



**KNOTS OF SOCIO-SPATIAL  
SEGREGATION  
THROUGH MULTIDIMENSIONAL  
IDENTITIES AND  
INTERSECTIONAL SOLUTIONS:  
THE CASE OF CHICAGO AND  
BEYOND**

*Photo by James Andrews*

Liridona Velju Ashiku, Sophia Duque, Anna Huber, Elani Williams, Carter Alvarado, Jonathan Nerenberg, Malik S. Henfield, and Heather Price.



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## Acknowledgements

The Institute for Racial Justice thanks the German Marshall Fund and its underwriter, the MacArthur Foundation, for their support of this research related to the Torino-Chicago Lab project.

The analysis presented in this document was conducted by the Institute for Racial Justice. The interpretations and statements are the authors' interpretations. The contents do not necessarily represent the views nor the official positions of the German Marshall Fund or the MacArthur Foundation. The authors take sole responsibility for the contents of and any errors in this document.

The Institute for Racial Justice team is indebted to the dozens of community members who partnered with us and shared their experiences, perceptions, and opinions with us during the Summer of 2022. Our aim is to represent their collective views here in efforts to directly address socio-spatial segregation, un-design it, and make our daily lives equitable and prosperous.

### Suggested citation:

Veliu Ashiku, L., Duque, S., Huber, A., Williams, E., Alvarado, C., Nerenberg, J., Henfield, M. S., Price, H. (2023). *Knots of Socio-spatial Segregation through Multidimensional Identities and Intersectional Solutions: The Case of Chicago*. Chicago: Institute for Racial Justice: Loyola University Chicago.

## Table of Contents

<b>Executive Summary .....</b>	<b>6</b>
<b>Extended Abstract .....</b>	<b>8</b>
<b>Acronyms and Abbreviations .....</b>	<b>11</b>
<b>Introduction .....</b>	<b>12</b>
<b>Understanding Race and Segregation: An Intersectional Theoretical Framework .....</b>	<b>13</b>
<b>Methodology: Intersectional Focus Groups and Interviews .....</b>	<b>14</b>
<b>Thematic Analysis: Multidimensional identities and intersectional solutions .....</b>	<b>16</b>
<b>From multidimensional identities to intersectional challenges .....</b>	<b>17</b>
Childcare, employment, and healthcare .....	18
Hate speech, media, and politics.....	20
Housing, transit infrastructure, and environment .....	24
Education, crime, violence, and the justice system .....	28
<b>From partial answers to intersectional solutions .....</b>	<b>32</b>
Childcare, employment, and healthcare .....	33
Hate speech, media, and politics.....	37
Housing, transit infrastructure, and environment .....	40
Education, crime, violence, and the justice system .....	48
<b>Conclusions .....</b>	<b>50</b>
<b>Annex 1: Focus Group Questions .....</b>	<b>52</b>
<b>Annex 2: Interview Questions.....</b>	<b>53</b>
<b>Annex 3: Positionality Statements.....</b>	<b>54</b>
Liridona Veliu Ashiku .....	54
Anna Huber .....	55
Carter Alvarado.....	55
Elani Williams.....	55
Jonathan Nerenberg .....	56
Sophia Duque.....	56
Heather Price .....	57
<b>Bibliography .....</b>	<b>58</b>

## **List of Figures**

<b>Figure 1:</b> Map of Race in Chicago, generated from 2020 Census. ....	6
<b>Figure 2:</b> Wheel of Social-Spatial Segregation: Dimensions of Identity and Sections of Segregation .....	17
<b>Figure 3:</b> Descriptors related to socio-economic status. ....	24

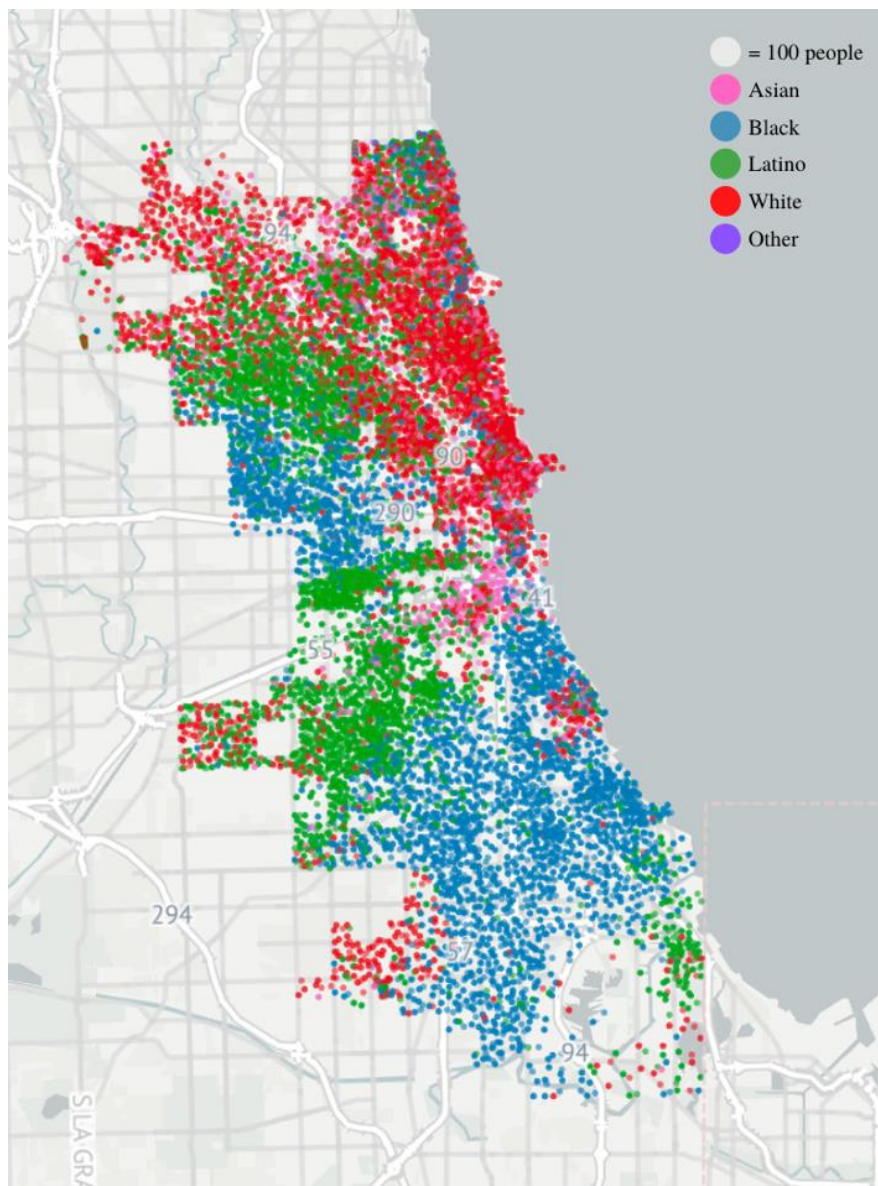
## **List of Tables**

<b>Table 1:</b> Knotted Challenges and Intersectional Identities .....	7
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## Executive Summary

Racial and ethnic segregation in Chicago is as old as the city itself.<sup>1</sup> Every one of the dozens of people interviewed in our study acknowledged the racial and ethnic segregation in Chicago. This white paper explains how residents experience this segregation, as shown in Figure 1, in their daily lives. These experiences differ by race, but they also are distinct by other identities such as whether a resident is a male, a mom, a Muslim, or employed.

*Figure 1: Map of Race in Chicago, generated from 2020 Census.*



*Note: Created by Maptiler and OpenStreetMap Contributors.*

The effects of socio-spatial segregation are complex, yet our solutions are often overly simple. As this study will show, it is often a function of top-down decision making that induces a unidimensional solution. The community partners we talk to clearly articulate the tight knots

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<sup>1</sup> This sentence itself elicits the impact of socio-spatial segregation since it implies that the city had a starting point only at the time of American incorporation in 1837. This assumption ignores the reality that the area where the City of Chicago now sits was prosperous Algonquian land before the American settlers invaded and stole it.

of challenges to daily living that result from socio-spatial segregation. Their solutions explain how to loosen these knots. Like a knot, simply loosening one string will do little to untangle it. Instead, all of the strings in the knots need to be tugged-at together in order to loosen its grip. The ideas that you will read in this report describe approaches and practices that could be used together to loosen these knots.

Before we discuss how to loosen these knots of challenges that come from daily living in a socially segregated city like Chicago, interviewees first explain which of these knots are most prominent in their lives. While the socio-spatial segregation in Chicago can be traced back to oppressive racial and economic histories, the experiences of these knots does not solely rest on race or economics. People experience these knots differently depending on their prominent identities, affiliations, and statuses *in addition to* the foundation of race and economics. That is, race and economics intersect with gender and religious identities as well as parental, immigrant, language, and employment statuses for individuals. These intersectional identities for an individual interact with these knots of socio-spatial challenges differently. For example, a Black employed mother contends with the challenges of childcare, education, transportation, and community violence more than a White elderly immigrant who speaks little English. Since Chicago is so segregated by race and economics, groups of individuals who share intersectional identities cluster in some areas of the city more so than in other parts. The four knots that arose as most prominent among our participants are:

*Table 1: Knotted Challenges and Intersectional Identities*

<b>Knotted challenge of: Impacts people with intersectional identities:</b>
childcare, employment, healthcare: Black women, especially mothers
hate speech, media, politics: Immigrants, Muslims and/or those with limited English
housing, transit, environment: Low-income Black and Brown people
education, crime, violence, justice system: Black men

These knots are not the full story, but they are the most prominent ones. As we spoke with people, the knots for those who identify as LGBTQ+ and those living with disabilities also arose. We leave those for a discussion at a later time.

This paper aims to reach readers across the globe to feel the reality of “race *and...*” in daily urban life. We encourage readers to read the companion publications to this paper, *Reviewing Socio-Spatial Segregation in the United States: History, Politics, and the Way Ahead* (Veliu Ashiku, Price, Nelson, & Alvarado, 2022) and *Reviewing Socio-Spatial Segregation: City Profiles* (Veliu Ashiku, Price, Alvarado, & Nelson, 2022). These publications provide the historical grounding and contemporary scope of how socio-spatial segregation arose, research on its impact, and how cities are working to un-design it today.

The paper is part of the Chicago-Torino Lab addressing the cost of segregation through peer learning and exchange funded by the German Marshall Fund (GMF). The larger project aims to answer crucial questions on spatial segregation through an exchange between Chicago, Illinois, and Torino, Italy. The goal of this paper is to contribute to that conversation by sharing the perspectives, experiences, and perceptions of Chicago residents who live through and with socio-spatial segregation in their daily lives. We also include the perspectives, experiences, and perceptions of leaders who work with residents to un-design socio-segregation and make cities more equitable places for people to live freely and prosper.

