional experiences. James, an education administrator, shared:

> I used to work in juvenile justice. Of the 200 kids cycling in and out of probation and parole, only one was on track to graduate. The rest were between GED, off track, to drop. That's why I got into education – it was shocking to see how these kids were falling through the cracks. Education seemed like a way to catch these kids before they entered juvenile justice.

James' exposure to systemic failures was a catalyst for their transition into education, viewing it as a means to intervene and prevent vulnerable youth from slipping through the cracks of the juvenile justice system. This comment also reflects a commitment to addressing root causes and restructuring systems to provide meaningful opportunities for local youth at risk of educational disadvantage, contrasting with some adequacy adherents who sought ameliorative measures within existing structures.

Equity as Adequacy. Adequacy in the context of educational equity refers to the concept that providing sufficient resources and opportunities to meet the basic needs of all individuals or groups is essential for achieving fairness and justice (Rice, 2004). This approach focuses on ensuring that everyone has access to a minimum level of essential resources and opportunities,

regardless of their background or circumstances, to create equal starting points and opportunities for advancement. Adequacy links school inputs and student outcomes but doesn't explicitly address systemic oppression.

Three education administrators and two elected officials' sensemaking reflected an adequacy approach to equity characterized as adequate. Chris, a Black elected official, suggested, "I think [equity] meant that families and students had access to education to gain skills. And allows them also to develop their voice and sense of being." Moreover, adequacy policymakers trusted in the city's approach to serving marginalized communities. For instance, a white education administrator, Amanda, stated, "Our schools spend lots of time ensuring students have clothes and food. So, I think to have equity be the focus, equity needs to be the focus in the city, across D.C. agencies, and I think we've done that pretty well." Amanda's remarks reflect neoliberal ideologies, which primarily view individual choices and market-driven interventions as the solutions to equity issues (Coles, 2019). By emphasizing the provision of material support to students, such as clothing and food, Amanda suggests that addressing equity entails working within the existing system rather than challenging systemic structures. This viewpoint underscores a reliance on government interventions and service provision to promote equity without necessarily interrogating underlying economic and social inequalities (Bonilla-Silva, 2018).

Likewise, Jessica, an Asian-American education administrator, invoked neoliberal thinking and attributed power asymmetries to longtime residents' failure to work within the system to protect their self-interest (Smith, 1996). Obscuring the city's role in minimizing longtime residents' voices, she continued:

> The District of Columbia has made smart public policy decisions by ensuring you have more social safety net programs for [low-income] individuals. I think that's smart and that's what you should do. So, it's a double-edged sword [because] communities are changing, and I don't think allocation based on who was here first is probably the best rationing of scarce resources.

Jessica's comments reflect a dialectic of the adequacy view of equity. Her words imply a recognition of the historical context and the impact of past policies on marginalized communities. Yet, we can interpret her hesitation about allocating resources based on who was there first, or, perhaps, who has the greatest needs, as a response to the spatial dynamics of urban development, where longtime residents face challenges retaining their "right to the city," and the state's role in redressing marginalization is opaque (Barrett, 2021; Lipman, 2011).

Although several adequacy-oriented local policymakers gestured towards a transformative view of equity, linking disadvantage to structural forces shaped by critical racial and spatial perspectives, none articulated a need for policy alternatives that might empower longtime residents or other historically marginalized families. Instead, they maintained a liberal belief in the virtue of incremental reforms and the idea that District policies could work for all families (Allbright et al., 2019). Chris added, "We had school choice. And that was the primary mechanism for equity. And I think that worked for some families, but choice alone was not enough. We needed to do more than that. And, you know, we had differentiated funding but didn't have enough funding." Even in critiquing the central features of D.C.'s school system, local adequacy policymakers took for granted that the city's education reform logic was just and appropriate.

Transformative Equity. Transformative equity refers to a comprehensive approach to achieving fairness and justice by reimagining social, economic, and institutional systems to address the root causes of inequality (Dixson & Rousseau, 2005). It involves challenging and restructuring existing norms, policies, and practices to create more inclusive, equitable, and just educational settings. Moreover, transformative equity not only seeks to address immediate disparities but also to create lasting systemic change, emphasizing the capacity of marginalized communities to upend forces that hinder their liberation (Delgado-Bernal, 2002).

Most participants, including nine education administrators and seven elected officials, engaged in sensemaking that reflected a transformative view of equity. They highlighted educational barriers affecting longtime residents, English learners, and students with disabilities, connecting these challenges to power and privilege dynamics (DeLuca et al., 2016). These participants contextualized the city's equity issues in historical and spatial dimensions. Josh, a Black elected official, emphasized the national context and the unique geographical challenges faced by D.C., stating:

> I think about this, and I think one way is, some of this is a national problem, right? Our country's history, society, structures, and D.C. being part of that history, society has many of the same issues, and the rest of the country does. And in D.C., I think sometimes those things are extra concentrated because of our peculiar geography or magnified because of their geography. And some things are worse in D.C. than other places.

Transformative policymakers like Josh discussed the importance of understanding how spatial arrangements contribute to and exacerbate racial disparities, emphasizing the inseparability of race, space, and history in shaping societal challenges (Delgado & Stefancic, 2017). Other

transformative policymakers discussed barriers to families accessing basic needs and stressed the need for city-wide equity focus and collaboration across agencies.

A consistent theme among transformative policymakers was the imperative to prioritize historically marginalized students and families, actively working to amplify their voices in policymaking. Gabrielle, a Black education administrator, emphasized the necessity of providing a "seat at the table" for local youth and longtime residents, stating, "Their stories need to be told, and it's my job to find ways to partner with them in our work." Other transformative policymakers discussed the need for student voice to contextualize quantitative data and offer a counternarrative to essentializing pathologies about students of color. Taylor, a white education administrator, argued that focusing on quantitative metrics ignored the root causes of issues, recognizing the nuanced understanding students can provide to policymakers:

> I hear all kinds of things like these kids are unmotivated, but if we just listened, we might learn something. When I talk to high school students, they always say, "Look, there are three reasons I don't go to school. First, you make it hard for me to get to school because I have walk through unsafe neighborhoods. Second, I haven't missed anything when I get there because you're giving me worksheets. Third, besides sitting through your boring class, you don't make me feel welcome." None of that shows up in the data, and you won't learn it if you don't ask.

