Wealth Matters: Home Ownership, Housing Values, and the Model Minority Myth of Black Meccas in The New South

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ABSTRACT

Black Meccas symbolize the structural—albeit residentially segregated—incorporation of a population subset identifying as both Black and middle-class, measured largely using income, and ignoring indicators of wealth. Given the tenuous nature of Black middle-class status and the challenges associated with measuring social class, we challenge conventional metrics categorizing Black Meccas, which often ignore asset ownership, values specific to housing, and Black population heterogeneity, including ethnic diversity. We examine racial and ethnic disparities in housing values across Metropolitan Statistical Areas (MSAs) in the New South in an effort to reevaluate definitions of Black Meccas. Using an underutilized perspective, the politics of respectability, and census-based data and regression modeling, we address a gap in the literature on race, place, and class by examining variations in the types and levels of assets owned and the appearance and/or disappearance of Black Meccas in the United States from the 1990s to 2016. We found that in Black Meccas of the New South wealth disparities, as reflected in the values of Black homes in comparison to their White counterparts, still exist.

Keywords: Black Meccas, racial inequality, respectability, Black middle class, wealth inequality

American mythology includes the perception of racial progress as linear and always moving towards greater equality between the dominant racial group in America—White people—and racial and ethnic minorities in America—especially Black people. One of the greatest signifiers of this American myth is the concept

of Black Meccas. Black Meccas, including Harlem in its heyday, and post-1970, Atlanta, Georgia, are allegedly places where Black people can thrive in ways unimaginable in other parts of the country and at other points in America's history (Allen 2017).

The term Black Mecca is derived from a historical place. Mecca, which is located in present-day Saudi Arabia. Mecca is a holy city because it is the birthplace of the founder of one of the world's most popular religions. The term Mecca also has a broader meaning. The term is often used to refer colloquially to any place viewed as the center for a group, activity, or interest. However, there is something very unholy about places where Black people remain segregated residentially and in schools, where child poverty remains high, racial wealth inequality persists, and the practice of leadership by people who identify their race as Black seldom reflects the interest of the majority of Black residents. Focusing on selected social and demographic variables alone limits our understanding of Black Meccas, and about the existence of a New South. Focusing on indicators of Black middle-class status, while ignoring ethnic (large subpopulations of foreign-born Black people recently from Africa and the Caribbean) and class differences within the Black population masked the ongoing suffering of many within the Black population (Bennett and Lutz 1999; Green and Shelton 2017; Logan 2007; Martin 2013; Waters 1990, 1994, 1999). Black Meccas when understood more broadly are more illusion than reality. The challenge lies in the standard operationalization of Black Meccas, the overwhelming focus on descriptive versus predictive analyses, and the reliance on data-driven versus theory-driven scholarly inquiries. Black Meccas can best be—and should be—understood beyond mere measures of selected sociodemographic variables, but more importantly through three important frameworks: politics of respectability, the myth of meritocracy, and the model minority myth.

THE MEANING OF MECCAS

The term Black Mecca has been used since the early part of the twentieth century to describe the cultural, intellectual, political, and social awakening occurring in Harlem in the 1920s. The "father of Black Harlem," Phillip A. Payton, a founder of the Afro-American Realty Company, recruited Black tenants to live in units left unsold by White developers after the Lenox Avenue IRT subway line was completed (Martin 2013). Harlem not only became home to many Black people for the first time, but it also became home to social protests. National Association for the Advancement of Colored People, the Urban League, and Marcus Garvey's movement all had a strong presence in Harlem (Jackson 2018). Harlem was "designed to help birth the New Negro. Harlem was an idea as much as it was a real place: it was a sanctuary, a race capital, a hope-disturbing lighthouse" (Sandhu 2011:2).

Many in the popular press appear to like the use of the term Black Mecca to describe cities like Atlanta, Georgia, although the metrics used for defining Black Meccas vary. Atlanta is considered the Black capital of America because of the number of Black businesses, historically Black colleges and universities, and relatively large Black population and Black electorate (Dameron and Murphy 1997; Harris and Tassie 2012; Hobson 2017; Mulholland 2017; Phillips 2003). Phyl Garland is credited with popularizing the idea that Atlanta was indeed the Black Mecca in an article published in Ebony magazine (Michney 2017).

Scholars such as Bullard (1989) are not wholly convinced that Black Meccas exist, or that Black people have benefited from the economic progress in the South, which caused many scholars to declare the emergence of a New South. Bullard (1989) edited a volume where he and other scholars questioned the existence of Black Meccas and also called into question the existence of a New South, given the enduring racial disparities between Black people and White people on a host of sociological outcomes. Bullard (1989) examined the six largest statistical areas in the South, beginning with a discussion about Black migration patterns, fol-

lowed by key periods where Black populations thrived economically and/or politically, and conclude with each area's decline. The cities included Houston, Texas; New Orleans, Louisiana; Atlanta, Georgia; Memphis, Tennessee; Birmingham, Alabama; and Tampa, Florida. Bullard (1989) made the general argument that the South has not allowed Black people in the region full economic access. He asserts also that the South has not allowed Black people in the region full political participation (1989).

Delores Aldridge (1989) wrote an essay in the edited volume titled In Search of the New South. In it, Aldridge (1989) said that the New South—and by extension the existence of Black Meccas—was an illusion. Although Aldridge conceded that the South became "a favored destination for new industry and in-migrants from other regions of the country" during the 1970s through the mid-1980s, she also observed that White racism and institutionalized discrimination maintained two societies—one Black, one White. Moreover, Aldridge (1989:ix) said, "residuals of southern apartheid are with us in the New South as demonstrated in the present-day inequities in education, employment, income, housing, and residential amenities, the judicial system, and a host of other areas."

Houston, Texas, established in 1836, is one example of a city in the New South plagued by a host of sociodemographic challenges. Bullard (1989:16) wrote that Houston had a relatively small slave population with many Black people working as domestic servants and that Black migration to Houston increased after Juneteenth as demand for labor grew in Houston. Houston's Fourth Ward, also known as "Freedmen's Town" was the center of Black life in the city in the 1920s. Over 90 percent of Black-owned businesses in Houston were located in Freedmen's Town, where most Black people lived until the Great Depression (Bullard 1989). Despite Houston's rich history, by the 1980s, Black residents were residentially segregated from their White neighbors. Black households were 3 times more likely to live in poverty than White households. The unemployment rate for Black people

was double the unemployment rate for White people—this just a decade after having the reputation "as the largest most affluent Black community in the South" (Bullard 1989:44).

Wright (1989) examined New Orleans, which was established in the early eighteenth century and which was home to Black people very early on. In 1726, there were 300 slaves in New Orleans compared to 1,000 slaves in 1732. In the early 1800s, there were over 1,000 free people of color living in New Orleans. By 1810, the city of New Orleans was predominately Black, with over 5,700 free people of color, 8,000 White people, and nearly 11,000 Black people (Wright 1989). Unlike some other cities in the New South, New Orleans has always had a very visible and very large underclass (Wright 1989).

Bullard and Thomas (1989) discuss the historical emergence of Atlanta. Atlanta, so named because of its location as the terminal point of the railroads on the Atlantic coast, became a financial capital in the South in the very early twentieth century (Bullard and Thomas 1989). Atlanta was selected in 1914 as one of 12 Federal Bank cities. The city soon made investments in office buildings, while other cities across the nation were investing in factories. Designed in a perfect circle, Atlanta stayed roughly the same size over time with no significant annexation well into the second half of the twentieth century. This lack of annexation led to uneven development, resulting in a mostly Black central city core (Bullard and Thomas 1989). Atlanta gained the titles of the "Jewel of the South," "City of the 21st Century," a "Regional City" (Bullard and Thomas 1989:83).