## Extended Abstract

### *Introduction*

Between July and August, we interviewed dozens of Chicago residents and municipal leaders in efforts to share-out the experiences of people who live their daily routines in a city spatially segregated by race. This white paper shares our analysis of socio-spatial segregation in the Chicago area.

We write this paper to contribute to the Chicago-Torino Lab (CTL): Addressing the Costs of Segregation through Peer Learning and Exchange funded by the German Marshall Fund (GMF). The CTL aims to answer crucial questions on spatial segregation through an exchange between Chicago, Illinois, and Torino, Italy. Its goal is to deepen city professionals and appointed officials' understanding of and appreciation for the effects of segregation by race and/or ethnicity, and explore how to build, strengthen, or bolster policy and practice responses to counter these challenges and un-design segregation. The research and the findings presented in this paper come from a series of focus groups and interviews in Chicago in the Summer of 2022. This report is a culmination of the summer information. It complements two other publications intended to support the CTL project research, the literature synthesis (Veliu Ashiku, Price, et al. 2022) and the City Profiles (Veliu Ashiku, Price, et al. 2022).

### *Theoretical framework and methodology*

Segregation is too complex to be causally traced to any single factor or single identity characteristic. This study therefore set out to achieve the goals of the CTL project using the lens of intersectionality. Intersectionality acknowledges that everyone has their own unique experiences of discrimination and oppression, and we must consider multiple characteristics of people that can marginalize them – gender, race, class, religion, parenthood, immigrant status, and the like. We use an intersectional lens to analyze the experiences shared by our interviewees. That is, we consider how the multiple identities of people interact with different manifestations of segregation. An employed Black mother, for example, will interact with different issues related to Chicago's segregation in her day than an elderly White immigrant who speaks limited English. Approaching how to eradicate segregation and un-design policies and practices with an intersectional lens allows us to disentangle the dynamic politics intertwined with the layers. By adopting this intersectional lens, this study offers a unique contribution to understand segregation more deeply within racially segregated communities.

### *From multidimensional identities to intersectional challenges*

Socio-spatial segregation manifests inequity in different aspects of society such as education, healthcare, childcare, justice, and many others. These manifestations tangle together and people with different combinations of identities experience these tangles differently. These knots presented here are the ones that stood out in our analysis. Others surfaced too but we leave those for a supplementary discussion.

- *Childcare, employment, and healthcare.* A lack of adequate childcare access tops the daily concerns of caregivers. Among our interviewees, this most harshly impacts Black mothers. Lack of childcare interrupts dependable hours to work a job. This



threatens job security and destabilizes healthcare access. This cycle intersects and reproduces itself while being hard to be free from.

- *Hate speech, media, and politics.* An individuals' immigration status, the language they speak, their religious affiliation, and their racial identity all link to experiences with hate speech. Media and political stages additionally compound acts of hate speech and their harm. These experiences are highlighted by our interviews with Muslim people, people who struggle to speak English, and immigrants. This further isolates these groups inward to their communities which further separates them into a category of "others".
- *Housing, transit infrastructure, and environment.* Access to housing, transit, and healthy living spaces highlight intergenerational disparities especially between White and Black communities. The roots of this divide go back to the institution of slavery in the United States. Disparities snowballed through Real Estate Agents (REAs), discriminatory zoning, redlining, and other separating practices. Communities were designed to isolate resources such as grocery stores, pharmacies, and gas stations which then impacts access to medicine and food. Exaggerating this isolation, train and bus routes run less frequently and reliably in underfunded areas keeping individuals and communities isolated from opportunity.
- *Education, crime, violence, and the justice system.* Whether we talked to mothers with sons or Black men, crime and violence as well as the associated justice system threatens the daily living. For the mothers, they expressed lists of strategies and approaches that they use to keep their sons safe. For the Black men, they expressed what worked to keep themselves safe as kids and what they hope can keep Black boys today safe from these threats. Education – both formal schooling and community programming as well as informal community care – repeatedly arose as a way to loosen this knot.

#### *From partial answers to intersectional solutions*

Historical lack of trust in current institutions demands resources and organization come from a collaborative approach. From a top-down government level a bottom-up community level, we summarize solutions that came up the most frequently in our interviews.

- *Childcare, employment, and healthcare.* Programs that provide childcare at a low or reduced cost will bolster stable employment and reliable healthcare. Current programs are insufficient in supply (number of enrollment spots) and in proximity (near where residents live and/or work).
- *Hate speech, media, and politics.* Reform to immigration law was seen as an impactful top-down approach that could change public perception of marginalized

immigrant groups. From a bottom-up approach, more resources to assist immigrants and non-English speakers find employment and housing are needed.

- *Housing, transit infrastructure, and environment.* Investing resources and funds to build reliable transit infrastructure, affordable and safe housing, and safe and healthy environments for communities is needed. A bottom-up approach to engage community members in efforts to center community needs is necessary to build accessible programming and accessible transit.
- *Education, crime, violence, and the justice system.* Interviewees support much of the new legislation and policies that are changing generations of oppressive and discriminatory practices against Black and Brown communities, such as new reforms for de-escalation, bail, and re-entry programs as well as community policing efforts. Gun control stands out as a major concern that is not being resolved. Educational programming for youth, like apprenticeships, are suggested as proactive solutions.

### *Conclusion*

While socio-spatial segregation is overwhelmingly shaped by race, experiences in segregated Chicago intersect race alongside gender, parenthood, employment, immigration, religious, language statuses, among others. This report exposes the most prominent and knotted experiences of the intersection of: childcare, employment, and healthcare; hate speech, media, and politics; housing, transit infrastructure, and environment; and education, crime, violence, and the justice system. Policies and their associated practices need to engage multilayered solutions to serve the interconnected aspects of socio-spatial segregation.

## Acronyms and Abbreviations

Affirmatively Furthering Fair Housing	AFFH
American Rescue Plan Act	ARPA
American Rescue Plan Act	ARPA
California Department of Public Health	CDPH
Chicago Coalition for the Homeless	CCH
Chicago Department of Transportation	CDOT
Chicago Transit Authority	CTA
Chicago's Equitable Transit-Oriented Development	ETOD
Child Care Assistance Program	CCAP
Child Care Development Block Grant/ Child Care and Development Fund	CCDBG
Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals	DACA
Development, Relief, and Education for Alien Minors	DREAM
Diversity Equity and Inclusion	DEI
Environmental Protection Agency	EPA
European Union	EU
Illinois Action for Children	IAFC
Immigrational and National Act	INA
Low-Income Housing Tax Credits	LIHTC
Partners of Refugees in Illinois Disability Employment	PRIDE
Qualified Action Plan	QAP
Racial Equity Impact Assessment	REIA
Real Estate Agents	REAs
Regional Housing Needs Allocation	RHNA
Second European Conference on Multidimensional Equality Law	SECMEL
Socio-economic Status	SES
Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program	SNAP
United Negro College Fund	UNCF
University of Illinois Chicago	UIC

## Introduction

“[T]here are so many *intersectionalities* that, throughout all these systems, come into play... Public safety, healthcare, education, financing, all those things come into play. We can no longer have conversations and policies as a one off, that we’re just going to deal with this one thing. We need to understand the intersectionality, the connectiveness of all of these things.”

– Interview 11

When most people hear the word segregation, they associate segregation with the infamous *racial* segregation of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. In addition to race, other dimensions of identities intertwine with it. This makes segregation much more pervasive and elaborate. While race is crucial for understanding how segregation manifests, especially in the context of states with colonial histories, race also intersects with other identities. This intersection deepens the breadth of how segregation impacts individuals’ lives and tightens the hold of segregation at a societal level. As an interviewed Chicagoan explains, “there are so many *intersectionalities* that, throughout all these systems, come into play... Public safety, healthcare, education, financing, all those things come into play” (Interview 11). In this report, segregation is analyzed within this framework of intersectionality.

This report goes beyond typical researching about how segregation manifests in separate systems such as in education, employment, and healthcare. This report reveals how these systems overlap and how they impact individuals differently based on the identities they hold, such as gender, and socio-economic status with race being at the core. This approach changes our orientation on addressing the question of how to un-design segregated spaces. Dismantling segregation must also take an intersectional approach. One interviewee maintained that policies cannot focus on one or two identities, stating that “[w]e can no longer have conversations and policies as a one off, that we’re just going to deal with this one thing. We need to understand the intersectionality, the connectiveness of all of these things.” Policymakers must consider that people are multi-dimensional and that a policy cannot be successful against segregation if it only targets one or two identities like race and socio-economic status. For policies to fight segregation, they must be built as inclusive of all identities of the most vulnerable.

**"[w]e can no longer have conversations and policies as a one off, that we’re just going to deal with this one thing. We need to understand the intersectionality, the connectiveness of all of these things."**

This report provides the anecdotes of people who lived and experienced segregation in Chicago giving a voice to the multiple findings in the literature synthesis (Velu Ashiku, Price, et al. 2022). Hearing the diverse voices of everyday people from Muslim women to Black men, discussing many topics pertaining to socio-segregation such as hate speech, childcare, and crime allows us to learn from the unique and valuable views of people living in a segregated city like Chicago. Having these perspectives allows us to address the questions of:

- How does socio-spatial segregation manifest itself based on intersected dimensions of identities?
- How do solutions to socio-spatial segregation consider intersected identities?

Before we present the voices of those who we interviewed, we first explain more about our intersectional identity framework and how we conducted our study.

### **Understanding Race and Segregation: An Intersectional Theoretical Framework**

The origins of *intersectionality* can be traced as early as the 1850s (Michals 2015), though the term itself was first coined by Kimberlé Crenshaw in 1989. Crenshaw (1989) exposed the problematic consequences of “*single-axis analysis*” and “the tendency to treat race and gender as mutually exclusive categories of experience and analysis” (p. 139) arguing that “theor[ies] emanating from a white context obscure[s] the *multidimensionality* of Black women’s lives” (p. 157, emphasis added<sup>2</sup>). **Intersectionality treats social identities as nexuses where multiple attributes intersect to produce marginalization and interrelated forms of subordination which enforce rather than exclude each other.** Intersectionality suggests that multiple dimensions of one’s identity intersect and generate marginalized experiences for and groups people based on shared attributes which cannot be captured through a unidimensional lens. As such, intersectionality is a predominantly qualitative analytical framework with roots embedded in feminist theory and an eclectic approach to studying oppression, discrimination, segregation and other forms of marginalization as intersecting and multi-axis configurations of social power. Beyond feminist theory, however, being a critical endeavor, intersectionality has proven a useful tool to critical race studies.