This acknowledgment aligns with existing literature on the value of youth perspectives in policymaking (Ramírez, 2020) and emphasizes the need for a comprehensive, context-aware approach.

Most transformative policymakers positioned their work as an effort to remedy a legacy of city leaders' ineffective and inauthentic engagement with longtime resident families. For instance, Amala linked her commitment to working with families in Wards 7 and 8 to her experiences as a DCPS student and parent, stating, "I've felt it. You have to be a super parent sometimes to get basic services for your kids. People have to fight through fire just to get basic information about their kids." Recognizing the need for creative solutions to redress decades of communication challenges, Melissa, a white education administrator, emphasized, "There's so much work to do. We've got to find ways to make up for decades of bad-faith engagement with lots of D.C. families." Lin, an Asian American education administrator, recounted a challenging experience involving mistrust from Black residents. In a community meeting to gather input for an upcoming bill, Lin faced a group of angry residents who believed that city leaders had already made final decisions on the legislation in secret. Despite Lin's efforts to clarify and engage in open dialogue, her message failed to resonate with the community members. Ashley, from the same agency, emphasized the lack of genuine interest in hearing from parents, noting a brief 30-minute focus group for a high-profile racial justice initiative as inadequate.

Transformative policymakers stressed that the absence of a comprehensive organizational approach hindered the development of a coherent district-wide equity understanding or response to pressing issues. Some participants suggested that peers avoided meaningful engagement with longtime residents, believing they could escape accountability. This perception purportedly led some city leaders to undervalue the insights of longtime residents or assume they lacked the political capital to influence decision-making. Despite OSSE's strategic goals emphasizing inclusivity (Office of the State Superintendent of Education, 2018), transformative policymakers noted a lack of consistent reflection of these goals in District policies and practices, expressing

frustration that, as Sarah lamented, “Equity in D.C. is just a word they say.” The limited engagement with longtime resident communities differed from the perceived frequent touchpoints and easy access that white and affluent constituents enjoyed with elected officials.

Numerous transformative local policymakers unequivocally identified whiteness as a substantial barrier to advancing equity. For instance, in response to a query about the primary obstacle to promoting equity in the city, Mike, a Black education administrator, bluntly stated, “white people. Yeah, it’s white people. And the thing about education is that everyone is an education expert, which impedes the process. They are the ones who are considered experts on what’s happening in schools.” As Mike’s comment notes, whiteness is a silent norm within policymaking spaces that shapes agendas, priorities, and decision-making. The dominance of white perspectives can lead to the neglect or dismissal of issues that disproportionately affect communities of color, perpetuating cycles of injustice and exclusion (Buras, 2011). Moreover, the perception of whiteness as an authority on education further marginalizes educators, administrators, and parents of color and reinforces hierarchies of knowledge and expertise that prioritize white voices (Good, 2017; Johnson, 2013). By recognizing the influence of whiteness as property (Harris, 1993), Mike challenges the notion of education expertise as inherently tied to whiteness. More generally, by recognizing whiteness as a barrier to advancing equity, policymakers can begin to dismantle the structures that uphold racial disparities in education. This dismantling requires amplifying historically marginalized voices and the interrogation of implicit biases and power dynamics that privilege whiteness in policymaking (Solorzano & Yosso, 2001).

Sensemaking of Gentrification

Discrepancies emerged in local policymakers' interpretations of gentrification's implications for students and families. Local adequacy policymakers viewed it as a "double-edged sword," whereas transformative policymakers framed it in terms of both physical and symbolic displacement—reforms that adequacy policymakers celebrated; transformative policymakers criticized for exacerbating adverse effects. Black policymakers, alongside some white transformative participants, related to longtime residents' struggles, emphasizing the intersecting dynamics of race and space. Additionally, transformative policymakers highlighted the geographical disparities impacting longtime residents' access to public amenities (Soja, 2010). The subsequent discussion elucidates how adequacy and transformative policymakers comprehended gentrification's effects on D.C. neighborhoods, schools, and families.

Gentrification and neighborhood change. Participants offered nuanced definitions of gentrification, encompassing production-side arguments (Hackworth, 2001), consumption-side arguments (Zukin, 2014), and displacement (Zuk et al., 2018). Ashley described it as "a rapid change, where longtime residents are displaced and don't have a way to stay in a community, where a bunch of new services crops up, and the income level of the people in that neighborhood is changing rapidly." Participants viewed gentrification as a racialized phenomenon disproportionately affecting longtime Black residents (Rucks-Ahidiana, 2022). Amala described it as the "objectification of the community" and "going through segregation again." Gabrielle noted, "I've watched how the city started supporting development now that white people are moving in, in ways that they didn't when it was just Black folks renting. It's like, you like Black culture, but you don't like our blues. That's gentrification to me." Other policymakers highlighted distinctions in gentrifiers' actions, emphasizing the importance of becoming part of the new community rather than imposing preexisting norms (Jones & Evans, 2012). This tension

between longtime residents and gentrifiers' interests was recognized, where newcomers often advocated for different amenities and cultural norms than their longtime resident neighbors (Pattillo, 2007).

Regarding public amenities, local policymakers highlighted the stark contrast in development between gentrifying neighborhoods and low-income communities. When asked about raising children in D.C., nearly all participants emphasized the abundance of civic institutions and amenities that have been instrumental in attracting gentrifiers, tourists, and developers, including national parks, Smithsonian museums, and the National Mall. However, participants also noted that citizen-based policing practices in gentrified areas and near tourist attractions outlaw the spatial practices of local youth and longtime resident families, which can engender racialized feelings of otherness and a sense that they no longer belong in these spaces (Butcher & Dickens, 2016). Citizen-based policing refers to residents and local businesses monitoring behaviors they perceive as inappropriate, such as loud music and loitering, and reporting them to law enforcement or non-emergency authorities, which may expose local youth to increased violence and crime (Harris et al., 2020). Jessica remarked:

> I could be out to dinner, and the person I'm with is like, "Did you see how she just looked at us." Then you hear about some horrible things like kids getting followed in stores, and we know that the police force needs to be more thoughtful about how they interact with young people.