After all, Atlanta was home to the landmark Black-owned Citizen's Trust Bank, which was founded in 1921. Atlanta was also the site of Sweet Auburn Avenue, the center of Black business in the city; and the city was long regarded as a sort of "Black talent academy" (Bullard and Thomas 1989:92). Civil rights giant Andrew Young was elected to the U.S. Congress in the early 1970s and a year later, Atlanta had its first Black mayor, both important symbols of a New South. Bullard and Thomas (1992), however, cautioned against equating political gains with economic gains.

Memphis, a city also in the New South, did not enjoy the economic progress that so many reflected upon since the 1970s. Memphis, much like the other five largest metropolitan areas in the South covered in Bullard's (1989) edited volume, has a very long history of Black residents. The first group of Black people arrived in Memphis in 1795 (Vaughn 1989). The large production of cotton led to the large population growth of the Black population. Memphis was home to two slave markets, yet Memphis was also one of the first cities in the south to emancipate slaves (Vaughn, 1989). However, during the height of economic development in the South, Memphis became known as the "dark spot in the Sunbelt" (Vaughn 1989:119). Unlike Atlanta and Washington, D.C., Memphis was unable to elect a Black mayor despite the existence of a large Black voter population (Vaughn 1989).

Birmingham, Alabama, is also located in the New South (Portfield 1989). "The Magic City," founded in 1871, earned the title because of its industrial wealth (Portfield 1989:121). "Birmingham was recognized as the industrial capital of the New South" (Portfield 1989:123). After slavery ended, many Black people migrated to Birmingham to work in the coal and iron industries. Black people worked in racially segregated occupations. Black women worked overwhelmingly as domestic servants and many Black men worked as yardmen and chauffeurs (Portfield 1989).

While Birmingham was praised for its place in the industrial industry, the city was also mocked because of relatively high crime rates that fed the city's and the state's appetite for the practice of convict leasing (Portfield 1989). "Black people were pawns of the fee system and convict leasing. They were economically as well as politically impotent" (Portfield 1989:124). Most Black residents in Birmingham were (and remain) economically insecure and the city was (and remains) racially polarized (Portfield 1989). In fact, Portfield (1989:124) described Black people living in the city as living "in economic bondage."

Tampa, Florida, is another city situated in the New South. Caitlin (1989) observed that many Black people moved to Tampa after the Civil War. The state and the city had a reputation for

strong resistance against racial inequality. The economic base for Tampa was built upon the rail lines, cigar industry, and the city's use as a port. While 800 Black people called Tampa home in 1865, the numbers grew to over 1,600 in 1890. By 1900, over 4,000 Black people lived in Tampa. "The Scrub" was the original Black community in Tampa. It was the center of Black life until urban renewal destroyed the community in the late 1950s and early 1960s.

Despite the fact that Tampa had a history of strong Black unions, including the International Longshoremen's Union Local 1402, the city was largely left out of the boom that led many to declare the arrival of a New South. Caitlin (1989) said Tampa was actually worse off than other cities in the south. Tampa did however, become home to many Afro-Cubans and other Black migrants by the 1980s. Housing was less expensive, less segregated, but also less safe in some areas. By and large, Black people in Tampa were marginalized in the political process and a "loss of community identity, caused mainly by the closing of traditionally Black elementary, and high schools, a phenomenon not experienced elsewhere" (Caitlin 1989:160).

In short, Bullard (1989:161) concluded that during the mid-1970s the South was viewed as the "land of opportunity for Black people." The area "attracted both the skilled and the unskilled, educated and uneducated, as well as low-income and middle-income Black people who sought to make their fortune" in a city in the South (Bullard 1989:161). The South became a leader in non-agricultural jobs. Nearly 200,000 of the Black people who moved to the South in the 1970s left between 1975 and 1980, and nearly 90,000 Black people left between 1980 and 1985. Yet, Black people remained a numerical majority in places like Birmingham, Atlanta, and New Orleans (Bullard 1989).

THE MYTH OF MECCAS

Despite claims of the dawning of a new day—an emergence of a New South—and the existence of one or more Black Meccas, persistent and chronic unemployment plagued most Black workers.

While homeownership is often used as an indicator of Black Meccas, Black middle-class status, and overall economic well-being, Bullard (1989) pointed out that "Black homes often have more deficiencies than their White counterparts" (Bullard 1989:165). Black homeowners rarely have access to the housing markets to which White homeowners have access, thus Black suburbanization in the New South represented "spillover from Black neighborhoods or an extension of the segregated housing pattern typical of the central city" (Bullard 1989:165). For far too many Black people, the New South was not noticeably different than the Old South. Bullard (1989:173) predicted this would be the case "until Black people…share more fully in the resources of the South."

More recently a body of literature has appeared also calling into question the existence of Black Meccas in America. Dixon (2004) focused on how "Maynard's millionaires" did well during his tenure in office as the mayor of Atlanta, but the economic benefits did not trickle down to poor and working-class Black people in the city. Dixon (2004:4) wrote that poor and working-class Black people were never intended to be part of the Black Mecca: "The Black Mecca hype was the product of this relentless business-class self-promotion." Dixon (2004:8) called for an end to any more discussions about "Black Meccas," declaring, "The time for pilgrimage is over. The next Black Meccas must be built in the many cities where we already stand, and for the people who already live there."

Wahl and Gunkel (2007) indirectly call into question whether Black Meccas exist, by challenging the almost exclusive focus on metropolitan statistical areas as the preferred unit of analysis in measuring racial progress. Black people in the South flocked not only to large cities since 1970, but also to micropolitan areas—places with populations between 10,000 and 50,000. Selma, Alabama; Tuskegee, Alabama; and Meridian, Mississippi are among the 560 micropolitan areas to experience increases in their Black populations over the past few decades.

Wahl and Gunkel (2007) measured Black-White residential segregation in their analysis, a measurement that is not historically used to identify Black Meccas. The authors found persistent

racial residential segregation between Black people and White people in their sample of 130 micropolitan areas using data from the 1990 and 2000 census, but the extent to which Black people lived apart from White people was more moderate in micropolitan areas than in metropolitan areas. The findings have methodological and theoretical implications. Racial residential segregation should be part of any discussion about Black Meccas and a New South, as the measurement points to the spatial, economic, and social incorporation of historically disadvantaged groups in America, particularly in the case of Black people.

By 2010, some places in the New South that saw Black population increases experienced Black population losses, as exemplified in metropolitan Atlanta. More and more Black people were leaving the city for Atlanta's suburbs. The exodus of nearly 30,000 residents from the central city outward occurred at the same time Atlanta was governed by a Black mayor and a predominately Black city council (Bullard, 2011). Bullard (2011) identified a number of factors contributing to the out-migration. The factors included the destruction of almost all of the city's public housing, ongoing class conflict within the Black population, and mismanagement of Empowerment Zone funds intended to foster economic development across the city with dollars from the federal government. Bullard (2011) also blamed under-resourced schools, predatory lending practices, and an increase in food deserts.

Some have chosen to ignore the challenges facing cities in the New South, including those designated as Black Meccas. Kotkin (2015) wrote about the best places for Black people to live and despite persistent racial differences on unemployment and income, the author chose to celebrate the fact that 13 of the top 15 areas were in the South. A few years later, Kotkin (2018) wrote with the same celebratory tone hailing Atlanta and Washington, D.C. as two of the best places for Black people based upon how Black people in these cities rank on homeownership rates, median income, and rates of self-employment relative to Black people in other cities, not with respect to how they rank

with similar White people. The articles also ignored within-group differences. Black ethnic groups, such as recent immigrants from certain countries in Africa, tend to have higher levels of education than both native-born Black and White people, which may account for some of the observed differences (Martin 2013). In short, the Black population is not monolithic but Korkin's (2015; 2018) metrics treat the Black population as such.