**Societal "knots" are intersections of social issues that tighten together on the basis of people's different layers of identities.**

It is worth noting that in the European Union (EU) and Europe in general, the notion is tightly connected to “multiple discrimination” or “multidimensional equality” (Roseberry 2011). Schiek and Lawson (2011, 11) also refer to the concept of “knots” for a “redefinition of equality cases” with insights deriving from the first and second European Conference on Multidimensional Equality Law (SECMEL). In creating the tool, the authors were inspired by, among others, “new manifestations of disadvantage at the intersections of ethnicity, language, religion and gender... with the consequence [on] the situation of Muslim and Romani women in Europe” (Schiek and Lawson 2011 p. 1). The results from the first meeting of SECMEL were of particular importance on matters of substantive equality while referring to concepts such as “multidimensionality”, “multiplication of discrimination grounds”, “interdisciplinary perspectives” (G. Harms 2007).

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<sup>2</sup> Hereafter, all emphasizes added within the original quotes of authors and respondents are added.

Intersectionality has become a crucial analytical lens in the study of segregation because it better represents peoples' experiences. Race-only studies of segregation operate under too simplistic assumption that individuals experience segregation in a single-faceted and unidimensional manner. An intersectional framework has found applicability in the United States and Europe as well as China, South Korea, India, Ukraine, Australia (Chow, Segal and Lin 2011) and other places around the globe. Though this paper focuses predominantly on the city of Chicago and the United States, socio-spatial segregation is a world-wide predicament with radiating effects into different domains of life across contextual peculiarities.

### **Methodology: Intersectional Focus Groups and Interviews**

This pilot study focuses mostly on Chicago though the scope stretches to include insights from the surrounding areas like Evanston, as well as other cities like Detroit. Our two main methods of research are *focus groups* and *interviews*. Most academic studies refer to the people from focus groups and interviews as “respondents”. We think of our study more as a collaboration with community partners who take time to share individual experiences with us so that we can synthesize their ideas with the others to report-out about the whole: the commonalities and the nuances. As such, we choose to refer to our community partners as our “interviewees” to highlight their individual contributions to create the whole of this study with us.

By design, our methodology is strictly qualitative and exploratory. Intersectionality research historically<sup>3</sup> relies on small samples of respondents emphasizing personal narratives as the main data for adding nuances, exposing the complexity, and analyzing the intricate nature of lived experiences. As part of an explorative study, the work presented here is not intended to provide generalizable insights and is not universally representative. This is not to say that this study offers no rich insight into the topic of socio-spatial segregation. Instead, we offer in-depth insights to set the stage for others to take forward into broader investigation. This design also speaks directly to policymakers to accentuate the impact of socio-spatial segregated contexts on individual livelihoods and neighborhood prosperity.

Eight focus groups were conducted, some in person and some remotely using Zoom. Since intersectionality research can only be built on an intersection of two or more demographic attributes, the interviewees were selected on the basis on one permanent attribute – *race* as a self-identified attribute – in combination with a least one other main attribute – *gender, religion, immigration status, ethnicity, and language*. Intersections of these dimensions of identity created their own subgroups such as the subgroup of Black<sup>4</sup> women, Muslim women, ethnic Albanians and Italians and United States citizens, etc. Indeed, individuals are defined by potentially countless demographic attributes. This study, therefore, focuses on specific combinations of attributes to retain particularity of experiences while capturing dynamics of identity that entangle multi-layered belongingness. The focus groups were diverse in the number of participants with the largest one including 8 participants and the smallest one

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<sup>3</sup> For more on this and for a thorough review of literature on intersectionality, faultlines, and multiplexity literatures, see Liu *et al.* (2019). Their article provides with an overview of the theories, methodologies, and current state of this approaches to research.

<sup>4</sup> The capitalization of the word Black transforms the word from being a color to defining a group of people, while it also signifies the history of enslaved Africans who were taken to the United States and labeled as an “other” (Wachal 2000).

containing 2 participants. The focus groups were guided by specific sets of questions (see Appendix 1), and the discussions remained predominantly centered around those questions besides when they would naturally follow another unanticipated yet relevant trajectory. Focus groups lasted around 1 hour and 30 minutes.

It is important to disclose that though the intersections of immigration status and race as well as language and race were not discussed thoroughly during the focus groups due to the lack of interviewees, these intersections were nevertheless elaborated by other participants bundled by other attributes, as well as during the interviews. The process of research is unpredictable, and while targeted attributes by researchers might not receive extensive treatment, other attributes might. This was the case with the attributes of *disability*, *sexuality*, *socio-economic status*, or *civil status* which naturally evolved in the conversation and were brought to the researchers' attention. Though notes on these intersections are mentioned in the text below, most analysis relies on the initial attributes as planned rather than those that emerged. This is due to, among others, the confined parameters of this report or any other for that matter which cannot accommodate the infinite number of identity dimensions.

This study also relies on 11 Zoom interviews conducted with local government leaders and officials functioning predominantly in Chicago but also in other cities like Detroit, Seattle, and Duluth. The interviews were guided by a set of questions (see Appendix 2) which, though different, drew communalities with focus group questions. The logic of relying on two different methods is found on emphasis rather than uniqueness of answers, though there were intersections between answers from focus groups and interviews. Therefore, while both focus group participants and interviewees brought to the surface common aspects of socio-spatial segregation, conversations with the 11 interviewed leaders intended to draw on aspects that might not be entirely visible to the public. Interviewees brought to the table of discussions the political aspect accompanying projects and initiatives, institutional blockages or incentives, as well as possible solutions with a realistic overview on available resources or their lack thereof. Interviews lasted about 45 minutes.

In both focus groups and interviews, one researcher led the questioning while another took notes. All conversations were recorded and transcribed. Focus group interviewees were given vouchers as small tokens of appreciation for their contributions<sup>5</sup>. While interviewed leaders were also offered small tokens of appreciation, most declined them.

Coding was done through NVivo with the help of five students and two members of staff members. Four of these students worked in pairs, while one worked independently when coding only the notes. The process of coding began with user 1 creating a new NVivo file, uploading the assigned transcribed interview or focus group, and coding it. User 1 did the initial coding, creating subcodes where they appeared fitting/relevant. After User 1 completed the first round of coding, the file was emailed to User 2 for them to add more subcodes and clarify the previous coding. This process of coding, revision, and editing was repeated as many times as needed until both Users 1 and 2 felt satisfied with the codes and subcodes created, at which point the user who made the final edits uploaded file to into a shared online folder and to an

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<sup>5</sup> In person focus groups and interviews were compensated with \$40 while virtual focus groups and interviews were compensated with \$20. Gift cards were given on slips of paper to in person participants after the interview where electronic gift cards were emailed to participants after interviews.

external drive. During this whole process, all team members led by the principal researcher stayed in contact through text, email, and weekly meetings to keep each other up to date on their progress, ask questions, and address any issues. Once all individually coded focus groups and interviews were brought together into a single NVivo file, they were reviewed by the principal researcher who reorganized the structure of codes, deleted, and built new codes, and aligned the coding towards the layout of this report.

The material presented here is the result of a multilayered approach to coding, reviewed by six different researchers. This is well aligned with the adopted theory and method which emphasize multidimensionality and intersectionality as opposed to singularity or uniformity. The findings presented are the result of the researchers' interpretations of the transcripts, notes made during the focus groups and interviews, audio recordings, and coded data clustered into NVivo nodes as units of analysis. The exclusion of material that did not make it to these pages is not an indication of irrelevance but rather an expression of choices made to retain only those aspects and references that best elucidate the intersectional nature of socio-spatial segregation.

**"Wherever you go, race will be a problem. Wherever you go, you have the White privilege"**

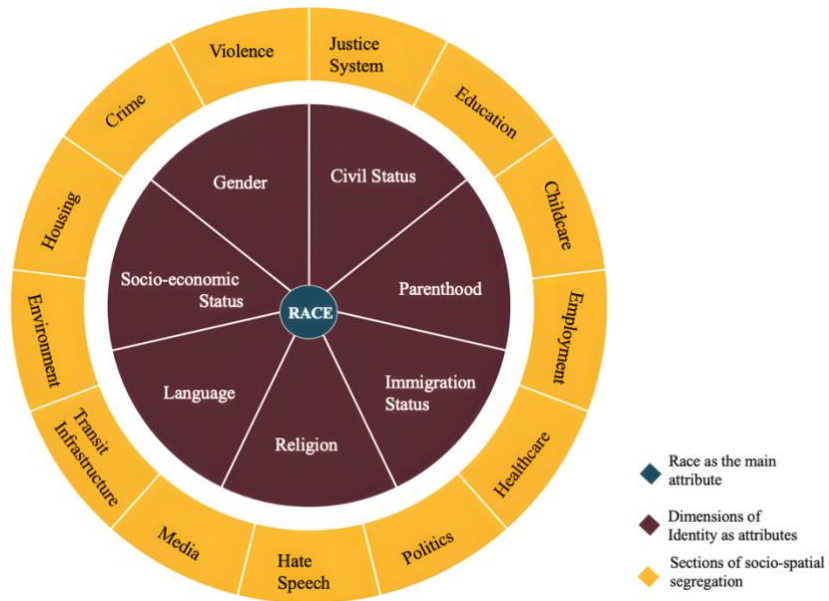
With this, the theoretical and methodological postulates of this project have radiated into all stages and aspects of our research, including here the personal and reflexive approach to analysis adopted by the researchers which is authentically exposed for the readers in Annex 3. **Reporting reflexivity in this study is aimed to provide contextual information on – not if – but how the multidimensional identities of the researchers themselves could have influenced the process of analysis.** Moreover, as per the logic of this study, positionality is an added value – and not a reflection of possible errors – to a more comprehensive understanding of socio-spatial segregation as a phenomenon that cannot be seen as isolated but instead one that we are all surrounded by and, therefore, the responsibility to address its adverse reflections in our societies belongs to us all. As one of our focus group participants said: “Wherever you go, race will be a problem. Wherever you go, you have the White privilege”.

### **Thematic Analysis: Multidimensional identities and intersectional solutions**

The section above elucidates the attributes considered as main dimensions of identity on the basis of which challenges, policies in place, and potential intersectional responses to current difficulties are built. It also touches upon the attributes initially planned to conduct research on and those which naturally emerged while engaging with participants. This section offers an in-depth analysis of intersections of some dimensions of identity and how these knots produce interlinked challenges across different domains. As such, current plans to address these challenges as unidimensional are partial and insufficient. More constructive ideas and suggestions consider complex solutions that take into account multi-dimensional identities and the compound nature of issues surrounding them. The dimensions of identity explored in this report and the socio-segregated spaces for individuals and groups face unique combinations of challenges, as visualized in Figure 2.