This comment underscores a prevalent sentiment among policymakers regarding the gap between policy rhetoric advocating for youth safety and the implementation of tactics that fail to build trust with law enforcement, often rooted in historical practices of controlling and disenfranchising Black bodies and marginalized communities (McKittrick, 2011).

Moreover, local transformative policymakers questioned the assumed benefits of new development. A Black elected official, Christina highlighted barriers such as cost and transportation, stating that gentrifying spaces were inaccessible to all families and did not fully reflect D.C.'s historically Black culture. These reflections underscored transformative policymakers' consideration of how gentrification's geography can threaten local youth's well-being and safety, emphasizing the need to center voices at the margins for social change (Barrett, 2021; Harris et al., 2020).

In contrast, both white policymakers with an adequacy orientation seemed to assume equitable access to public amenities for all families, overlooking the variable impact of geography and social constructions of space. When asked about local youth visiting retail spaces in some gentrified areas, Becca responded, "I know some of the streets are unsafe. Bad things happen, I get that. But it's all relative. I guess they might not go there, but I hope they would." This limited perspective has implications for policymaking, emphasizing the importance of shared understandings and acknowledging the salience of geography in addressing spatial inequality (McAdam & Kloos, 2014; Soja, 2010).

Gentrification and public education. Local policymakers' sensemaking of the relationship between gentrification and education aligned with their broader perceptions of gentrification's impact on neighborhoods and residents. Transformative policymakers described parent gentrifiers as seizing opportunities within and between schools, influencing parent engagement organizations, limiting longtime resident families' access to preferred schools, and advocating for policies that disproportionally favored gentrifier children. The contentious Shaw Junior High School and Banneker High School relocation exemplified this dynamic.

In 2018, the D.C. Council narrowly approved the relocation of Benjamin Banneker Academic High School, a top-performing institution primarily serving Black and Latinx students, to the former Shaw Junior High School site. Situated in the historically Black Shaw neighborhood, which emerged from encampments of formerly enslaved people and was the cultural heart of D.C.'s "Black Broadway" (Sheir, 2011), Shaw Junior High School closed in 2013 due to declining student enrollment. Following the closure, the city rezoned middle-school-aged children in the area to Cardozo—an education campus a mile away from Shaw Junior High, predominantly serving low-income students. Banneker's previous location was adjacent to Shaw neighborhood, across from Howard University.

Gentrifier parents living in the Shaw neighborhood advocated for a new middle school to retain families in local neighborhood schools beyond elementary grades (Executive Office of the Mayor, 2021). Critics contended the push for a new middle school lacked sufficient demand (Stein, 2019). The mayor's proposal to relocate Banneker argued that a new 175,000-square-foot building on the redeveloped Shaw site would allow the high school to increase its enrollment by 300 (Stein, 2022). The D.C. Council vote followed racial lines, with six of the seven members favoring the move being Black. All six supporting the modernization of Banneker at its original location were white. This plan would have paved the way for the reopening of Shaw Junior High School to accommodate the wishes of gentrifiers Local policymakers described the debate as particularly "nasty," marked by students of color advocating for themselves and white parent gentrifiers attempting to "work the system." Sarah, an instrumental figure in the debate, offered insights into the racial dynamics:

> Banneker is the best high school in this city, but most white people don't talk about it that way because it's a school for little Black girls. So, when the whole

> thing was going down about the construction of a new Banneker, all these folks who had gentrified the neighborhood were like, "Oh, no, because we want a middle school that benefits us—it's our turn." And so, we tried to have conversations with these people. But still, there wasn't going to be any reconciliation because they ultimately did not want that school, because it would not suit their purposes, because they say it was promised to them years ago, because they were banking on it for their property values, and because, down the road, they don't want to go to a middle school with Black and Brown kids.

Sarah's insights into this contentious matter and those of other transformative policymakers align with existing research on school choice and gentrification. Notably, prior research has shown how families often shape their perceptions of school quality based on factors such as race and class (Pearman & Swain, 2017). The efforts of Shaw parents to avoid Cardozo are in line with findings elsewhere, which suggest parent gentrifiers and other privileged families tend to avoid schools with significant Black and low-income student populations (Siegel-Hawley et al., 2017).

Local transformative policymakers questioned the assumed benefits of new development, seeing them as relatively inconsequential. Multiple transformative policymakers described it as "creating a tiered educational system," scrutinizing the reform logic of school choice. Specifically, these participants challenged the assumption that competition among schools for families sparks innovation that improves a school system's overall quality (Scott, 2013). A Black elected official, Shaina, commented, "It doesn't create competition between schools, and it doesn't encourage public schools to do better. It creates competition among students because not every student can attend a top charter school."

Moreover, transformative policymakers argued that the system privileged parent gentrifiers and other advantaged families and perpetuated spatial inequality within the education system. Participants highlighted numerous school choice equity barriers consistent with existing research, emphasizing the racial disparities in access. Some suggested that longtime resident families did not have equal access to information about school choice options, pointing to a spatialized information gap (Makris, 2015). Gabrielle said, "there are many choices, but I don't think all families feel like they have access to those choices or are aware of them." Other transformative policymakers centered their critique on the limited number of high-quality schooling options in longtime resident neighborhoods, underscoring the spatial concentration of educational resources. Taylor explained:

> I think gentrification is concentrating the students who are furthest from access in schools that still aren't good enough. A select handful of at-risk students, by the luck of the draw of the lottery, get into one or two high-performing schools located in their neighborhoods, and I think those students have an excellent chance of changing their circumstances. But for the most part, we're concentrating most of those students into neighborhoods and schools that are still very troubled.

Taylor's words underscore the need for a more equitable distribution of resources and opportunities within the educational landscape and challenging existing structures that perpetuate spatial disparities.

In contrast, adequacy policymakers suggested gentrification had mixed effects on public education. These participants hinted at the positive aspect of resource infusion associated with

parent gentrifiers, aligning with the goals of need-based vertical equity and school choice promoting horizontal equity (Guiton & Oakes, 1995). Expressing this perspective, Chris stated:

> I think it has helped the city. The more kids you have in an LEA, the more dollars you get, creating a more robust system. And I think with more families opting into public schools. You see a reduction in the number of kids that could have gotten seats from other parts of the city. But this may not be bad because families are now considering a wider lens of schools. In turn, I think this has spurred innovation. So, I think it's a mixed bag.