THE POLITICS OF RESPECTABILITY AND THE MAKING OF MYTHS

Most discussion about the experiences of Black people in the New South, and the debates about the reality or mythology surrounding Black Meccas, focus on comparing Black people in various towns and cities on indicators such as home ownership, business ownership, income, and changes in population. Few of the discussions surrounding these debates provide framework for understanding what Black Meccas and a New South really represent in the broader context of race relations in America. We contend Black Meccas and the New South can best be understood through three important frameworks: politics of respectability, the myth of meritocracy, and the model minority myth.

Evelyn Brooks Higginbotham wrote about the politics of respectability in her book, Righteous Discontent (1993). She described how the Black Baptist women's movement, from the 1880s through the early part of the twentieth century, worked to combat stereotypes about Black women. The Black Baptist women's movement not only focused on the Bible, the bath, and the broom, but it also focused on combating social justice issues (Higginbotham 1993). The Black women in the movement, who were undoubtedly inspired by the policy of submission and accommodation of Booker T. Washington and led by such notable Black women as Nannie Boroughs, believed that monitoring their attitudes and behaviors, as well as those of Black women from lower social class positions, would lead to greater acceptance and greater respectability from members of the dominant group (Higginbotham 1993). While the ideas of the women associated with this movement were in

many ways quite radical, they also helped to reinforce many of the stereotypes associated with Black people, and Black women in particular (Higginbotham 1993). Although Higginbotham (1993) considered the politics of respectability as a bridge discourse that could unite Black women from various social classes and even unite Black women with White women and Black men, the politics of respectability did expose long-held class differences within the Black population and an affinity for adhering to a set of White middle-class standards that in many regards did not even exist.

Unfortunately, the politics of respectability is not used to understand why racial and ethnic disparities persist despite changes in individual attitudes and behavior, while structural barriers persist. The idea that hard work will be rewarded is a widely held American myth and Black Meccas serve as signifiers of the myth. Black people living in so-called Black Meccas are portrayed as model minorities, the existence of which is a myth that does more harm than good by masking the ongoing misery and suffering of large segments of the Black population. Additionally, the politics of respectability is often misunderstood and misrepresented as respectability politics, or the idea that Black people must win the respect of the dominant racial group in order to enjoy full citizenship and the American Dream.

We are unaware of any studies directly linking Black Meccas to the politics of respectability, the myth of meritocracy, and the model minority myth. We view Black Meccas as the spatial sites of Black people who are said to adhere to at least part of the politics of respectability—the part that focuses on modifications in behaviors and attitudes. Conventional wisdom says Black people in so-called Black Meccas "have made it." They are hailed as model minorities and other Black people—should they wish to succeed—need only follow their lead. Black people, particularly those with membership in the fragile Black middle-class, are upheld as proof that America is indeed a meritocracy and that anyone can succeed if they only put forth their best efforts. The continued suffering of lower-class Black people and the ongoing

experiences with racial discrimination from private and institutional practices for the Black middle-class are minimized, marginalized, or rendered invisible. While Harlem as a Black Mecca was so hailed because of its emphasis on the latter part of the politics of respectability—the focus on social justice issues—and as a site of protest, in the post-Civil Rights era, Black Meccas in more recent times are places where residents are simply "too busy to hate." Residents don't riot or rally. Black people in modern day Black Meccas are rightly focused on owning homes, owning businesses, and furthering their education, and do not concern themselves with enduring racial disparities. The time has long passed for new ways of thinking about and new ways to measure wellbeing as it relates to Black people in America.

DATA AND METHODS

Data

Reconsidering how Black Meccas are defined and measured is important. We examine variations in housing values—one of the greatest contributors to racial and ethnic disparity in America—over time and within the Black population. The data for this analysis was procured from the Integrated Public Use Microdata Service (IPUMS) for 1990-2016 (Ruggles et al. 2017). More specifically, we analyzed data for the years 1990, 2000, 2005, 2010, and 2016 for the metropolitan areas defined in much of the literature as southern Black Meccas: Atlanta, Georgia; Birmingham, Alabama; Houston, Texas; New Orleans, Louisiana; Memphis, Tennessee; and Tampa, Florida. For the years 1990 and 2000, the data were drawn from the five-percent census samples; data for 2005, 2010, and 2016 were drawn from the American Community Survey (ACS) for the corresponding year. In addition to data from the decennial years of 1990, 2000, and 2010, 2005 data is added to reflect the housing values before the official start of the Great Recession of December 2007 (Jacobsen and Mather 2011). The 2016 data were used because it should reflect post-Great Recession economic recovery.

The unit of analysis is the household. Characteristics for the head of household are used as a proxy for household composition. Households are included in the sample if the head of household is the owner-occupant of the residence. There are 418,657 households across the five cross sections that fit this criterion. In the regression analysis, eight households were not included due to listwise deletion, producing samples of 115,159 households for 1990, 168,454 for 2000, 44,241 for 2005, 44,885 for 2010, and 45,910 for 2016. Household weights are used in this analysis. Although the proportion of Blacks in these cities are higher than their representation in the overall U.S. population (U.S. Census 2018), the weights were used to reflect the sampling frame. Models were estimated without use of the weighting; the resulting coefficients, standard errors, and significance values were very similar to those derived from the use of the weighted data.

Measures

Economic well-being. In this analysis, housing values measure relative economic wellbeing because disparities in value directly translate to disparities in wealth accumulation (Archer, Gatzlaff and Ling 1996; Denton 2001; Lipsitz 1995). Housing values are the reported value of owner-occupied housing units measured in contemporary U.S. dollars.

Race. The focal relationship of interest is comparison of relative economic well-being across race in Black Meccas of the New South. Race is measured using the reported race of the household head, with three categories of White, Black, and other race (White is the omitted category). Households containing mixed race couples were not differentiated (Fu 2008). Constructed as a dichotomous variable, Black ethnicity is used as measure of Black heterogeneity as foreign –born Black ethnic groups are viewed as culturally different from American born Blacks (Martin 2013).

Social class and respectability. The level of educational attainment has two functions in this analysis. First, it is used to measure middle-class. Class status may be measured in a number of other ways including by income and occupational prestige. However,

some scholars assert that educational attainment is the best measure of middle-class (Bowser 2007; Higginbotham 2009). Additionally, attaining a college degree is also a symbol of hard work within the myth of meritocracy framework, as education is seen as an equalizer across race (Coleman 1961; Jencks 1972). Heads of household with at least a bachelor's degree is the measure of middle-class and meritorious (hardworking) in a dichotomous variable.

Marital status is also used to measure respectability. Although, cohabitation and single female-headed households have lost some of its stigma, they violate these norms of respectability (Cherlin 2004). Marriage is also a symbol of the high moral status of a household.

Interactions. In order to fully test for the politics of respectability within Black Meccas, we construct interaction terms to examine the moderating effect that race plays in economic well-being in the New South. We disaggregate educational attainment by race (Black*education; other race *education) as well as marital status (Black*married; other race*married) to estimate the effects of behavior and attitude modification (politics of respectability and model minority/meritocracy myths) on housing values as an indicator of relative economic well-being.

Controls. Our control variables are age and gender. Age is a continuous variable measure by year. Regarding gender, the data used in this analysis from IPUMS constructed gender as dichotomous male/female variable. Even though gender does not necessarily correspond with biological sex, this analysis is limited to these categories that appear in the data (Female =1).