Figure 2: Wheel of Social-Spatial Segregation: Dimensions of Identity and Sections of Segregation



Note: The idea for the “Wheel of Socio-spatial Segregation” has been borrowed from Marilyn Loden’s (1995) “Wheel of Diversity” and adapted to the attributes and sections employed in this study. The wheel incorporates similarities and differences between societal and cultural groups, while acknowledging the weight that dimensions of their identity have in organizing societies along power structures.

In the two subsections below, we present findings from the focus groups and individual interviews.

### ***From multidimensional identities to intersectional challenges***

This subsection sets forth the challenges from socio-spatial segregated aspects of society depending on multiple identity affiliations. It explores and expands on groups who are most prominently affected by a tightly knotted combination of socio-spatial segregation in their communities. Following this subsection, suggestions and tools are discussed on how to best address these challenges.

The analyses presented here reveals four main knots that combine aspects of socio-spatial segregation: (1) childcare, employment, and healthcare; (2) hate speech, media, and politics; (3) housing, transit infrastructure, and environment; and (4) education, crime, violence, and the justice system. Each of these four combinations is shaped by and reinforces intersected dimensions of identity. The multi-dimensional identities elicit attributes of: (a) race, gender, civil status, and parenthood; (b) race, immigration status, religion, and language; (c) race and socioeconomic status; and (4) race and gender. This subsection unpacks these challenges through the words of our participants.

### *Childcare, employment, and healthcare*

Race, gender, parenthood, and civil (marriage) status intersect with socio-spatial segregation



*Note: Image taken by William Fortunato via Pexels.*

and manifest most prominently in childcare, employment, and healthcare. These aspects impact Black single mothers in particular. Data shows that “in 2021, there were about 4.27 million Black families in the United States with a single mother” (Statista 2022). Most recent data from the United States Census Bureau (2022) also show that the number of Black households with a child of under 18 years old where no partner is present is double the number of White households. Unemployed women with children were also significantly affected by COVID-19 seeing greater employment declines than other groups, including fathers and women without kids, with the decline “most pronounced among Black moms, single moms and moms with no more than a high school education” (Elejalde-Ruiz 2021).

The school and day care closures during the pandemic had a crucial impact on these rates with most single mothers having no

childcare support being pushed out of the workforce. **Lack of employment also deprives Black women of stable healthcare particularly in countries like the United States where affordable health insurance is inextricably linked to employee benefits.** Relying on reports from the National Center for Health Statistics and Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, studies show how “Black women continue to experience excess mortality relative to other U.S. women including... shorter life expectancies and higher rates of maternal mortality” (Chinn, Martin and Redmond 2021), despite Black women being overrepresented and underpaid in healthcare’s toughest jobs (McShane 2022).

Interviewees pointed to these challenges in several instances. Some referred to the United States government that “cut childcare during pandemic leaving people to feel threatened with childcare” (Focus Group 1). While others referred to the support from the Illinois Action for Children (IAFC), a not-for-profit charitable organization dedicated to quality, accessible early learning, and care opportunities for children. During the pandemic when most childcare facilities and day cares stopped providing services, IAFC tried to provide services. But even in early 2023, their offices are still closed. Their website explains: “Due to an increase in CCAP” [Child Care Assistance Program] (Illinois Action for Children 2022). Interviewees indicated that such delays have significant consequences in preventing them from showing up to work, especially when they have no other parent at home to rely on. Associated job losses then induce losing healthcare benefits provided by their employers. One participant succinctly summarized

what everyone was expressing, “When you help the kids, you help the parents” (Focus Group 1). While so straightforward, it remains a tight knot from socio-spatial segregation.

These challenges do not only affect single Black mothers, but also those who act as a community of support with single mothers. One participant explains:

[E]ven if you don't have kids, you got friends... you're part of a network of people who have depended upon you to fill that gap [of childcare]. Even if you don't have kids, you have a network of community. We pull up everybody, all the cousins, all the play cousins, we play aunties, and aunties to whomever. And, what you're saying is keeping an eye out for all of these kids... I think that for Black women, especially, in these neighborhoods, because we don't have all these resources, it's always making a way out of no way; and even if you do have resources, it just it always costs extra to fill in these gaps. (Focus Group 3)

The lack of childcare impacts employment opportunities and healthcare. This combination has radiating effects unto many members of the community. This is what makes the intersection of childcare, employment, and healthcare uniquely important for specific multidimensional identities of gender, race, parenthood, and civil status.

When it comes particularly to the lack of healthcare, though its detrimental effects can more specifically be observed in women of color, its segregated lack of quality is felt most acutely by Black Chicagoans since most healthcare facilities are concentrated in the predominantly White North Side of Chicago. Here is what one of the interviewees had to say about this:

You're going to the same doctor trying to get the same thing as everybody else around you, so whereas in other areas you have space to do it, you show up to your doctor's appointment, you don't wait six hours. Up until I could pay for it, up until I could afford it, I would have to take off all day, and I was working minimum wage at the time... That's what segregation means to me. I didn't have any *other choice*. I have serious medical conditions, so I had to use the services available, whereas when my dad had a *good job* and my mom had a good job and we could go to Rush [Medical University Hospital], we were in and out of there at Rush... (Focus Group 5)

While the lack of affordable and quality healthcare targets all people of color living on the South Side of Chicago, its effects are particularly felt by Black women who face shorter life expectancy rates and higher rates of maternal mortality (Chinn, Martin and Redmond 2021). The roots of this healthcare inequality are historical, as described by one of our interviewees who genealogically traced its contemporary manifestations as one of fatal symptomatic manifestations of slavery:

[S]laves were bred. What happened was Black women becoming pregnant with Black children was a business. First of all, there were incentives where you had to have 15 children for 5 years... And, if you didn't, as a Black man, as a stud, they would either castrate you or sell you off. And, if you were a Black woman, and you gave birth to a certain number of children, you qualified for meritorious manumission. Because the breeders were giving birth to so many children, most of them were... either born stillborn or died a year after birth... (Interview 8)

The historical lack of healthcare for Black women connected to childcare is further demonstrated by how birth experiments did not end with the act of giving birth. Gillian Clouser (2022) explains how Black women who were coerced into giving birth to children, were also coerced to neglect the children they gave birth to for “raising White children was necessary for their survival”. This led to a system in which Black women’s reproductive lives were co-opted and no longer their own. For example, enslaved Black women were forced to nurse White infants instead of their own children.

These experiences demonstrate how socio-spatial segregation and its different manifestations are historically rooted and cannot be treated in isolation. These issues manifest as tight knots that are inextricably connected. They do more harm to people with certain layers of multiple identities than others. This section illustrated how childcare, employment, and healthcare are inextricably connected, contextualized by socio-spatial segregation, and how this knot particularly harms women of color, especially single mothers.

### *Hate speech, media, and politics*

At the intersection of *immigration status, religion, language, and race* occurs a dangerous synergy of *hate speech* in daily encounters, *media* promotion of xenophobia, and *political* instrumentalization of ‘otherness’ aimed towards fueling polarization and the socio-spatial segregation of people. Hate speech against immigrants (Shively, et al. 2013), against Muslims (Shahbaz 2022), and against those who do not speak the local language in the United States (Hegarty 2020) is not a novelty in Chicago, and it most certainly is not anything new in other cities across the world either. The attribute of race plays an interesting function with Albanian and Italian second-generation immigrants in the focus groups being White more privileged than Black Muslims in Chicago (Mohamed and Diamant 2019). This combination illustrates how privilege and underprivilege are parts of a large and nuanced spectrum of segregation wherein there are degrees of inclusion and exclusion based on ideas of similarities and differences.

Interviewees pointed out Muslim enclaves in Chicago and the greater Chicago area in neighborhoods such as Skokie, Devon, Bridgeview, Albany Park, Lincoln Park, or areas around Iman Clinic as a hub for uniting Black Muslims in Chicago. Albanian and Italian second-generation immigrants similarly indicated that there are Albanian, Italian, Irish, Polish, Mexican pockets in the city bound by not just ethnicity and immigration status, but also religion, expressing that “there’s always some kind of association with the Parish, the church they went to” (Focus Group 2). Gravitating towards similarities and building homogenous compartments does not necessarily present a challenge if such processes are driven by choice, but socio-spatial segregation manifests itself beyond the maps of the city into the daily encounters, media representations, and political stigmatization of this group of people who not only occupy separate and secluded spaces but are also deprived of goods and services based on their identities. These disparities are emphasized by second-generation Muslim immigrants living in the United States including among our Albanian immigrants who are also Muslim.

Albanian interviewees reported that they often felt caught in-between identities as second-generation immigrants in the United States but also as second-degree locals in North Macedonia. This has often led them to cluster into communities that made it feel “comfortable around us, and so like we’re surrounding ourselves around with people who are *like us*” (Focus Group 2) they say. One of the interviewees calls it a “no-man’s-land” because, as they say,

“we’re that first generation, although not born here, that we’re Albanian but we’re foreigners as Americans. We go to our homeland and we’re Albanian but we’re essentially foreigners to them and we’re really American, so we don’t really fit it” (Focus Group 2). Therefore, interviewees share, “within Albanian community, there are other communities that are minorities. There is definitely that segregation” (Focus Group 2).

**"My kids as well, they feel that separation, that segregation, from just within our own community based on that identity"**

This in-group segregation most often manifests itself along the lines of differences in how Albanian language is spoken by those who immigrated to the United States and whose children were born here, and others whose mother tongue is fluent, standard, and grammatically correct and who immigrated to the country more recently. One of the interviewees shared this story:

I started taking my kids to an Albanian school within the Chicagoland area. The particular dialect that we speak is not the grammatically correct dialect of Albanian, it’s sort of a slang of the language... [C]oming into this environment where I’m with a lot of other Albanians from all the different regions, I think that’s one thing that really segregated us and I think we were looked down upon. They looked down upon us because we weren’t speaking the correct - grammatically correct – form of Albanian. My kids as well, they feel that separation, that segregation, from just within our own community based on that identity, specific identity. (Focus Group 2)

The deeper roots to this in-group segregation can be found in the different levels of education in mother tongue. Most second-generation immigrants that had the opportunity to attend a school or a university in Albanian would have also had access to learning the standard language. This is different from those who were born to first-generation immigrants with little to no education. **The disparities, therefore, manifest themselves in a language format where the educated elites also speak in a sophisticated vocabulary and a different socio-phonetic system.** To elaborate further:

You have this bubble of the Albanians. Within this bubble, you have your elitist that are, the ones that are educated, nose up in the air. It’s like, “well, we’re just smarter.” And, part of it is they’re not recognizing the opportunities and access that they had versus others. (Focus Group 2)

That is, speaking a language means being privileged with opportunities and access; not speaking a language, therefore, would mean quite the opposite: being underprivileged, deprived of opportunities and access, and isolated when the language used does not conform the normative standards of speech.