Acknowledging the complexity of D.C.'s choice landscape, Chris and other adequacy adherents assumed that prioritizing resource distribution is sufficient for improving the educational landscape for all students. Moreover, this emphasis on choice and innovation reflects dominant gentrification and school choice policy logic.

Discussion and Conclusion

This paper explored the intricate perspectives of local policymakers concerning educational equity and their negotiations between the interests of newcomers and long-term residents. Elected officials and education administrators in this study grounded their sensemaking in a shared commitment to advancing educational equity. Participants of color drew from their experiences of oppression, and white participants reflected on their privilege and proximity to disadvantage, both personally and professionally. These perspectives on equity were intertwined with views on gentrification, as all participants acknowledged its uneven effects on neighborhoods, schools, and longtime resident families. Some policymakers viewed gentrification as reinforcing white racial dominance and advocated for transformative change.

Others saw potential benefits in gentrification-induced development, viewing it as an opportunity to connect longtime resident families with resources and educational opportunities.

The paper's findings highlight the pivotal role of local policymakers' sensemaking on space and race in shaping the trajectory of educational equity. While all participants considered the broader influence of social disadvantage, poverty, and race on opportunities, not all recognized space as a significant factor in their decision-making. Policymakers emphasizing adequacy tended to prioritize short-term and market-driven solutions. This tendency toward color-evasive policymaking, as noted by Johnson (2013), Lipman (2015), and others (e.g., Diem et al., 2019; Good, 2017; Pedroni, 2007), reflects a broader oversight of the spatial dimensions inherent in gentrification and school choice. This oversight can inadvertently deepen existing inequalities or further marginalize vulnerable groups. In contrast, policymakers adopting a transformative approach prioritized comprehensive, community-centered strategies to address spatial disparities in high-quality schooling opportunities. They emphasized inclusive policies that centered the voices and experiences of longtime resident Black families and other disproportionately marginalized communities.

These findings also challenge the prevailing depiction in the literature of local policymakers as uniformly advocating for gentrification. Instead, the research uncovered a spectrum of viewpoints among policymakers, with many expressing apprehensions about its adverse effects on marginalized communities. Much like Green and colleagues (2022) observed, local policymakers influenced gentrification by "racially mediating" (p. 852) the flow of people and resources across the educational landscape, thereby both responding to and contributing to racial changes. By acknowledging displacement, critiquing gentrification, and considering structural inequality, transformative policymakers sought to prioritize longtime resident families

to mitigate gentrification's negative impacts. For instance, the decision to relocate the predominantly Black and prestigious Banneker High School to a rapidly gentrifying community against the wishes of parent gentrifiers exemplifies elected officials privileging the interests of longtime residents amidst heightened racial tensions and competing community interests.

It is essential to clarify that this distinction does not absolve local Washington, D.C. policymakers of their roles in facilitating broader waves of gentrification. The city is replete with market-driven education reforms, and the influx of capital and resource investments has disproportionately benefited specific neighborhoods while harming others. Some policymakers recounted instances where colleagues, as Cucchiara (2013) documented, treated parent gentrifiers as "valued customers" (p. 80). Echoing scholars who interpret gentrification as a racial capitalist project (Addie & Fraser, 2019; Rucks-Ahidiana, 2022), other policymakers acknowledged the city's history of disinvestment in and disposability of Black and other racially minoritized longtime resident communities. However, the efforts depicted in this paper to resist these oppressive tactics underscore the necessity for a more nuanced examination of the role that local policymakers play in either exacerbating or mitigating gentrification.

This paper suggests several avenues for future research. As this paper focuses on a uniquely liberal context, investigating local policymakers' sensemaking on school gentrification across diverse political contexts would be valuable. Exploring scenarios where prioritizing the interests of longtime residents may pose political challenges could shed light on potential professional dilemmas. In less ideologically progressive areas than Washington, D.C.,[11] policy outcomes on contentious debates like the Shaw Junior High School and Banneker High School

[11] Washington, D.C., is a predominantly liberal enclave with a higher proportion of Democratic-leaning voters than any other state or territory. For example, during the 2020 Presidential Election, 92.1 percent of D.C. residents voted for the Democratic candidate, Joe Biden, while 5.4 percent cast their votes for the Republican candidate, Donald Trump (CNN Politics, 2024).

relocation may more readily serve gentrifier interests or yield color-evasive solutions. Comparative studies across different sociopolitical contexts may offer insights into policymakers' responses to the racialization of space and the strategies they employ to address inequalities. This focus may also show how policymakers navigate the challenge of maintaining political power and representation for longtime residents as gentrification accelerates.

This research also encourages a deeper exploration of policymakers' perceptions of gentrification and their responses to its racial and spatial dimensions. While this paper doesn't delve into specific policy interventions, employing an equity typology and critical perspectives on a gentrifying educational policy debate could reveal tangible expressions of transformative and adequacy views in policymaking. Such an approach could also reveal how influences less focused on advancing educational equity gain prominence in policy adoption.

The racially charged conflicts heightened by gentrification underscore the importance of elevating voices the literature has traditionally overlooked (Billingham, 2015; Slater, 2006). These groups, whose stakes in neighborhoods and schools play crucial roles in reimaging these spaces, include local youth, longtime resident parents, school leaders, and the private developers who wield significant influence over public-private ventures. For instance, understanding how activists and other non-system actors interpret and influence the policymaking process could offer strategies for organizing for to confront gentrification and advance educational justice (Butler & Sinclair, 2024). Adopting this broader perspective would enhance our understanding of urban educational policymaking dynamics. It would recognize the efforts of local policymakers committed to amplifying the voices of longtime residents and acknowledge the complexities of working towards equity within a neoliberal policy environment that, for some, precipitates the privileging of economic forces over community needs.