We also control for variation in housing costs based in place by adding controls for MSAs into the models to account for clustering of the data. Full multilevel models using different statistical techniques (HLM) are not appropriate here because the number of groups at that level is small (n=6). A summary of the descriptive statistics of the variables included in the analysis are provided in Tables 1a and 1b.

ANALYTICAL STRATEGY

Based on the literature of the myth of meritocracy, the politics of respectability, and the model minority myth the following hypotheses were developed:

> Hypothesis 1: Black households in southern Black Meccas have lower housing values than their White counterparts.
>
> Hypothesis 2: Black ethnicity matters in understanding variations in housing values for Black people in so-called Black Meccas.

First, we estimated the models using multivariate ordinary least squared regression (OLS) to test the hypotheses. Based on the research question and the level of measurement of the dependent variable (housing values), OLS is the appropriate quantitative methodological approach. We conduct a cross-sectional analysis for each year (1990, 2000, 2005, 2010, and 2016) to examine the trends over time. Three models per year are estimated. The first model for each cross-section approximates the baseline and no explanatory variables are added. Theoretical predictors and controls are added to the second model for each year, examining the effects of marital status and socioeconomic class on housing values while controlling for gender, age, and place. Lastly, model 3 includes the interaction terms. We then illustrate and discuss the racial inequality in housing values across cross-sectional samples using visualizations of the Black-to-White housing value gap in each Black Mecca.

RESULTS

OLS Regression Results

In Model 1, for each time period in the southern Black Mecca MSAs, displayed in Table 2, being a Black household predicts lower average housing values. The disparities between Black peo-

Table 1a. Means (Standard Deviation) for Variables Across Race in Black Meccas of the New South, 1990-2016

	1990		2000	
	Mean	SD	Mean	SD
Household-level demographic characteristics				
	Whites			
Head has a bachelor's degree or better (1 = yes)	0.300	0.46	0.326	0.47
Head's marital status (1 = married)	0.697	0.46	0.663	0.47
Female head (1 = yes)	0.254	0.44	0.277	0.45
Age of head	51.938	16.34	52.339	16.00
Housing value (U.S. dollars)	93165.09	71560.38	139853.20	127418.60
Proportion of sample	0.828	95353.00	0.780	131333.00
	Blacks			
Head has a bachelor's degree or better (1 = yes)	0.167	0.37	0.211	0.41
Head's marital status (1 = married)	0.536	0.50	0.488	0.50
Black ethnicity (1=yes)	0.026	0.16	0.064	0.24
Female head (1 = yes)	0.406	0.49	0.456	0.50
Age of head	51.427	15.56	50.491	15.16
Housing value (U.S. dollars)	55792.91	36525.87	88515.20	74129.11
Proportion of sample	0.138	15867.00	0.161	27172.00
	Other Race			
Head has a bachelor's degree or better (1 = yes)	0.252	0.43	0.274	0.45
Head's marital status (1 = married)	0.805	0.40	0.748	0.43
Female head (1 = yes)	0.175	0.38	0.224	0.42
Age of head	43.992	12.36	44.719	12.80
Housing value (U.S. dollars)	68087.34	58888.94	110111.00	107370.40
Proportion of sample	0.034	3941.00	0.059	9955.00

2005		2010		2016	
Mean	SD	Mean	SD	Mean	SD
0.381	0.49	0.400	0.49	0.431	0.50
0.652	0.48	0.638	0.48	0.634	0.48
0.391	0.49	0.407	0.49	0.463	0.50
53.421	15.55	55.145	15.59	57.286	15.60
211079.00	171126.50	220257.30	238435.70	267928.70	322692.80
0.778	34431.00	0.759	34080.00	0.762	34983.00
0.288	0.45	0.308	0.46	0.348	0.48
0.472	0.50	0.464	0.50	0.448	0.50
0.091	0.29	0.097	0.30	0.107	0.31
0.547	0.50	0.572	0.49	0.598	0.49
51.692	14.76	53.221	14.60	57.670	14.25
137856.30	105297.10	144802.40	143058.70	160029.70	177013.90
0.150	6658.00	0.168	7556.00	0.160	7339.00
0.359	0.48	0.422	0.49	0.485	0.50
0.723	0.45	0.729	0.44	0.729	0.44
0.358	0.48	0.363	0.48	0.391	0.49
46.194	13.25	47.559	12.96	50.645	14.05
170497.30	135678.80	196819.90	188221.60	262507.00	292142.40
0.071	3152.00	0.072	3249.00	0.078	3588.00

Table 1b. Descriptive Statistics for Households in Black Meccas of the New South by Race, 1990-2016 (continued)

	1990		2000		2005		2010		2016	
	Mean	SD	Mean	SD	Mean	SD	Mean	SD	Mean	SD
Sample Level Characteristics										
Head has bachelor's degree or better (1 = yes)	0.280	0.45	0.304	0.46	0.366	0.48	0.386	0.49	0.422	0.49
Head's marital status (1 = married)	0.679	0.47	0.640	0.48	0.630	0.48	0.615	0.49	0.611	0.49
Female head (1 = yes)	0.273	0.45	0.302	0.46	0.412	0.49	0.432	0.50	0.479	0.50
Age of head	51.596	16.18	51.591	15.80	52.646	15.39	54.272	15.38	56.828	15.38
Housing value (U.S. dollars)	87157.71	68705.18	129815.00	120836.50	197168.10	162791.00	205858.60	223528.60	250256.60	304259.70
Numbers of household-year	115161		168460		44241		44885		45910	

Source: U.S. Census 1990-2016 Note: Household weights are applied. Sample size is before listwise deletion.

ple and White people continue to grow across years as reflected by the coefficients for Black. For example, the 1990 average housing value of Black households was approximately $36,816 less than average White housing values. However, in each subsequent year in the analysis, the average Black housing value are estimated to be continue to be worth less, and increasingly so. In 2016, Black housing values are predicted at roughly $92,000 less, on average, than White homes in Black Meccas of the New South. Conversely, the gap between the average housing values between White and the other race group increased from 1990 to 2000 to 2005, decreased in 2010, and became no longer significant in 2016. Based on Model 1, we have baseline evidence to support Hypothesis 1 at each time point.

Model 2 estimates housing values after including household characteristics as predictors and controls for variation between Black Meccas. These cross-sectional models also provide strong evidence to support Hypothesis 1. Even after controlling for education, marital status, sex, age, and MSA mean housing value variation, the relationship between race and housing values is still negative and statistically significant across time periods. The models estimate that the mean housing values for Black households, holding all other variable constant, are roughly $29,000 less than the White comparison group in 1990, $41,000 less in 2000, $50,000 less in 2005, $55,000 less in 2010, and at $73,000 in 2016.

We also notice that adding these measures increases the adjusted R2 for each model, showing that this model explains more of the variation in mean housing values than Model 1 (1990: $\Delta R2 = .185$; 2000: $\Delta R2 = .185$; 2005: $\Delta R2 = .17$; 2010: $\Delta R2 = .092$; 2016: $\Delta R2 = .093$). Additionally, the difference between the Bayesian Information Criterion (BIC) statistics of Model 1 and 2 for each time period provides very strong support that the Model 2 for each time period fits the data better than Model 1 (Williams 2017). Of course, both educational attainment and marital status have positive statistically significant relationships with housing values in Black Meccas across time periods in Model 2, also dis-

played in Table 2. However, we show in Model 3 that the returns for these household characteristics are not the same across race.