According to an Italian interviewee, this is also what leads to some immigrants being secluded into the peripheral parts of cities, which then further feeds back into them being socio-spatially segregated. They explained how “if they’re in the city, then there is a lot of access but then when you’re out in the suburbs, it’s very hard to get that access. Especially when you’re coming into a country where you don’t know the language” (Focus Group 2). There is certainly a communitarian aspect to overcoming such difficulties which seems like it’s the other side of the in-group segregation tendency. **When the lack of language skills expands beyond mother tongue into the local language spoken in the immigrating country, in-group segregation converts into a version of in-group preservation or self-segregation.**

Albanian or Italian immigrants who have moved to the United States earlier than the newcomers or who have been born here as second-generation immigrants, unite based on their immigration status with those whom they separated from based on a spoken language due to the fear of assimilation. As one interviewee shares, “it was also then, I think, very intentional for our parents to try to be as resistant as possible when it came for us to assimilate” (Focus Group 2). The fear of assimilation transcends and overcomes in-group differentiation and externalizes towards ‘others’ who are more different. Here is how this is described by an interviewee:

[M]y great-uncle, in the 70’s, he didn’t like how things were going, and he ran for the 1st Board of Chicago. Won it because he was very, very well-spoken. He, manually, tried to change the living situation of a lot of Italians in the neighborhood who were down on their luck, or just had moved here. Even my grandma’s side with Croatian, she would take in people from Croatia and give them a place to stay in our house, and they’d stay there for months, some even for years, just because they couldn’t find a job or couldn’t find a way out. (Focus Group 2)

This communitarian aspect, however, comes with the risk of differentiation not just from those who are citizens of the country *versus* those who are immigrants, but it also has a race aspect to it whereby being White fuels self-segregation as a form of preserving common cultural traits which appear further away from Black than White Americans. **This uncovers another layer of differentiation with the underprivileged within their own community replicating exclusionary practices towards others who are of a different race.** One of the interviewees explained this as follows:

Especially because we’re Caucasian, that everything’s under attack, and some of our culture is intertwined with a lot of things that could be under attack. My family’s very defensive in that regard, so it’s just always like falling back into ourselves, and being comfortable around us, and so we’re surrounding ourselves around with people who are like us. That’s drawing us away from going further and just diversifying everything. (Focus Group 2)

Conversely, some participants respond to the similar threat by distancing themselves from their community:

a lot of my very practicing Muslim friends who live in that community don’t have a lot of friends who are not Muslim because they don’t want to have to deal with that judgment and mental inconvenience or hassle of having to explain or introduce somebody into their world

and the dynamics of their world without fear of social repercussion or judgment (Focus Group 9).

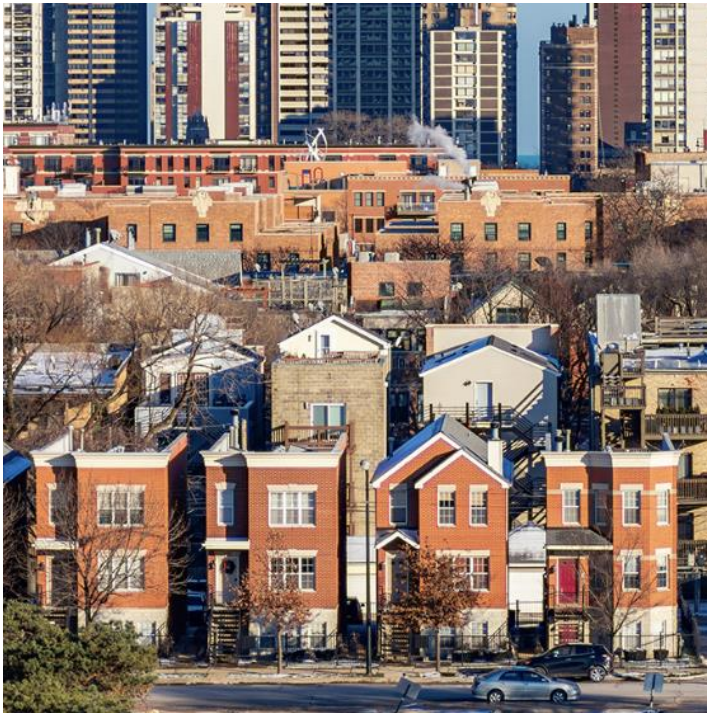
**"My family's very defensive...so we're surrounding ourselves around with people who are like us"**

When adding race as an attribute to the mix of immigration status and language, the ratio of privilege within the in-group underprivileged status increases. That is, Albanian and Italian immigrants who were themselves secluded first as newcomers who did not speak the language and then maybe as members of their communities whose mother tongue they speak differently, segregate from others on the basis of race. Piro Rexhepi (2018), for example, writes interestingly on “Arab others at European borders: racializing religion and refugees along the Balkan Route”, as writes Fred Gardaphe (2002) on Italian American Racism, claiming that “[f]or those who can naively say we’re not black, there are others who counter with the truth, that we weren’t always white”. Ironically, however, these would be the same Albanians and Italians who were the victims of hate speech and media framing as “brutal criminals”, “dangerous breed” (Arsovska and Michilli 2016), and members of the organized “mafia” (Luconi 1999) and continue to date.

Interviewees also referred to the media aspect and the politics surrounding the derogative imagery of Albanians as interconnected and self-enforcing. They spoke of how the media would give space to “those politicians” who “don’t want to show they’re associated with Muslims”, drawing specific references to “when Trump was here, he brought the worst of the people” (Focus Group 9) and the introduction of the Muslim ban which, surprisingly, had the participants feel treated rather kindlier by people who were ashamed of the former President’s actions. Respondents called it “White privilege guilt, or something” (Focus Group 9). They almost always connected their religious identities with being, among others, immigrants, and explained how they struggled with the idea of “the good immigrant[s], [who don’t] cause a ruckus” and who kept their “heads down, not be conspicuous” (Focus Group 9). In their “The Particular Harms of the ‘Good Immigrant’ versus ‘Bad Immigrant’ Construction on Black Immigrants in the United States”, DeNul (2022) echoes the participants concerns particularly on “Black Muslim immigrants [who] take on an additional layer of this narrative by also being branded as unpatriotic, unassimilable, and most of all, as ‘terrorists’ (773).

**This imagery of Muslims dominating daily hate speech encounters, media reproduction of stereotypes, and political propaganda, is built on the intersection of race, immigration status, religion, and language skills.** These intersections sometimes include and sometimes exclude an attribute. For example, it might be that only race and immigration status intersect at times. An intersection of race, immigration status, and language can be another combination. Whichever the links, however, treating these attributes as interconnected in how they produce socio-spatial segregation is essential for a wholesome understanding of those cases were looking at isolated attributes – for e.g., religion only – are not sufficient as current opinions claim (Aziz, 2022; Pew Research Center, 2018).

## *Housing, transit infrastructure, and environment*



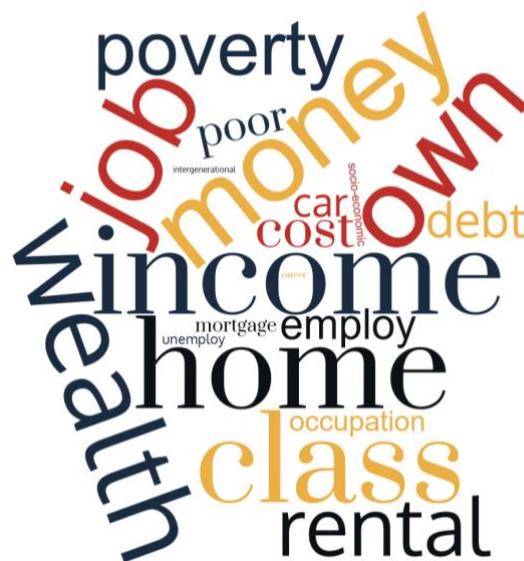
Note: Image by James Andrews via Getty Images.

Our participants expressed how the intersection of *race* and *socio-economic status* (SES). In this context, SES blends wealth, income, and occupation, as the word cloud shows (see Figure 3).

Race and SES intersect to produce socio-spatial disparities in *housing, transit infrastructure, and environmental* standards. **These manifestations of socio-spatial segregation as maintained by “a dynamic set of rules that have been set up to exclude people who are lower income and people of color and in the case of a city like Chicago, usually that’s one and the same”** (Interview 1). Decades of studies corroborate the importance of

understanding how race and SES influence disparities across the socioeconomic spectrum (Erbe 1975) which then produce a cycle of segregation in healthcare (Williams, et al. 2010), school systems (Boser and Baffour 2017), housing (Thomas, et al. 2018), labor market (Yu and Sun 2019), to name a few. Moreover, the references to SES are varied, as shown in Figure 3.

Figure 3: Descriptors related to socio-economic status.



Note: Word Cloud illustrates frequency of terms used that related to socio-economic discussions in the interviews



This subsection investigates how race and SES intersect to socio-spatially segregate housing and transit infrastructures. Through disinvestment, disproportionate harms from environmental hazards and climate change are described.

Interviewees noticeably pointed out this clear line of division between the North and South Sides of Chicago (as shown in Figure 1) as separated by the Dan Ryan expressway<sup>6</sup>. Not one respondent disputed this reality. The literature synthesis (Velu Ashiku, Price, et al. 2022) describes Chicago's segregated housing and what the role of real estate agents (REAs) is in shaping the housing market and promoting segregation by upselling, steering, and 'blockbusting' to benefit their own professional economic gains as well as how local and federal institutions created and upheld racially restrictive covenants, discriminatory zoning and ghettoization, redlining, and other discriminatory practices. **Such discriminatory practices lead to socio-spatial segregation for accessible, affordable, quality housing between Chicagoans on the North side versus South side.**

"if you layer the percentage of people's income that they have to spend on transportation costs, getting to and from work, getting groceries, going to medical appointments, you see that there's a greater burden on the communities of color that exist in the city"

Segregated housing intersects closely with transportation and transit infrastructure. One of the interviewees explains:

If you look at [the] layer [of] income, in particular, if you layer the percentage of *people's income* that they have to spend on transportation costs, getting to and from work, getting groceries, going to medical appointments, you see that there's a greater burden on the communities of color that exist in the city. That also tracks with the *commute* times to work, that communities of color have longer commute times to work, due to distance from the job centers, and we know that that tracks [to] the *neighborhoods* that have more segregation... neighborhoods that see higher commute times, lower incomes, higher percentage of communities of color... (Interview 9)

Another interviewee explicitly refers to the dense housing around transit stations as inextricably connected to the SES of people living in those areas. They said that

[n]ext to a transit station is where we really want to look at dense development with reduced parking, and when we look at that, let's look at what levels of income, low income housing, tax credits actually housed and what you'll see is that that income is actually higher than your community's median income. (Interview 1)

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<sup>6</sup> For a visual representation on the Dan Ryan express way and how it fueled segregation, see "Chicago: Dan Ryan Expressway" (Chicago: Dan Ryan Expressway 2022).