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Conclusion

The rise of neoliberal reforms aimed at drawing middle-class families back to city centers across America as part of a significant urban restructuring trend called gentrification has sparked important debates about the implications of these processes for schooling. Some reformers and policymakers view gentrification as a mechanism for revitalizing struggling schools. According to this theory, marketizing public education through methods like privatization, expansion of school choice, and the adoption of rigorous accountability measures will attract investments from public-private partnerships and middle-class families. Gentrification advocates expect these investments to bolster school communities, ultimately improving students' academic performance. While these investments have indeed reduced racial and socioeconomic isolation in certain schools (Mordechay & Ayscue, 2020), and the involvement of parent gentrifiers' has been instrumental in the transformation of some schools (Siegel-Hawley et al., 2016), this dissertation illuminates the complex and messy nature of these reforms, which is far from the straightforward narrative the prevailing policy discourse suggests.

Situated in Washington, D.C., a focal point of gentrification-induced development and market-based education reforms (Butler, 2021; Hyra, 2017), this dissertation's three complementary studies highlight the limited effectiveness of these strategies in improving experiences and outcomes for local youth and longtime residents. It also foregrounds the decision-making processes of local policymakers striving to mitigate the perpetuation of racial and spatial educational inequities, which unchecked gentrification can exacerbate. In doing so, this dissertation aligns with Posey-Maddox and colleagues' (2014) concept of school gentrification as it illustrates how the rapid influx of middle-class families into urban education markets often, but need not inherently, worsens the exclusion of historically marginalized communities.

Methodologically, this dissertation differs from much of the literature on the intersection of gentrification and education by centering the perspectives of local youth, longtime resident Black parents, and local policymakers. These often-undertheorized groups' aspirations and neighborhood ties are crucial in understanding the racially and spatially charged dynamics that school gentrification can amplify (Green et al., 2022; Makris, 2015; Pedroni, 2011; Roda, 2020; Slater, 2006). This focus counterbalances the prevailing tendency to prioritize the viewpoints of white parent gentrifiers. Furthermore, the dissertation's use of participatory mapping with young people aligns with critical geographers' observations about the value of spatial methodologies in allowing youth to depict their unique connections to their surroundings (Gordon et al., 2016; Kinloch, 2007; Literat, 2013). This approach reveals insights about race, space, and policy that a myopic focus on adult perspectives might overlook (Jenkins, 2022; Young, 1999).

Conceptually, this dissertation demonstrates that local youth navigating the borderland of gentrification find themselves at the intersection of promise and exclusion. These young people witness an enticing and alienating transformation as gentrification sweeps through their city and brings newfound amenities and revitalization efforts. The allure of upgraded public spaces and trendy commercial institutions offers them new opportunities for leisure and socialization, enhancing their daily experiences in tangible ways. However, this surface-level progress belies a deeper, more troubling reality rooted in racialized pathologies antiblackness. While the external facelifts and modernized amenities may seem like progress, they often come at the cost of marginalization. Gentrification not only alters the physical landscape but also perpetuates systemic inequities and reinforces the notion that Black youth and other young people of color are disposable and undesirable (Lipman, 2015). Policies aimed at attracting and retaining gentrifiers further entrench these dynamics as they normalize the social practices of this desirable

constituency and, in turn, convey to local youth that they are the racialized "Other" within their own communities.

This dissertation documents that despite the narrative of gentrification driving improvements and investments, the lived experiences of local youth tell a different story. Many find that their schools remain largely untouched by these waves of change or have failed to become more responsive to their unique needs. Accordingly, the rhetoric that gentrification engenders improved educational opportunities rings hollow for these youths. This disjuncture highlights the complex interplay between development initiatives and antiblackness narratives, which contribute to some youths' perceptions that developers and city leaders intentionally seek to displace them or, at best, lack concern for their needs. At the same time, some youth attribute the disinvestment in their communities or the valorization of blighted buildings by developers to community failings. These explanations echo majoritarian narratives that blame longtime resident communities rather than structural forces for the economic conditions that real estate developers exploit under gentrification (Smith, 1996). Nevertheless, youth largely resisted these pathologies and asserted their right to the city. They allowed themselves to imagine a more just city that centers on housing and food insecurity and the development of inclusive and engaging learning environments. Local youths' experiences in these liminal spaces, where targeted investments collide with ongoing racial and spatial disparities, complicate the discourse concerning gentrification's impact on their lives.

The stories of longtime resident Black parents, as depicted in this dissertation, unravel the complex web of racial and spatial barriers these parents face in navigating a gentrified school choice marketplace. The delicate balance between academic excellence and ensuring their children's physical and emotional well-being leads many parents to opt for high-performing

schools in gentrified areas despite the challenges of long commutes. However, as the broader literature on Black parents' decision-making observes (Cooper, 2005; Ellison & Aloe, 2018; Posey-Maddox et al., 2021), their hopes of finding a welcoming environment clash with their encounters with hostile staff. These experiences deepen parents' sense of exclusion and reinforce their perception that most education officials across the city do not value Black children.

Moreover, this dissertation extends existing research on gentrification and school choice by challenging the prevalent discourse that portrays school choice as a means to empower historically marginalized families, like longtime resident Black parents (Scott, 2013). Although school choice policies have contributed to revitalizing underinvested neighborhoods, the neoliberal practice of transforming schools into commodities and parents into consumers risks perpetuating existing disparities (Good, 2017; Johnson, 2013; Lipman, 2011). A growing literature base documents that parent gentrifiers, buoyed by their economic advantage, often wield disproportionate influence in the educational marketplace (Cucchiara, 2013; Syeed, 2018). These families effectively deploy their resources and social capital to effectively navigate the system, access their preferred schools, and secure advantages for their children within those schools (Butler, 2021; DeSena & Ansalone, 2009; Freidus, 2020; Sattin-Bajaj & Roda, 2020). In contrast, this tendency of gentrified education markets to prioritize accommodations for predominantly white and affluent neighborhoods and families constrains the schooling options for marginalized families. This reality effectively transforms longtime resident Black parents' access to quality education into a precarious game of chance rather than an assured choice.

This dissertation also documents the intersectionality of race and class in shaping Black parents' schooling experiences. It highlights the challenges faced by low-income and working-class parents who lack access to social networks that could assist them in navigating the system

and finding the right schools for their children. The pursuit of advantage by affluent longtime residents inadvertently contributes to the socioeconomic stratification of schooling. Like parent gentrifiers, some affluent longtime resident parents work to leverage their economic resources and social capital to secure coveted spots in high-performing schools. This practice perpetuates a system where wealth and privilege dictate the distribution of educational opportunities, echoing Audre Lorde's (1984) assertion that "the master's tools will never dismantle the master's house" (p. 112). Such efforts also ensure the concentration of affluent longtime residents' capital in select schools rather than dispersed throughout the system. The systemic hurdles longtime resident parents encounter erode their trust in institutions ostensibly designed to support them. This distrust deepens a sense of powerlessness among some and ignites the resolve and creativity of others in advocating for their children's rights and needs.