Turning our attention to the cross-sectional estimates of Model 3, displayed in Table 2a, we continue to find strong evidence to support Hypothesis 1. The mean housing values for Black households continue to be worth less than comparable White households after controlling for all other variables including the interactions between race and social class, as well as race and marital status. Clearly, the interaction terms reflect the difference in slope between middle-class Black households and White middle-class households as reflected in the most recent data displayed in Figure 1 and in its corresponding coefficient (2016: b(Black*education) = -$109,365 p<0.001).

The same negative and statistically significant relationship is reflected in the relationship between housing values and the interaction of race and marital status across time periods in southern Black Meccas. There is variation between the slopes of marital status between Black and White households as reflected in the coefficients for the interaction terms. For example, in the most recent data, the benefit of marriage on housing values is roughly $33,000 less than for White households (b = -32867.62 p < 0.001).

For the sake of comparison, we estimate the following housing values based on the 2016 regression equation.

$$\hat{Y}_{\text{Housing Value}} = \$120968.17 - \$16{,}891.25_{\text{Black HH}} + \$9{,}980.90_{\text{Other Race HH}} + \$16{,}9436.56_{\text{CollegeDeg}} + \$79{,}325.17_{\text{Married}} - \$3{,}135.99_{\text{Female}} + \$570.67_{\text{Age}} - \$109{,}364.92_{\text{Black*CollegeDeg}} - \$14{,}440.08_{\text{OtherRace*CollegeDeg}} - \$32{,}867.62_{\text{Black*Married}} - \$35{,}802.21_{\text{OtherRace*Married}} - \$49{,}458.84_{\text{Birmingham}} - 6{,}548.41_{\text{Houston}} - \$53{,}230.55_{\text{Memphis}} - \$1{,}668.41_{\text{New Orleans}} - \$22{,}491.28_{\text{Tampa}}$$

A hypothetical White 40-year-old married man with at least a bachelor's degree as the head of household, holding all MSA level predictors at 0 (locating the household in Atlanta) is predicted to have a housing value of approximately $393,000 on average. In comparison, a household with the same characteristics described

Table 2. Cross-sectional OLS Regression of Housing Values in Black Meccas of the New South, 1990–2016

	1990	2000	2005	2010	2016
Model 1: Baseline					
Household characteristics					
Race (White)					
Black	-36816.26[c] (396.80)	-51403.60[c] (600.41)	-68098.73[c] (1958.86)	-72130.28[c] (2205.47)	-91774.90[c] (2850.81)
Other race	-24179.11[c] (997.69)	-31029.48[c] (1170.85)	-38434.41[c] (3090.34)	-25619.90[c] (3589.37)	-3907.44 (5848.92)
Constant	92388.20[c] (249.39)	141821.11[c] (366.77)	206579.97[c] (1071.92)	217333.55[c] (1440.54)	258861.50[c] (1840.54)
Adjusted R^2	0.039	0.027	0.028	0.017	0.015
BIC	2886170.56	4414316.03	1184029.65	1229524.60	1281807.81
Model 2: Including education, marital status, age of head household and controlling for MSAs					
Household characteristics					
Race (White)					
Black	-28976.02[c] (389.86)	-41339.26[c] (586.33)	-49377.86[c] (1841.59)	-54898.27[c] (2207.96)	-73180.98[c] (2791.57)
Other race	-18465.08[c] (891.07)	-22744.38[c] (1105.80)	-27273.17[c] (2837.14)	-23669.52[c] (3422.59)	-21007.50[c] (5811.37)
College degree	51360.79[c] (523.26)	81367.73[c] (715.08)	104927.74[c] (1901.08)	114942.63[c] (2543.51)	149548.54[c] (3208.53)
Married	21921.40[c] (521.89)	31136.54[c] (684.33)	47866.82[c] (1730.00)	52321.79[c] (2350.29)	70804.67[c] (2855.28)
Female head	126.35 (553.74)	-4491.78[c] (710.82)	-7376.42[c] (1766.39)	-7435.44[b] (2328.43)	-4849.17 (2977.98)
Age	118.58[c] (11.53)	204.83[c] (16.59)	204.08[c] (49.48)	488.06[c] (62.08)	585.35[c] (85.42)

Table 2. Cross-sectional OLS Regression of Housing Values in Black Meccas for New South, 1990-2016 (continued)

	1990	2000	2005	2010	2016
Level 2 variation					
Southern Black Meccas (MSAs) (Atlanta)					
Birmingham	-31052.47[c] (797.74)	-38301.19[c] (1184.63)	-65614.67[c] (3531.46)	-28223.72[c] (4082.18)	-49393.15[c] (4586.35)
Houston	-31940.98[c] (591.70)	-49775.13[c] (805.65)	-73890.91[c] (2180.50)	-40303.78[c] (2779.19)	-7360.90 (3868.45)
Memphis	-20689.06[c] (813.55)	-34191.15[c] (1067.96)	-61751.54[c] (2789.56)	-39531.24[c] (3795.37)	-51493.74[c] (4823.66)
New Orleans	-19511.43[c] (758.78)	-33048.28[c] (1042.23)	-48163.41[c] (2959.71)	-11532.46[c] (3467.76)	-173.90 (4790.32)
Tampa	-29719.10[c] (603.14)	-53238.11[c] (834.10)	-21544.16[c] (2574.19)	-27537.54[c] (3771.09)	-24086.97[c] (428.91)
Constant	77852.38[c] (859.13)	117732.95[c] (1175.38)	167252.37[c] (3415.76)	139488.32[c] (4521.13)	135081.34[c] (6310.49)
Adjusted R^2	0.224	0.189	0.198	0.109	0.108
BIC	2861613.13	4383696.03	1175595.72	1225195.07	1277335.18
Model 3: Including interactions					
Household characteristics					
Race (White)					
Black	-19040.86[c] (547.44)	-23307.47[c] (810.48)	-22104.54[c] (2578.73)	-24213.87[c] (3185.20)	-16891.25[c] (3670.21)
Other race	-12900.31[c] (1555.92)	-10096.01[c] (1889.20)	-5380.14 (4771.58)	-7724.73 (6134.12)	9980.90 (11114.39)
Black ethnicity	8528.70[c] (2288.79)	8976.25[c] (1719.26)	16189.46[a] (6686.63)	-3090.86 (4422.58)	20559.26[b] (7541.44)
College degree	54015.20[c] (581.09)	88128.47[c] (827.03)	114899.40[c] (2242.22)	128450.93[c] (3164.55)	169436.56[c] (3906.72)
Married	23630.00[c] (573.79)	34226.97[c] (785.32)	53581.80[c] (2005.79)	55407.64[c] (2917.11)	79325.17[c] (3337.04)
Female	321.54 (552.63)	-4046.47[c] (708.70)	-6537.46[c] (1759.58)	-6152.43[b] (2320.65)	-3135.99 (2969.01)
Age	115.00[c] (11.51)	205.67[c] (16.57)	208.43[c] (49.41)	478.86[c] (62.15)	570.67[c] (84.61)

Table 2. Cross-sectional OLS Regression of Housing Values in Black Meccas for New South, 1990-2016 (continued)