The lack of affordable and accessible housing and transportation options links tightly to employment opportunities and access to goods and services. The lack of mass transit furthers socio-segregated housing. These manifestations form a tight knot and intersect with race and SES.

Citywide, centralized housing around commuting services signals inaccessible transportation and flawed transit efficiency. The unreliability of trains and buses further socially segregates; only in certain communities in the city do trains and buses not come on time, function on reduced schedules, follow longer and exhausting routes, and offer poor quality services. An interviewee explained how

[w]hen I do go to the south side or to the west side, it's just night and day. I can't believe the difference in the service, bus services, hard to get a rideshare. When I'm going south or west, I have to plan because I might not be able to get an Uber or Lyft, the rideshare, the buses and everything takes longer. (Focus Group 5)

In this way then, the everyday domains of socio-spatial segregation, not only operate in an intersectional fashion, but the knots tighten differently on individuals and communities depending on their spatial and social locations. Intersectional identities of race and SES cannot be decoupled from these locations. These disparities then reinforce and reproduce the racial divisions in the status quo. This results in serious consequences, such as:

[W]hen I first started at the company I work for now, I used to get in trouble because I wouldn't be on time and me and my boss, we took the same train and I'm close to the train, but he couldn't understand when I used to explain to him about the train delays for the redline and I had to tell him about city of Chicagoness. I said, the southbound redline and southbound trains run more than northbound trains in the morning and then the inverse, in evening, because people are typically... Northsiders use more public transportation because that's what it's made for. It's made for them. It's not made for us on the other side the line. So, whereas your train runs every two to three minutes, mine runs every seven to nine minutes, so I ended waking up 30 minutes early, sitting in Dunkin Donuts every morning for 20 minutes just to make it to work on time. (Focus Group 5)

Another interviewee elaborated on how segregated mass transit is damaging also to the business that, particularly after COVID-19, were facing massive employee turnover and were in need of staff:

[A]n example – the airlines, so O'Hare, they are hurting for staff right now, and, I'm sure that there are people in the south side who would be happy to work at those jobs, but that could be, on public transportation, easy, a two-hour commute – easy; and so, where you live can cut off that access to that employment. Can you get there? (Interview 2)

**The lack of solid mass transit structures, therefore, keeps people in some communities physically separated from socio-economic opportunities and trapped in secluded areas where quality housing is scarce.** It embeds the marginalization of these communities further into under-resourced areas, keeping away the tools, access, and resources that could relieve

some of these disparities. How deeply engrained these disparities are into the fabric of societies is also indirectly indicated by how segregationist systems are kept in place even at the expense of leaving business unsupported when support is needed the most.

**"Northsiders use more public transportation because that's what it's made for. It's made for them. It's not made for us on the other side the line."**

Further problematic in transit infrastructure is the interstate highway system in the United States, was built in such a way that enforced segregation, prioritized White people's needs, and displaced and largely ignored the needs of impoverished urban people and Black and Brown communities (Karas 2015). Indeed, transit infrastructure was built in the name of economic and financial development. However, its design structures socio-spatial segregation into expressways, interstate highways, and freeways which separate and divide. As an interviewee states, "the structures that are in place do not support people's upward mobility" (Interview 7) but instead reinforce and feed disparities.

These disparities have a direct physical effect on the health of this group of people. While the literature synthesis referred to environmental racism (Heck 2021) particularly in reference to natural disasters (Mays, Bischoff and Schmidt 2021), our participants expose the complex nature of environmental justice as intricately linked to housing, transportation, and transit infrastructure. The social fact that environmental disparities intersect with housing and transit infrastructure radiated across interviewees, with one referring directly to these links:

[W]e were going through some big federal transit planning exercises back in the Obama Administration that was supposed to theoretically reduce greenhouse gases and send *transit* oriented development... and the reason why I think fondly back to that period is that I realized that transportation had an impact on *housing* and jobs and the environment and all this. It kind of took into place a little bit of the *intersectionality* of some of the work that happens... (Interview 10)

Interviewees share the sentiment expressed by Interview 10 that "the neighborhoods that I've worked in have always been impacted by *transportation* systems, either by the building of interstate highways or by light rail systems, and then by the *pollution* that may or may not be created by them... [O]nce the construction is done, who actually benefits from it?"

**"the neighborhoods that I've worked in have always been impacted by transportation systems, either by the building of interstate highways or by light rail systems, and then by the pollution that may or may not be created by them"**

These are “industrial corridors” with “lower income communities of color, [where] if you look at both social and health indicators, you can see those industrial corridors in communities with higher populations of folks of color, [and] that there are poor environmental and public health indicators in terms of air quality...” (Interview 9). In particular, warehouses that are “logistical hubs” are built near communities of color “having thousands and thousands of trucks [commercial vehicles in particular] going through these neighborhoods, and because we’re maybe a decade away from being able to transition to electric with those vehicles on the technology... those are diesel emissions, so further adding to poor air quality conditions in those areas” (Interview 9) among other environmental hazards.

Other discussions of industrial corridors reference “pockets of poverty” with worse air quality such as areas “closer to the freeways, they’re closer to the industrial areas, they’re under the airport flight paths” (Interview 10) and the lack of parks as well as green recreational areas in neighborhoods distinctly occupied by people of color. “As a mother” explains an interviewee, “I can’t take my children to Tuley Park, to Rainbow Beach, to Oakwood. There’s too much going on. I have to drive 45 minutes out to just take them to do the most everyday things” (Focus Group 3). Interview 10 shared that “White neighborhoods...[h]onestly, got nice parks, they’ve always had nice parks”. People’s SES does little to overcome the racial aspect here; families of a different racial and SES with an income of “at \$200,000 to \$250,000 a year” live in neighborhoods “disinvested for many years” with no “proximity to green space and the lake” (Interview 7). Parks as healthy oases in the midst of industrialized and grey areas seem rare in spaces where communities of color live, or as is the case, where transit infrastructure obliged communities of color to live.

Further reading on the historical aspects of the undisputable intergenerational wealth gap between Black and White people can be found in our companion [literature synthesis](#) (Velu Ashiku, Price, et al. 2022).

### *Education, crime, violence, and the justice system*

While gender and race intersect to produce socio-spatial segregation in childcare, employment, and healthcare, especially for Black women, this section describes the knot that manifests particularly tightly for the Black men who participated in our study. A Black male interviewee explained when “talking about black males, I would say staying alive is more important in Chicago... it’s a dramatic piece, as you look at the news and whose shooting who. It’s the kids shooting each other, as the gangsters use to do” (Focus Group 8).

With the schools in the United States being so tightly connected to space, bound by a system of school districts, it would be expected for education to naturally intersect with other space-defined aspects of segregation as discussed above. Education cannot be seen as disassociated from the districts where people have their homes and are obliged to – unless they have the financial means – send their children to school. **Therefore, all levels of education in the country are highly segregated with children attending primary and secondary education with other children who look similar to them.** Emily Richmond (2012) claims that schools are more segregated today than during the late 1960s when segregation laws were no longer in force. **When it comes to higher education, a lot of intergenerational variables gain importance as for many Black Americans universities are unaffordable and inaccessible.** In 2018, the United Negro College Fund (UNCF) (Bridges 2018) reported on the

low retention rates of Black students across the nation, with 45.9% of Black students completing their degrees in six years, the lowest rate compared to other races and ethnicities. Black men were singled out here with the lowest completion rate at 40%, which is partially since 65% of African American college students must balance pursuing a degree with full-time work and family responsibilities due the lack of intergenerational support and resources. Studies also refer to the lack of a quality education which results in “inequities in high school graduation, college enrollment, graduation rates and degree attainment” (Jr., Nichols and Pilar 2021).

With the schools in the United States being so tightly connected to space, bound by a system of school districts, it would be expected for education to naturally intersect with other space-defined aspects of segregation. Primary and secondary education cannot be seen as disassociated from the districts where people have their homes unless they have the financial means. Thus, educational opportunities are highly segregated since children attend school with children who look similar to them. Emily Richmond (2012) claims that schools are more segregated today than during the late 1960s when segregation laws were no longer in force. Interviewees referred to the opportunity for “kids [going] to integrated schools” as “transformative in early childhood years” (Interview 5). Studies also refer to the lack of a quality education which results in “inequities in high school graduation, college enrollment, graduation rates and degree attainment” (Jr., Nichols and Pilar 2021). Our participants share that an overarching explanation for many disparities is that *school curricula* and the education system overall is “based on the White middle class” (Focus Group 5) experience. These ideals do not represent whole communities and cities, do not integrate with other experiences, and therefore underperform the social power of schooling to prevent crime and violence and in keeping communities safe.

When it comes to higher education, a lot of intergenerational variables gain importance as for many Black Americans universities are unaffordable and inaccessible. In 2018, the United Negro College Fund (UNCF) (Bridges 2018) reported on the low retention rates of Black students across the nation, with 45.9% of Black students completing their degrees in six years, the lowest rate compared to other races and ethnicities. Black men were singled out here with the lowest completion rate at 40%, which is partially since 65% of African American college students must balance pursuing a degree with full-time work and family responsibilities due the lack of intergenerational support and resources. Our participants share that *student loan debt* is a barrier for many to enter colleges, and also to those who have completed a degree. **This debt impacts their post-university futures because it burdens people who then are unable to accumulate wealth after obtaining a degree, therefore reinforcing the cycle spatial segregation in housing.**

This lack of quality education also radiates in pre-K (Dorn, et al. 2020) and afterschool programs (Hynes and Sanders 2011). In a survey commissioned by the nonprofit organization Afterschool Alliance (2021), data demonstrates that the number of Black children in afterschool programs declined from 2.4 million in 2014 to just 1.5 million by 2021, partially due to barriers including cost, access, and transportation. “Black parents say afterschool programs are doing stellar work in helping meet many of their children’s academic, social/emotional and other needs” says the report, “[b]ut investments in afterschool have not kept up with demand, and that puts millions of children and youth at *risk*” (Afterschool Alliance 2021). The risk

element is specifically what arises in our participants' commentary. In their responses, disparities in education enable disparities in crime and violence which then links to discrepancies in how the justice system treats Black men in particular. By the same logic, equalizing opportunities in education protect Black men from the violence of the streets and dangerous scenarios by building busy, mentored, and guided opportunities.