Another contribution of this dissertation is complicating the literature's portrayal of all local policymakers as proponents of gentrification. Instead, it reveals a more nuanced landscape of perspectives and depicts the pivotal role local policymakers' sensemaking plays in shaping the trajectory of school reform amid gentrification. Local policymakers conveyed diverse understandings of gentrification's causes and consequences, with some acknowledging its multifaceted nature and its exacerbation of spatial and racial inequalities within education markets. They recognized gentrification not merely as a process of physical displacement but also as a racially charged force that leads to cultural erasure and power shifts within communities. In contrast, others espoused a narrower view, seeing gentrification as a mixed phenomenon with potential benefits, like increased resources and school choice options. This perspective downplayed gentrification's adverse impacts on longtime residents and other

marginalized communities. These differing viewpoints significantly influenced policymakers' decision-making processes.

Local policymakers with transformative outlooks advocate for sweeping reforms to dismantle systemic barriers exacerbated by gentrification. They prioritize the voices and experiences of marginalized constituencies. They emphasize the importance of inclusive policies that center on the needs of longtime residents and local youth. Conversely, policymakers with an adequacy orientation lean towards incremental reforms within existing systems and often overlook the role of space in perpetuating inequality. Despite their aspirations for educational equity, adequacy policymakers' reliance on short-term fixes and market-driven solutions risk reinforcing existing disparities or further marginalizing vulnerable populations. However, while adequacy frameworks may fall short in addressing systemic inequities (Allbright et al., 2019), policymakers' commitments to equity underscore the potential for educational policymaking in gentrified spaces that center those whose voices often receive short shrift in school reform debates. Their intentional consideration of the input and concerns of families at the margins points to a path where local youths' and longtime residents' marginalization and distrust are not inevitable within gentrified educational markets.

This dissertation's exploration of how undertheorized constituencies experience neighborhood and school gentrification prompts several avenues for future research. Firstly, researchers should prioritize engaging local youth in policy discussions about gentrification, with the recognition that their narratives are crucial for holding schools and policymakers accountable. This involvement can lead to policies that prioritize safe neighborhood spaces and robust resource allocations for young people, which may help foster the inclusive environments gentrification's advocates take for granted.

Secondly, understanding the dynamics of gentrified school choice markets requires an ongoing interrogation of the policy logics that drive decision-making processes. Researchers must investigate why marketizing public education for parent gentrifiers hasn't fully materialized in high schools, particularly those serving predominantly Black and Latinx communities. As some scholars have already begun to explore (Diem et al., 2019; Green et al., 2022), unpacking the sensemaking that stifles integration efforts in gentrifying contexts would enrich policy debates regarding the efficacy of commodifying education to instigate system-wide change. Further exploration into the choice-making of longtime resident parents is also salient to this discourse. A more nuanced understanding of these families' experiences has important implications for designing choice systems that account for how racial and spatial asymmetries play out across urban education landscapes. Foregrounding the strategies these families employ and the hostilities they endure challenges neoliberal narratives that the educational marketplace is minimally restrictive. It also supplants the reductive portrayal of marginalized families as passive choosers who are disengaged from their children's schooling experiences, instead highlighting stories of their agency, resilience, and creativity in the face of oppressive forces.

Finally, future research must explore the perceptions of local policymakers across diverse contexts, especially in areas with social and political dynamics different from those in Washington, D.C. Given their pivotal role in shaping the charter school landscape, examining authorizers' practices becomes imperative. Authorizing practices and decisions are influential signals to the marketplace that shape how schools approach community engagement and meet the needs of diverse consumers. By delving into authorizers' perceptions, researchers and policymakers can gain deeper insights into how charter schools navigate issues of equity, inclusion, and community representation within gentrified neighborhoods. Integrating an

exploration of authorizers' sensemaking with other local policymakers on a specific policy case can add nuance to understanding educational governance in gentrified areas. This approach reveals how power dynamics, institutional norms, and political pressures influence school operations and resource allocation decisions. These insights offer critical knowledge for effectively identifying and overcoming barriers to advancing educational equity.

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Appendix A. Data Collection Protocols

A-1. Local Youth Mapping and Focus Group Protocol

Mapping Prompt

Imagine that you were asked to give a tour of DC that includes the significant places that make DC your home. Your map should include the places you've lived in and around the city, your current and former schools, and other places that matter to you. For example, you might include your favorite and/or least favorite neighborhoods, places to hang out, shops, parks, restaurants, metro stops, etc.

The places on your map can be places that are in your neighborhood currently or have been here in the past. They may be physical landmarks (e.g., a house, restaurant, park) or site where significant events have occurred. This map is personal to you. These places do not have to be of shared importance to others in your neighborhood.

Please take about 10 minutes to draw **and** label these places. Then we'll discuss why each place on your map is important to you and how its importance has changed over time.

Focus Group Prompts

Neighborhood Background

- What do you like about your neighborhood?
- Where have you lived in and around D.C.?
- For each neighborhood in which the participant has lived:
    - What words would you use to describe this neighborhood?
    - What do you wish you could change about this neighborhood?
    - How do you think other D.C. residents would describe this neighborhood?
    - How Are there amenities in other neighborhoods that you wish were in your neighborhood or vice versa?

Educational Background

- What DC schools have you attended?
- For each school the participant has attended:
    - How did you and your family select these schools?
    - What had you learned about this school before enrolling?
    - What is your daily commute like and how do you feel about the neighborhood in which your school is located? (Probe for belongingness and discomfort)
    - What do you like about this school and what do you wish you could change about this school? (Probe on mutual respect and fairness, disciplinary procedures, academic expectations and rigor, resources/extracurricular opportunities, "Otherness")
    - How does this school compare to others you have attended?
    - What do you wish you could change about your current school?