	1990	2000	2005	2010	2016
Interactions					
Black* college degree	-26510.71[c] (1170.98)	-48709.09[c] (1500.80)	-58520.92[c] (4304.57)	-75607.83[c] (4853.44)	-109364.92[c] (6136.12)
Other race* college degree	1298.04 (2684.41)	-6983.88* (2991.90)	-14712.41[a] (6794.73)	-10686.05 (7467.37)	-14440.08 (12118.37)
Black* married	-9244.48[c] (706.78)	-12957.16[c] (1086.04)	-22136.73[c] (3495.94)	-12163.59[b] (4299.63)	-32867.62[c] (5338.14)
Other race* married	-7433.01[c] (1826.13)	-14116.53[c] (2209.05)	-24314.82[c] (6080.24)	-16963.69[a] (7150.12)	-35802.21[a] (14549.71)
Level 2 Variation					
Southern Black Meccas (MSAs) (Atlanta)					
Birmingham	-31275.41[c] (794.47)	-38797.12[c] (1180.40)	-66339.38[c] (3540.85)	-29319.72[c] (4079.70)	-49458.84[c] (4606.60)
Houston	-32029.19[c] (590.66)	-50042.88[c] (803.13)	-73705.53[c] (2169.32)	-40654.37[c] (2769.57)	-6548.41 (3859.11)
Memphis	-21128.77[c] (812.08)	-35326.32[c] (1065.92)	-63213.22[c] (2769.19)	-42257.16[c] (3826.41)	-53230.55[c] (4786.40)
New Orleans	-19496.15[c] (754.56)	-33601.95[c] (1037.74)	-48166.21[c] (2945.23)	-13324.43[c] (3473.43)	-1668.41 (4754.32)
Tampa	-29438.53[c] (602.50)	-52904.25[c] (832.99)	-20551.31[c] (2558.40)	-27330.97[c] (3765.07)	-22491.28[c] (4257.14)
Constant	75983.67[c] (874.12)	113371.28[c] (1209.85)	159173.72[c] (3455.40)	132658.54[c] (4694.92)	120968.17[c] (6438.65)
Adjusted R^2	0.228	0.194	0.203	0.113	0.114
BIC	2861145.17	4382797.82	1175369.81	1225039.08	1277080.88
Observations	115159	168454	44241	44885	45910

Note. Standard errors in parentheses. AIC = Akaike information criterion of goodness of fit. Reference category for dummy variables in parentheses. Household weights are applied.

[a] $p < 0.05$, [b] $p < 0.01$, [c] $p < 0.001$

above, except changing the race of the household to Black is estimated to have a mean housing value of about $233,000. This is a difference of about 68 percent.

Model 3 also tested Hypothesis 2 by adding Black ethnicity as a predictor. Also shown in Table 2, we find that the relationship between households of Black ethnic groups in Black Meccas and housing values are positive and statistically significant in each cross-section except in 2010, when there was no significant or substantive difference between this group and non-Black ethnic groups. In 1990 and 2000, the difference was not substantive, though statistically significant. However, in 2005 and 2016, the housing values of Black ethnic households are estimated to be worth substantially more than non-Black ethnic house-

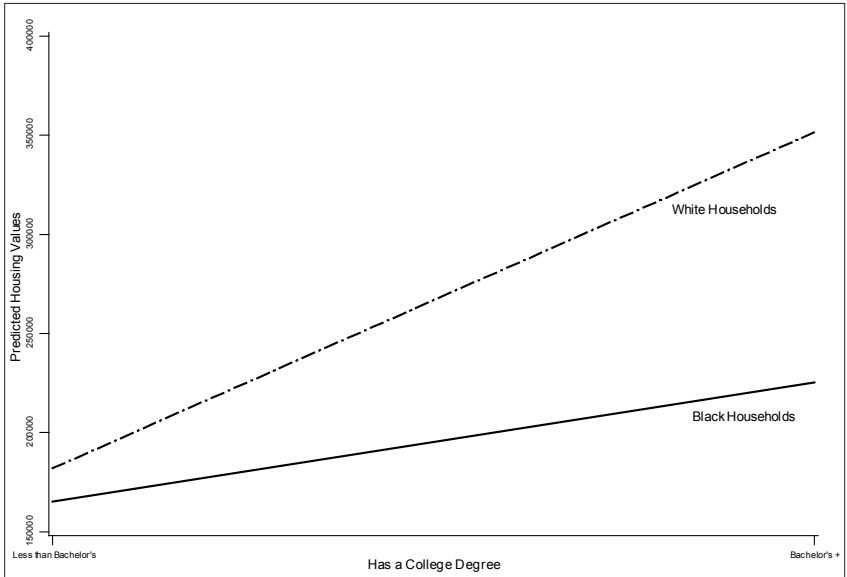

Figure 1. Effect of Education on Housing Values in Black Meccas by Race, 2016.

holds on average, holding all other predictors in the model constant. In 2005, the estimated housing value for Black ethnic households in Black Meccas are about $16,000 ($p < 0.001$) more on average. Similarly, in

2016, the average housing value for Black ethnic households is estimated to have an average housing value that is worth roughly $21,000 more than similarly situated households of non-Black ethnic heritage. Thus, in four out of five time periods, Model 3 provides strong evidence to support hypothesis 2.

Lastly, as reflected in the BIC statistics across time periods, we have very strong support that Model 3 fits our data better than Model 2. However, the difference in the adjusted R2 for each cross-section shows that the full model explained less than 1 percent more of the variation in mean housing values in southern Black Meccas (1990: $\Delta R^2 = .004$; 2000: $\Delta R^2 = .005$; 2005: $\Delta R^2 = .005$; 2010: $\Delta R^2 = .004$; 2016: $\Delta R^2 = .006$).

Ratios of Black-to-White Housing Values

Figures 2-7 reflect the median housing values in 1990, 2000, 2005, 2010, and 2016 for Black and White married middle-class households for each of the six Black Meccas of the New South based on the regression models. Figure 2 represents the predicted median housing values for Atlanta, Georgia for each time period. In this graph, we notice that the gap between the Black and White married middle-class estimated housing values is wider in 2010 than it was in 2005 and the gap increases again in 2016. The Black-to-White median housing value ratio in 2005 was the smallest, with Black married middle-class housing value worth 0.68 of the value of their White counterparts. However, in 2016, the racial gap in Atlanta is wider, with the median value of Black married middle-class housing values worth 0.60 of White home values ($200,000 to $330,000 respectively).

The estimates of the predicted median housing values in Birmingham, Alabama, for married middle-class couples are shown in Figure 3. After a cursory glance comparing the six figures, we notice that the largest housing value gap across these Black Meccas exists in Birmingham. We can see that the Black-to-White housing value ratio does not change substantially, even though the 2016 ratio of 0.566 represents the predicted racial gap across

time points and MSAs. This finding undermines the belief that the Black middle class is approaching equality with their White counterparts in these places.

In Figure 4, we see a substantial decrease in the Black-to-White housing value ratio in Houston, Texas from 2000 to 2005 (0.69 to 0.87). The predicted median housing value for White married middle-class households in 2005 is estimated at $187,000, while similarly situated Black households' predicted median housing value is $162,500—a difference of about $24,000. However, like in Atlanta and Birmingham, the racial gap in predicted median housing values for married middle-class households increases in 2016; the Black-to-White ratio increased to 0.67. This means that, for every dollar of White married middle-class median housing value, the Black housing value is 67 cents.

Memphis, Tennessee's Black-to-White housing value ratios show a unique trend among the southern Black Meccas analyzed here, as depicted in Figure 5. The ratios start to move toward parity, decreasing from 0.64 in 1990 to 0.69 in 2000. However, the difference in the estimated Black and White housing values took a noteworthy negative turn in 2005. The ratio between Black and White home values became 0.61, meaning that the predicted median married middle-class housing value for a Black household is worth 61 cents compared to a comparable White household's housing value dollar.