Pre- and after-school programs are viewed by our participants as also important ways to protect young boys from being exposed to crime and gang violence. Crime and gang violence abound in parts of Chicago where communities of color live, with one interviewee sharing that their "children have never ridden a bike in their own neighborhood... [because] they're shooting outside" (Focus Group 3). The intensity of coordinating to protect Black boys from violence, crime, and the justice system is illustrated with this example:

I have a friend who is a Black woman who has two sons... they live in the heart of Englewood. What she has done to keep her kids safe is grade school, she paid for Catholic school, so they went to Catholic school. She drove them to school and paid for somebody to pick them up and bring them home so they avoided the neighborhood that way... In the summertime, they were in camp, in basketball. She kept them busy because the alternative is the streets; and the neighborhood that they live in, Englewood, will swallow them up if they don't have... anything to occupy their mind.

Black men in Focus Group 8 pointed out the "lack of parental or some parental influence in the lives of children" as "there's nobody holding these kids accountable on any level" (Focus Group 8). Thus, educational programs (school, pre- and after-school programs, summer programs, and park activities) are seen as potentially bridging gaps by decreasing kids' chances to cross-paths with crime and gang violence where they can become prey for the justice system to take these matters into its hands thereafter. For the programs that do exist, however, they are *little promoted or marketed*. A participant explains how

there are a plethora of programs out here. They do not do a good job of *marketing* themselves to the people in the community, to the people who really need them... I'm going to give you one example because I used to work for the One Summer Chicago program. Everybody used to say how do you get into One [when] I signed my child up... What they don't tell you is that the city contracts with a lot of these social service agencies in the neighborhoods, in the communities... They try to get community social service agencies from all sides of the city... [and] they contract with them to get these kids. They don't tell people "listen, go to that place over in your community here". **The city does this city a disservice because they do not market properly.**

Interviewees, however, also exposed a wide range of disparities in education which hinders the educational and protective functions where children can gain skills and mature socially. These *low and unequal funding and investments* in schools seclude and underprivilege areas in Chicago. Participants share that disparities are widened by the public schools' *lottery admission systems* that are highly competitive and push parents to send their children to private or charter schools instead, as well as *selective enrollment* schools which provide a select few students of color with an academically advanced college preparatory experience. Both options

create a competitive system where these schools are highly valued and schools are viewed as lower quality.



*Note: Crispus Elementary is a Chicago Public School (CPS), which was one of 50 CPS schools that shut down in 2013. Image by Steven Kevil.*

Our literature synthesis (Veliu Ashiku, Price, et al. 2022, 18) drew the readers' attention to the unique links between crime, violence, and the justice system, particularly through expanding on the socio-segregationist nature of the justice system and law enforcement in the United States which results with several hundreds of Black people being shot to death and the rate of fatal police shootings among Black Americans being much higher than that for any other ethnicity, standing at 42 fatal shootings per million (Statistica 2022). The issue of incarceration was also reviewed, with the United States having the highest rate of incarceration in the world, and a hyper-disproportionate number of Black prisoners compared to the rest of the population which creates a self-enforcing cycle of socio-spatial segregation through tightly networked systems of laws, policies, customs, and institutions beyond courts, prisons, or police into, for example, opportunities for employment (Alexander 2010). While the literature synthesis took a predominantly reactive approach to crime, violence, and the justice system, the information from our participants took proactive and preventative approaches to thinking about socio-spatial segregation as manifested in crime, violence, and the justice system by thinking about this knot tightness depends on education.

To be sure, the four knots of socio-spatial combinations are not the only possible combinations. For example, education, childcare, and the justice system might very well present a unique combination; housing, transit infrastructure, and environment could also add the aspect of employment. The above four knots were the ones that were most prominent among our participants during the Summer of 2022. Other combinations emerged but were less shared experiences between participants. While these combinations appear quite locked, undoubtedly issues of the time can impact prominence. These analyses reflect life experiences emerging from more than two years of COVID-19 and racial reckoning in Chicago. The examination of these knots underscores challenges identified in the literature synthesis (Veliu Ashiku, Price, et al. 2022).

### *From partial answers to intersectional solutions*

The challenges identified above in crossroads of several dimensions of identity are the most prevalent ones that emerged from the interviews and focus groups. Corresponding to the challenges exposed above, this subsection touches upon existing solutions that are built on reductionist notions which see them as isolated rather than knotted. We list the current approaches, tools, and programs mentioned by our participants that are currently in place. We also share solutions from the participants that aim to loosen the interconnected knots in ways that could work to eradicate socio-spatial segregation and its disparate impacts on communities and its members.

Many reductionist approaches address challenges from *top-down*. Participants express that this approach cannot work since their representatives are not sufficiently attuned to these issues. Participants pointed out how *city politics* and aldermen control *zoning*, *gerrymander*, *lack government accountability*, are *corrupt*, *unstable*, and *fail to continue policies*. Participants expressed lack of trust in governmental institutions, sharing that “[t]he city does not work for us”, adding that “historically, it has been set up that way. Whenever you have a man that is White, comes from a certain neighborhood, has a certain mindset... you’re going to have that” (Focus Group 3). “[T]he only color that matters in the City of Chicago” said one participant, “is green, because they just don’t care. They will do anything if it gets them what they want as far as finances are concerned” (Focus Group 1).

**"[t]he city does not work for us"**

Participants’ opinions on whether the city of Chicago has done enough are represented well by this quote:

For the City of Chicago, I think what makes it so difficult is [that] they’ve gotten away with, for years, letting the minorities fend for themselves because of our community, because we came in as survivors. We scraped. We were the ones who... got a dresser from a garbage bin because you make ends meet... and yeah, the City of Chicago, it would be nice if they help people, Italians, Albanians, whatever ethnicity coming into the city, because right now... it’s kind of like everybody kind of fend for themselves. (Focus Group 2)

Participants did provide a generous list of reliable and trusted non-governmental organizations (NGO-s), particularly non-profit ones. NGO-s offered *bottom-up* approaches including raising much-needed awareness. Some interviewees volunteered for some of these organizations and initiatives because there are “organizations that help those, but we’ve got to help them too” (Focus Group 8). Several interviewees, however, traced down the spillover of distrust into NGOs versus government programs into the aforementioned lack of good promotion and marketing of programs offered by state institutions. As one interviewee shares,

[T]here’s an issue of promoting, getting resources to help because you see not-for-profits working on initiatives such as that, from a private sector you see that. But, as a city, the city can serve as a mechanism to get these groups together. There could be more involvement, but



I don't know if then politics play into it, and there's distrust in that, which could be an element of why then they say no, we're not going to work through the city... We're going to support this not-for-profit *versus* supporting an initiative from the city where you feel like is that money is really being well spent. Theirs is sort of a negative connotation of any governmental jobs where they take so much time, and they're not efficient... (Focus Group 2)

Beyond participants contributions there indeed exist ethical and competency concerns about NGOs (Delahunty 2021). The overall impression, however, is that NGOs are better in bringing in community perspectives as well as building bridges between grassroots organizations and local and national-level structures and processes by applying their knowledge of local contexts to strengthen their roles in empowerment and social transformation (Banks, Hulme and Edwards 2015, Boser and Baffour 2017). A knowledge of contexts also entails awareness of the complex nature of manifestations of socio-spatial segregation and the way that they intersect. “[Y]ou can throw all the resources to it, and try to make it equitable, and fair all you want” said an interviewee, “[but] you’ve got to be able to change the mindset” (Focus Group 3).

#### *Childcare, employment, and healthcare*

Discussions with participants revealed that Black women were uniquely affected by disparities in healthcare, opportunities for employment, and childcare. As a participant says, “because a lot of Black women are mothers. Everything always boils down to our children” (Focus Group 1). **They also revealed that there are programs and tools in place that aim to address the segregated aspects of their experiences, though they are not sufficient.** They lack quality and/or they treat these knotted challenges as isolated issues.

Treating childcare as isolated from access misses the opportunity for solutions. Women referred to programs such as the aforementioned *IAFC* which offers early learning and care opportunities for children. *IAFC* is a not-for-profit charitable organization with a focus on assisting low-income families in Cook County by providing subsidized child support to parents and enabling them to take on job opportunities. In Illinois, however, childcare subsidies for low-income families come from the Illinois *Child Care Assistance Program (CCAP)*, one of the programs administrated by *IAFC*, which is funded through the state and federal governments. *CCAP* is a derivative of the *Child Care and Development Block Grant (CCDBG)*, also called the *Child Care and Development Fund*, and the primary source of United States federal subsidized funding for childcare subsidies founded in 1990. *CCDBG* is notoriously known for maintaining wide bipartisan support in the face of increased polarizations in the country, including here the most recent *COVID-19* crises. Though in 2018 *CCDBG* received a historic increase in funding (Alliance for Early Success n.d., Afterschool Alliance 2021, Afterschool Alliance 2021, Alexander 2010) and it changed program eligibility rules from 6 to 12 months, parents have reported frustrations because, “in order to qualify for the subsidy, for instance, the parents must first have a job lined up and a provider as well” (W. Harms 2016). Participants shared that the places offered in these programs “fill up so fast [and] there’s never really any room to go anywhere else because that’s all you got” (Focus Group 1). As Harms (2016) claims, “[n]ationally, program funding does not meet demand, and in Illinois in particular, there have been recent changes to the eligibility rules for childcare assistance that

have reduced the size of the program”. While participants mentioned other alternatives like Jack & Jill (<https://www.jackandjilledu.com/about>), they expressed that it is rooted on class and affordable only to layers of society that can afford to pay. Stipends come up as another tool built to assist Black mothers. An example of stipends would be the Emergency Child Care Stipend Program (Illinois Department of Human Services 2020), but they only target specific groups such as essential workers, and as participants say, they “know it’s not enough” (Focus Group 1).

Intersectional solutions to these challenges offered by participants involve more resources for *parental leave*. They refer to “other countries” where people “take a significant amount of maternity leave whether you’re a man or a woman to have the time with your kid. But, here, they don’t do that because you get fired. Then, if you get fired, then you can’t run your household” (Focus Group 1). Participants suggest businesses should be provided incentives to support parental leave by dividing funds for welfare, the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP), cash benefits, and Medicaid “in a way that there is built-in time” and “if you’re working, and you’ve been at this job for x amount of time, and you have a baby, then you can take x amount of time off for maternity, and you’re guaranteed to be able to go back into your job without it being an issue” (Focus Group 1).