    - How do you think other D.C. residents would describe your school?
- Tell me about your school friends – where do they live, where do you hang out at or near school? (Probe on family background – are their families gentrifiers or longtime residents)

Social Networks and Belonging

- Where do you and your friends like to hang out? What do you like about those areas?
- To what extent do you feel safe/comfortable throughout the city? (Probe for specific areas, Chinatown, SW Waterfront/Wharf, Navy Yard, H St, Southeast, U Street/Shaw, Georgetown, Redline North of Dupont, Silver Spring, Alexandria, Fort Totten, Prince George's County, Montgomery County
- To what extent do you interact with people from other backgrounds?

Gentrification

- What does the term gentrification mean to you?
- How do you think gentrification is impacting DC?
- Why do you think some neighborhoods receive more investments than others?
- If you were ruler for the day, what, if anything, would you change about your neighborhood and/or the city? What would you do to make the city better for young people like you?

Mapping Probes

- Can you tell me more about this particular place?
- What is the significance of this place historically?
- How have you used this place over time?
- Do you still go there regularly / at all?
- Has the use of this place changed over time for you personally / in general?
- How do people use this space today?
- Who are its primary users today / in the past?
- Is this place still here? If not, why?
- How have the physical features of the site changed over time?
- Do you think that others in your neighborhood consider this place to be important? If so, who?
- Do you think that others in your neighborhood might not consider this place to be important? If so, who?
- Who owns / operates this place?
- Has the owner / operator changed over time?
- Has the importance of this place for you changed over time?
- What do you think the future of this place will be?
- What are your least favorite places in your neighborhood?

A-2. Longtime Resident Black Parent Interview Protocol

Neighborhood Experiences

- What brought your family to your current neighborhood and where else have you lived in the area?
- What do you like about your neighborhood?
- What do you wish you could change about your neighborhood?
- How do you think other DC residents would describe your neighborhood?
-

School Selection

- How would you describe the defining characteristics of a 'good' school for your child(ren)?
- To what extent do you think your neighborhood has good schools?
- What DC schools have your child(ren) attended?
- How did you select these schools? What sources of information did you find most/least useful?
- Are there additional pieces of information you wish you'd had before selecting your child(ren)'s current or previous schools?
- To what extent do you think all DC families have comparable access to quality schools?

Out-of-boundary and charter schools (Only for families that have used the lottery system)

- Please describe your experience with the My School DC lottery?
- To what extent, if at all, do you have a preference for sending your child to a DCPS or public charter school? If so, why?
- To what extent did you consider the lottery process easy to navigate?

Within-school experiences

- To what extent are you satisfied with your child(ren)'s school?
- Please describe the relationships you have with your child(ren)'s school staff?
- Please describe the relationships you have with the other families at your child(ren)'s school and within any parent organizations?
- To what extent do you think all families have the same opportunity to actively participate in your child(ren)'s school community?

Gentrification and Belonging

- What DC public spaces does your family most frequently use? To what extent do you think those spaces are accessible to all DC residents?
- To what extent do you think all DC families have comparable access to safe and affordable things to do around the city?
- What does the term gentrification mean to you?
- How do you think gentrification is impacting DC?
  If you were ruler for the day, what, if anything, would you change about your neighborhood and/or the city? What would you do to make the city better for families like yours?

A-3. Local Policymaker Interview Protocol

Professional Background

- How would you describe your professional responsibilities? What do you like about your position? What are the challenges you face and how do you confront those challenges?
- What led you to your current position?

Educational Equity

- What does the term educational equity mean to you?
- To what extent do you think all city residents have accessible to a quality school?
- What does DC do well to ensure educational equity for all city residents?
- What barriers do you see to ensuring educational equity for all city residents and who should be responsible for overcoming those barriers?
- How do you think the growth of the charter sector has influenced families' access to quality schools around the city?

Decision Making

- What data sources does your team use to inform your educational decision-making?
- What data sources are most important to you/your team? How do you/your team assess and evaluate competing data sources?
- Knowing that there are winners and losers in all policy decisions, how do you determine which stakeholder group(s) to center in your educational decision-making?

Perceptions of Washington, DC

- What public spaces do you frequent most in the District? To what extent do you think those spaces are accessible to all residents?
- To what extent do you think Washington, DC is a good and safe place to raise children?

Gentrification

- What does the term gentrification mean to you?
- How do you think gentrification is changing Washington, DC and how do you think gentrification is changing neighborhood conditions for local children and families?

Gentrification and Education

- How do you think gentrification is impacting the landscape of public education in DC?
- To what extent do you think all families receive the same customer service throughout the city's education sector?
- To what extent do you think gentrifications reduces or increases barriers to educational equity in the city and who should be responsible for remediating these barriers?
- In general, how do you think district families and employees feel about gentrification?
- What additional policy changes t would implement or recommend to make educational opportunities more equitable for all city residents?

Appendix B. Analytic Codes

B-1. *Analytic Codes for "'It Feels Like the City Pushed Us Aside': Mapping Local Youths' Experiences of Gentrification and Education in Washington, D.C."*

Primary Codes	Secondary Codes	Tertiary Codes
Educational biographies (i.e., schools attended)		
	Elementary school	
	Middle school	
	High school	
	School choice-making	
Perceptions of gentrification		
	Amenities	
		Negative: "They aren't for us"
		Positive: Appreciate new amenities
		Positive: Environmental changes
		Positive: Favorite places
		Positive: Financial incentives for longtime residents to sell property
	Effects on homelessness	
	Gentrification and justice	
		Catering to gentrifiers/Whiteness
		Class inequity
		Don't view gentrification as unjust
		Emergent critical consciousness
		No clear articulation of justice
		Physical displacement
		Racial inequity
		Spatial inequity
		Symbolic displacement
	Interactions with gentrifiers	
		Citizen-based policing
		No meaningful interactions
	Positive: "it's good for the economy"	
Perceptions of neighborhood		
	History of neighborhood	
	How neighborhood is named	
	Negative: Amenities	
	Negative: Food quality	
	Negative: Homelessness	
	Negative: "Poor tax"	
	Negative: Safety	
		General concerns
		Gun violence
		Parents' concerns
	Positive: Accessibility	