The New Orleans, Louisiana, graph reflects the opposite pattern from that of Memphis (Figure 6). The predicted median housing value for married middle-class households racial gap began with a difference of $35,000 in 1990. Though substantial, this Black to White housing value ratio is the second smallest of all the Black Meccas in this analysis for 1990 at 0.69. However, in 2000, there was a large increase in the racial gap of housing values, with the Black married middle-class home worth 59 cents to the housing value dollar of their White counterparts. The impact of Hurricane Katrina and subsequent gentrification (Johnson 2015; Parekh 2015; Perine, Swarner and Pinkney 2017) is reflected in the trend from 2005 (before the catastrophe) to 2016.

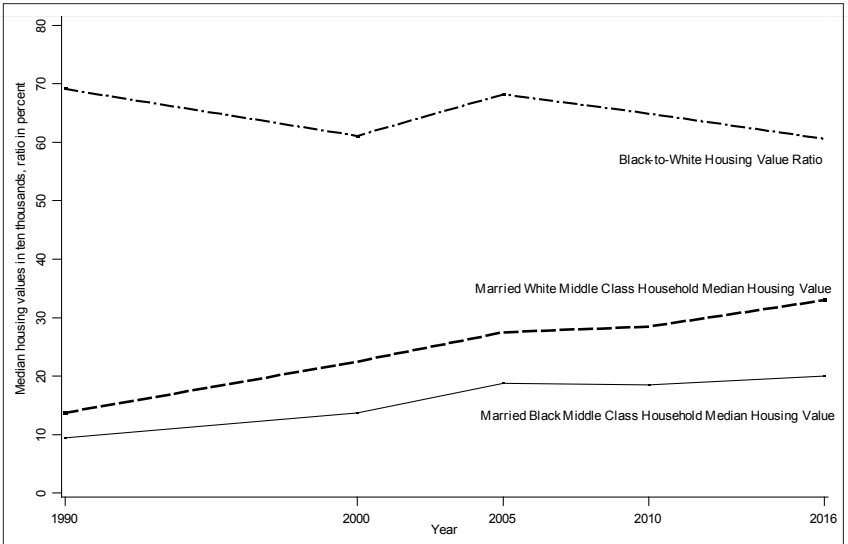

Figure 2. Black to White Married Middle Class Median Housing Value Ratio and Median Housing Values by Race in Atlanta, Georgia MSA, 1990-2016.

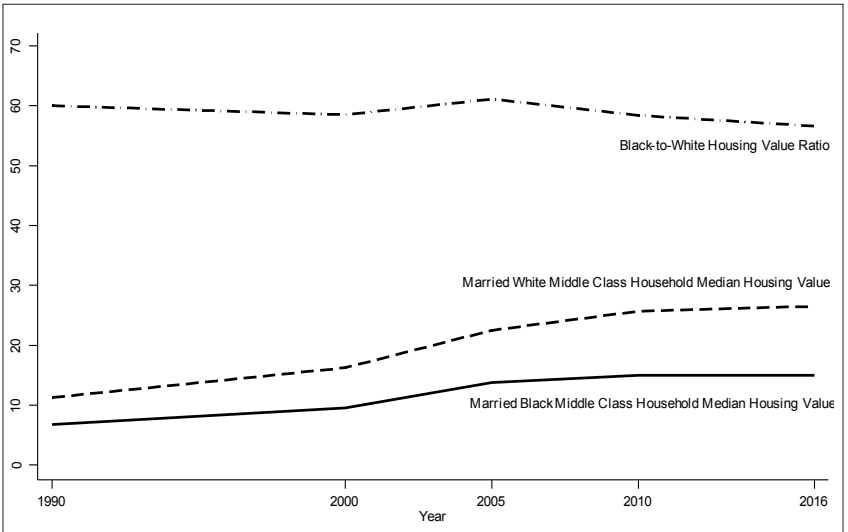

Figure 3. Black to White Married Middle Class Median Housing Value Ratio and Median Housing Values by Race in Birmingham, Alabama MSA, 1990-2016.

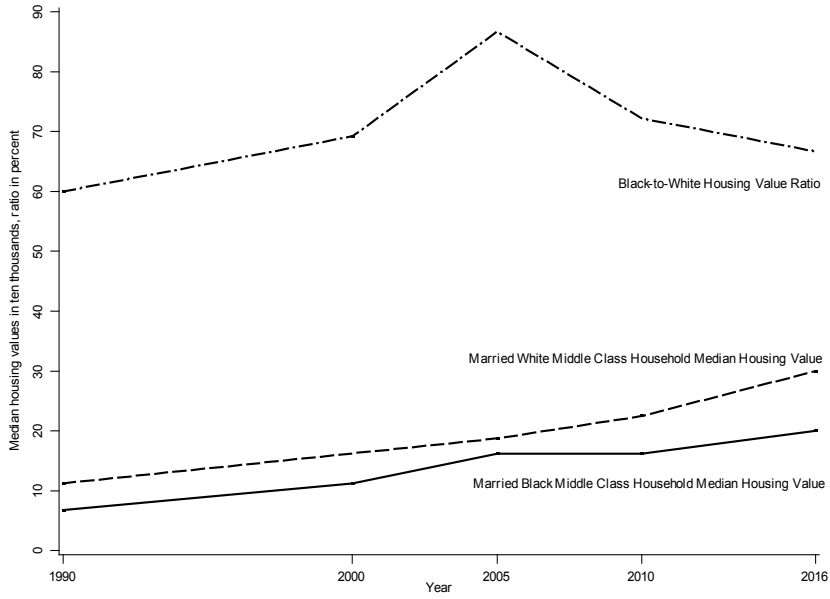

Figure 4. Black to White Married Middle Class Median Housing Value Ratio and Median Housing Values by Race in Houston, Texas MSA, 1990 - 2016

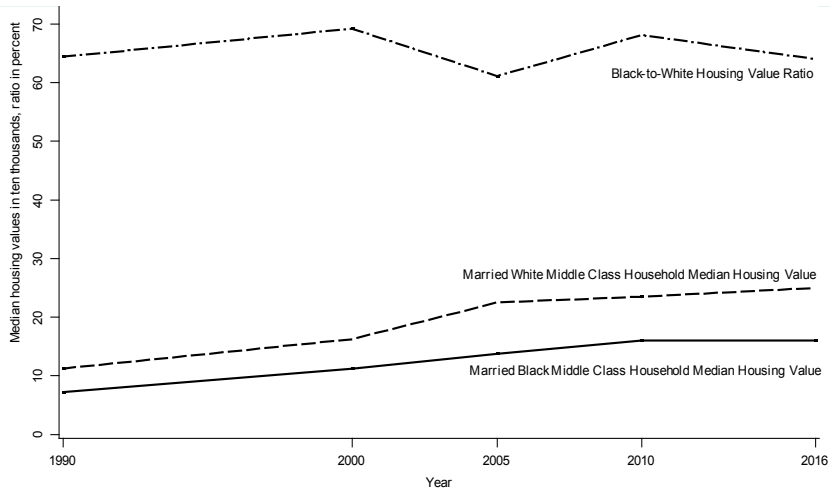

Figure 5. Black to White Married Middle Class Median Housing Value Ratio and Median Housing Values by Race in Memphis, Tennessee MSA, 1990 - 2016