	Positive: Belonging and comfort	
	Positive: Recreational spaces	
Perceptions of local policymaking		
	Banneker high school vs. Shaw middle school	
	Belief that youths' voices aren't valued	
	Belief that longtime residents' voices aren't valued	
	Distrust of local politicians	
	Limited understanding of political process	
	Privileging Whiteness	
Place Attachments		
	Discomfort: Accessing all of city	
	Discomfort: "white" places	
	Belonging: Community centers	
	Belonging: Friends homes	
	Belonging: Museums	
	Belonging: Non-gentrified areas	
	Belonging: Parks	
	Belonging: Suburban areas	
	Neighborhoods: Chinatown	
	Neighborhoods: Georgetown	
	Neighborhoods: PG County	
	Neighborhoods: National Harbor	
	Neighborhoods: Shaw/U St.	
	Neighborhoods: Waterfront	
	Notions of embodiment	
	Local youth as border crossers	
	Mixed: Gentrified areas	
	Mixed: High school neighborhood	
	Mixed: Immediate neighborhood	
	Mixed: School commute	
	Role of social media	
	"Someplace Quiet"	
Policy recommendations		
	Housing affordability	
	Homelessness	
	Policing	
	Poverty	
	Improving neighborhood schools	
		After school programs
		Raising expectations
		Teacher incentives
		Wraparound services
	Amenities for non-gentrified neighborhoods	
		Food quality
		Parks
		Public safety
School experiences		
	Attributing gentrification to demographic shifts	

	Awareness of relative deprivation between peers	
	Code-switching	
	Negative: Bullying	
	Negative: Disparities in treatment	
		Gender disparities
		Racial disparities
	Negative: Lack of rigor	
	Negative: Punitive discipline	
	Negative: Racial tension between students	
	Negative: Resource allocation	
	Negative: School staff deficit thinking	
	Negative: staff turnover	
	Positive: Belonging	
	Positive: Caring adults	
	Positive: "it's not weird to be smart"	
	Positive: Programming/curriculum	
Transportation		
	Challenge: Coordinating with friends that live in different areas	
	(In)accessibility of gentrified areas	
	Perceptions of Metro	
	Perceptions of bus access	
	Perceptions of school commute	
	Role of parents	
	Safety concerns	
Understanding of gentrification's drivers		
	Gentrifiers	
	Local policymakers	
	Longtime residents (victim blaming)	
	Real estate developers	
	Urban pathologies	

B-2. *Analytic Codes for "'A Prisoner's Dilemma': How Longtime Resident Black Parents Navigate School Choice, Gentrification, and Antiblackness"*

Primary Codes	Secondary Codes
Choice set construction: School attributes	
	Behavioral management
	Curriculum
	Diversity
	Facilities
	Feeder pattern*
	Physical location
	Proximity
	Reputation
	Safety - physical
	Safety - social and emotional
	School culture and climate
	Staff quality*
	Standardized performance
	"Valuing blackness"*
Choice set construction: Sources of information	
	Peer groups (child's)*
	School district data
	School visits
	Social networks
Choice set construction: Processes	
	Considering private schools*
	Entering the choice market
	Leveraging social networks
	Observing classes
	Researching schools
	Reviewing district data
	Visiting schools
	Weighing child's preference*
	Weighing other parents' comments
	Weighing professionals' comments*
Experience in prior school(s)	
	High-quality curriculum
	Interactions with gentrifier families
	Intentional and performative engagement
	Lack of Black families*
	Negative interactions with school staff
	Negative interactions with students*
	Proximity challenges
	Responsive school staff
	School staff privileging white students/interests
	Well resourced

Ongoing choice dilemmas	
	Exit
	Intervening and monitoring
	Intentional and performative engagement
	Perception of parent engagement opportunities
	Perception of other parents
	Perception of school staff
	Racialized tensions
	Satisfaction with decision(s)*
Perception of current neighborhood	
	Amenities
	Built environment
	Geography
	Neighborhood schools
	Safety - crime
	Safety – police*
Perception of D.C. charter schools	
	Distrust*
	Impact on DCPS*
	Lack of accountability*
	Positive experiences
Perceptions of gentrification	
	Affordability
	Impact on friends and family*
	Impact on historical understandings
	Interactions with gentrifiers
	"It's a mixed bag"
	Perceptions of gentrifiers
	Two classes of customers
Perception of public education in D.C.	
	Distrust
	Equitable
	(Impact of) school closures
	Inequitable
	Lottery system
	Messages about public education *
	No sector preference
Place attachments	
	Belonging
	Connections to current neighborhood
	Connections to D.C.*
	Discomfort
	Role of history

B-3. *Analytic Codes for "Local Policymakers Sensemaking on Gentrification and Education: 'Equity in Washington D.C. is Just a Word They Say'"*

Primary Codes	**Secondary Codes**
Approach to decision-making	
	Coalition building
	Community engagement
	Goals and objectives
	Important data sources
	Key interest groups
	Organizational norms and values
	Past experiences
	Political pressures
	View of professional positionality
Equity	
	Class-based challenges
	Color-evasiveness
	Democratic liberal equity
	Equity as adequacy
	Horizontal equity
	Liberal equity
	Libertarian equity
	Race-based challenges
	Transformative equity
	Vertical equity
Perceptions of Gentrification	
	Affordability
	History and gentrification
	Impact on built environment
	Impact on local youth
	Impact on longtime residents
	Mixed understanding
	Negative view of gentrification
	Perceptions of gentrifiers
	Positive view of gentrification
	Role of developers
	Spatiality and gentrification
Perceptions of pressing education issues in Washington, D.C.	
	Attendance
	Centering youth of color
	Enrollment
	High-quality curriculum
	Housing insecurity
	Market and geographic saturation
	Student discipline
	Student engagement

	Violence
	Treatment of local youth
	whiteness
Perceptions of school choice	
	Challenges
	DCPS
	Diversity vs. inclusivity
	Impact of school closures
	Lottery policies
	Parent gentrifiers
	PCSB
	Student assignment policies and feeder patterns
	Successes
Perception of Washington, D.C.	
	Accessibility
	Benefits of living in D.C.
	Challenges of living in D.C.
	Public spaces
	Resources for marginalized families
	Safety
Place attachments	
	Belonging
	Connections to current neighborhood
	Connections to D.C.*
	Discomfort
	Role of history
Policy recommendations	

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