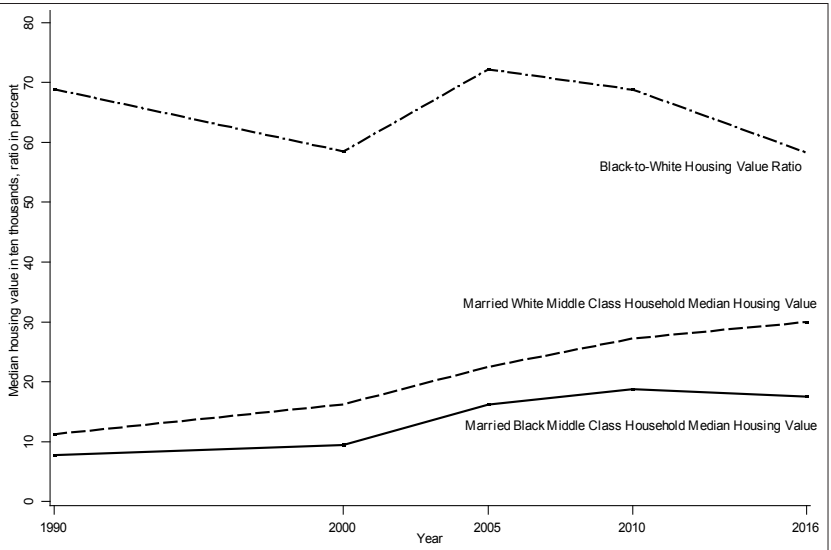

Figure 6. Black to White Married Middle Class Median Housing Value Ratio and Median Housing Values by Race in New Orleans, Louisiana MSA, 1990-2016.

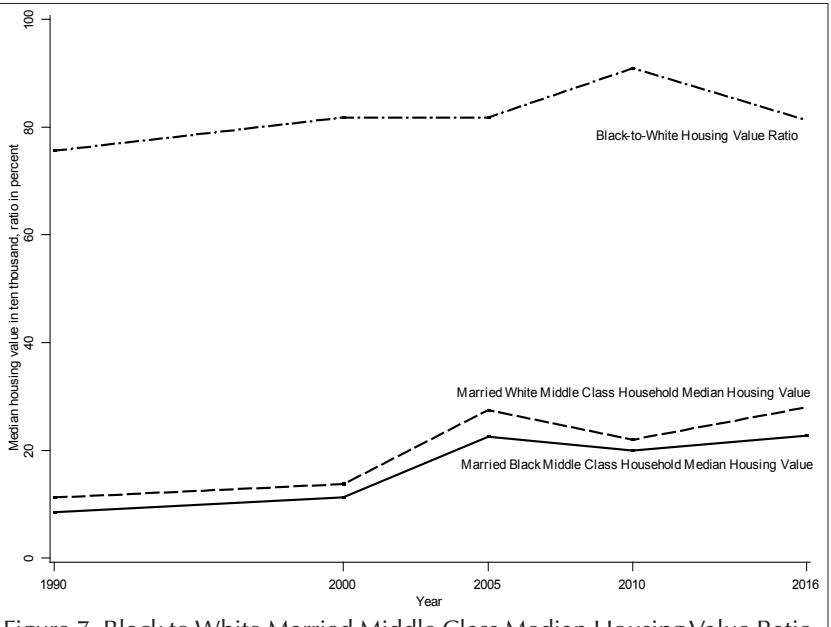

Figure 7. Black to White Married Middle Class Median Housing Value Ratio and Median Housing Values by Race in Tampa, Florida MSA, 1990-2016.

Though total equity has not been achieved and a housing value gap still exists, the estimated housing values for Black and White married middle-class predicted households are the most similar in Tampa, Florida. In fact, in 2010, the Black married middle-class household predicted median housing value was worth roughly 91 cents for every housing value dollar of similarly situated White households. At each cross section, the Black-to-White median housing value ratio after 1990 does not descend below 0.81. Of all the cities in this analysis, Tampa's housing values are closest to being representative of Black Meccas of the New South's promise of relative economic well-being. However, this smallest ratio of 2010 still equates to an estimated $20,000 material difference in potential asset accumulation, which we argue is substantial. In light of these material differences between Black and White homeowners and the impact this inequality has on asset accumulation, it is important to investigate the relationship between race and housing values in Black Meccas of the New South as indicators of relative economic well-being more closely using more advanced statistical analyses.

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

The goal of this study was to examine the relationship between race, place, and class through the lens of the politics of respectability and the myths of meritocracy and model minorities. We examined the effect of race in economic well-being by examining housing values. We expected that there would be variation in housing values across race that could not be explained by factors that are promoted as a direct path from poverty to affluence, like getting a college education and building a nuclear family through marriage. We find that race continues to be a differentiating factor in the values of homes, regardless of Blacks as a group adhering to the attitudes and behaviors of the politics of respectability (marriage) and the myths of meritocracy and the model minority (educational attainment). We also find that Black people within southern Black Meccas do not form a homogeneous group and

there is variation in the economic outcomes of the overall Black population based in Black ethnicities.

The study findings also reflect the material impact that differences in housing values have on Black households. As conversations about baby bonds and reparations are discussed as policies to lessen the economic divide between Black and White groups in the future, understanding how wealth inequality presents itself in the present is also important. Similarly situated Black families do not benefit from home ownership in the same way that White families. If this aspect of wealth inequality is not addressed, the wealth divide will continue even if money is pumped into the Black community. The ratios of housing values by race painted a clear picture of the trends that are likely to remain until policymakers address the housing industry.

The image of America as the land of opportunity where anyone can succeed based upon his or her willingness to work hard is more like a mirage than a reality, or even a dream that one might aspire to, especially if you are a person of color. The experiences of Black people in America provide some of the most historical and enduring evidence of the myth of the American dream, the myth of meritocracy, and the model minority myth. No matter how hard Black people have tried to modify their behavior or to proclaim a moral authority upon which to engage in unconventional forms of political activities (e.g., boycotts, other forms of protests), Black people continue to lag behind White people on a host of social and demographic variables, particularly when assets such as housing values are considered. Black people are a diverse group; therefore, it is not surprising that Black ethnicity matters or that there is variation within the Black population on housing values. If the Black middle class continues to lag behind comparable Whites, one can only imagine what the situation is like for Black people with relatively lower levels of socioeconomic status and lower (or no) levels of asset ownership within and across Black ethnic groups. Our research findings support the aforementioned conclusions and further point to the need for revisiting how scholars think about Black Meccas.

Black Meccas, as they have been defined and understood in the literature to date, do not adequately reflect the demographic profiles, or the experiences, of the diversity that is the Black population. Black Meccas serve to perpetuate the myth that there is a segment of the Black population that has "made it." Black Meccas also imply that residential segregation is, at least in part, the result of class differences and/or personal preferences, when residential segregation is best understood as the legacy of discriminatory public policies and individual practices that have relegated Black people, as a whole, to certain geographical areas, sometimes concentrating people with relatively low income levels, as in the case of distressed communities, and sometimes concentrating people with relatively moderate income levels in so-called Black Meccas. In reality, when one considers a host of factors, especially housing values, Blacks in the middle class, including those living in so-called Black Meccas, are not any closer to reaching parity with White people in contemporary times than they were decades ago.

Abandoning or reimagining Black Meccas has theoretical, methodological, and public policy implications. The politics of respectability, which focuses on changes at the individual level and dismantling structural issues, is a powerful but underutilized framework for understanding persistent racial inequality. Additionally, scholars should consider broader measures of determining the overall economic well-being of Black people that go beyond measures of income to also include indicators of wealth and other quality of life factors. Scholars should also look at differences within the Black population, including Black ethnicity. Moreover, public policies must focus not merely on addressing changes on the individual level (e.g., increasing educational levels, income levels, and occupational prestige), but more importantly on addressing structural issues (e.g., residential segregation, predatory lending, tax policies that benefit affluent homeowners, etc.). The idea that there are places in the United States where Black people find a sanctuary from the systemic racism that produces geographical spaces is simply not true, and the concept of Black Meccas and related literature perpetuates that myth.

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