For middle childhood and adolescence, participants suggest building more recreational and educational places such as *parks* in secluded spaces in the cities where a dominant majority of Black mothers live. Interviewees share that the best parks are in the White neighborhoods. There is such “competition in the City of Chicago if you want to send your kid to any of these parks... because the park is beautiful. They have all the amenities” (Focus Group 3). The interviewees also express that creating parks in the areas where they live “will probably be segregated” because “White folks don’t want to come and have their kids [there]. They don’t even want to sit next to us in school, but, at least, our kids would have the access to the exact same thing” (Focus Group 3). **Safe and accessible public parks with quality amenities are very important resources for children and their parents**, including the parks districts’ summer camps. These important resources keep kids engaged and protected from crime and violence.



Note: Image of Wrightwood Park Playground taken in in 1985, via archives from the Chicago Public Library.

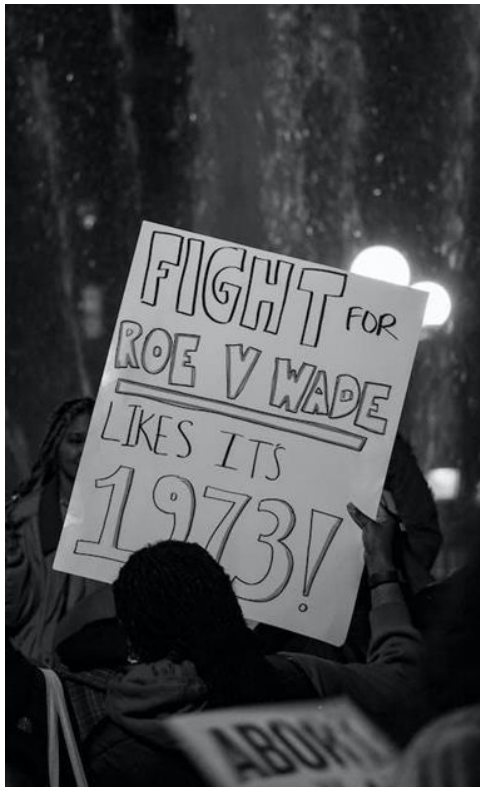
Three major aspects about healthcare came from conversations with participants and that bear importance particularly in reference to Black mothers: ensuring *universal* and *equitable health* coverage, improving *services* through working on *biases*, and removing barriers between Black women and *reproductive rights*. Interviewees shared that “[w]e need universal equitable healthcare” because the way that things stand right now is that “if you don’t have money, you don’t get access to good healthcare” (Focus Group 5). Participants explain how inaccessible healthcare also makes healthcare more expensive and unaffordable because “when you have a product, and you don’t have it as valuable, and you don’t have a lot of it, it’s price goes up” (Focus Group 8). Universal healthcare breaks this cycle. To get to universal healthcare, participants suggest “a value-added proposition to get it done” because “you’ve got to figure out the economics, the dollars about it” (Focus Group 5). Specific suggestions on how to materialize universal healthcare were not brought up by the participants, but experts suggest options<sup>7</sup> (ARPA) permanent, closing the Medicaid coverage gap, reducing deductibles and out-of-pocket costs, allowing more workers to become eligible for subsidized marketplace plans, mounting targeted outreach and enrollment efforts to reach the remaining uninsured, lowering immigration-related barriers to coverage, and promoting more equitable treatment of enrollees in commercial insurance plans (Radley, et al. 2021).

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<sup>7</sup> The American Rescue Plan Act was put into place initially in March of 2021. This act dispersed funds to individuals and businesses. This economic stimulus package was sent out with the goal to reduce the economic impact of the COVID-19 pandemic (Haagensen 2022).

Poor healthcare services are yet another section that, though uniquely affecting Black mothers, affects underprivileged communities overall. The difference in the quality of service is so stark when it comes to Black women so that interviewees see the gender and race attributes as overpowering that of SES. For example, one interviewee shares that

it's different for Black women because you're literally talking about a life-or-death situation, and it doesn't matter what income level you are. Beyonce and Serena Williams are some of the most famous and wealthiest people in the world. Both of them nearly died while giving childbirth. I think that's the impact of slavery, of segregated hospitals, of doctors thinking that Black people are less than, of doctors experimenting on Black women. (Interview 8)



*Note: Image taken June 2022 in a New York protest, by Emma Guliani via Pexels.*

For this to change, hospitals need to offer better services and rectify unconscious biases (Focus Group 8), including those entwined into algorithms used to manage the health of populations (Obermeyer, et al. 2018). Omeisha and Kiernanb (2020) explore options of reducing biases and improving maternal care and outcomes for Black women in the USA. They suggest (1) clinical checklists prompting providers to act through screenings, surveillance, or interventions; and (2) expanding implicit bias training and education to promote awareness of how bias affects Black women's lives.

In addition, including an historical dimension to discussions on reproductive justice is crucial. An interviewee draws special attention here to "the abortion conversation" which, as they say, "it's different for Black women" (Interview 8). Locating childbearing in suppressive practices during slavery and Jim Crow laws, early pregnancies, and motherhood in women of color are genealogically explained. **The reproductive autonomy of Black women has historically been**

**compromised, and their fight for their own bodies continues to date.** For some, says Johnson (2022), "overturning Roe would mark the latest effort to take away what generations of Black women have seldom had control of their own bodies". Cineas (2022) considers that "Black women are more likely to live in areas where it's harder to access contraception. They get abortions at the highest rates compared to women of other races, due to high rates of unintended pregnancy". **Having access to safe procedures of reproductive health can radiate into other intersected socio-spatial manifestation of segregation, particularly childcare and employment. Agency over reproductive health decisions is imperative to un-design legacies of the past that find their way back into Black women's lives.**

### *Hate speech, media, and politics*

There are programs, tools, and procedures in place to help increase awareness of and fight hate speech in daily encounters, media promotion of xenophobia, and political instrumentalization of ‘otherness’. However, responses to these challenges do not incorporate the intersection of immigration status, religion, language, and race, and they therefore risk on treating hate speech, xenophobia in media, and political isolationism as disconnected manifestations of socio-spatial segregation. Treating these aspects as isolated leads also to responses who are either deficient, dysfunctional, or underutilized. The most prominent groups from our research include Muslim immigrants as well as Albanian and Italian second-generation immigrants with experience with limited English language skills.



*Note: Image taken November 2019 in Washington, D.C. by Saul Loeb via Getty Images.*

At a political level, *changing immigration laws* to legalize undocumented immigrants came up as a potential response to addressing xenophobia which can sprinkle down its effects in media and daily encounters. As current policies in place, participants referred to the Development, Relief, and Education for Alien Minors (DREAM) Act and the Consideration of Deferred

Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA)<sup>8</sup>. Therefore, interviewees discuss that “[t]here’s a lot of immigration laws that can be changed to benefit people in this country that are not being looked at right now because of the roadblocks that are set up between parties in government” (Interview 6). Section 245(i) of the Immigration and National Act (INA) enacted by the U.S. Congress in 1994 permitted certain individuals who were otherwise ineligible for adjustment of status to pay a penalty fee while remaining in the United States. To be eligible for a green card under this section, however, an immigrant must have been named in an immigration application on or before April 30, 2001. This means that, as of date, no one is currently eligible to apply for a green card under section 245(i). Interviewees referred to DACA and 245(i) as tools of immigration reforms that “would have a huge impact on people in our communities”

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<sup>8</sup> DACA is an immigration policy that protects some immigrants who came to the United States as children from deportation. The DREAM act is an immigration policy that requires immigrants to apply for residency based on what age they were and when they immigrated to the United States (Gogol 2022). The former, though introduced several times since 2001, was never approved by the U.S. Congress. The latter, however, went through a political roller coaster which completely neglected its effects on the turmoil, instability, and imagery of immigrants in the United States. Introduced by President Barack Obama in 2012, DACA was planned to be phased out by President Donald Trump in 2018, only to be reinstated by President Joe Biden in 2021, but finally deemed as “unlawful” by a federal court of appeal in 2022 (Hackman Follow and Caldwell 2022).

as there are immigrants in the United States “absolutely no way of legalizing their status and that’s unfortunate” (Interview 6).

Interviewees also acknowledge that **immigration laws reforms are not sufficient, and that immigrants and refugees need to be helped in “find[ing] jobs and they need help as far as we set them up with resources and learning the *language* and all that because it’s really difficult”** (Focus Group 5). Muslim participants also referred to some existing organizations that factor in religion when dealing with immigrants. They mentioned Partners of Refugees in Illinois Disability Employment (PRIDE) which runs through the University of Illinois Chicago (UIC) and connects refugees to resources such as food, education, and job opportunities. PRIDE broadens up its intersectional approach to include people with disabilities. Along similar lines, GirlForward was brought up, a community of support dedicated to creating and enhancing opportunities for girls who have been displaced by conflict and persecution. Participants also suggested volunteering as a response to the lack of resources for supporting immigrants, though this is a very limited and not a robust approach as it requires quite often language skills and it relies on the good will of people which is often unpredictable. A respondent, for example, was volunteering for PRIDE because they “know their language, Arabic, and the culture” (Focus Group 9) they said. Political decisions, therefore, are considered as more effective.

How politics fuel hate speech in daily encounters and in media was first-hand felt by the participants. As mentioned above, Trump’s presidency seemed to have a direct effect on increased islamophobia felt by Muslim women in particular, not just in their media representations but also their day-to-day encounters. However, participants also believe that **the media is uniquely situated to prevent the political instrumentalization of segregation.** They say that “if the media stops those stereotypes, or those politicians... if they would give Muslim women more opportunity to be in the media... then people would be more educated and aware of our culture and more sensitive instead of looking at us like outsiders” (Focus Group 9). They share that “even passive representation is important” and “if the media would start portraying or allowing the Muslim people to be portrayed in a positive way, then you would see more examples of Muslim women who have a more active role in society” (Focus Group 9). They point out that including Muslims in decision-making is more difficult to achieve while visual representations of “a Muslim woman wearing a headscarf, or even a sheikh man in a turban on a news channel” (Focus Group 9) would help break stereotypes.

**"if they would give Muslim women more opportunity to be in the media... then people would be more educated and aware of our culture and more sensitive instead of looking at us like outsiders"**

When it comes to the in-group segregationist tendencies and stereotypes among immigrants themselves mainly due to sociophonetic differentiations, the interviewees did not have any expectations for state institutions to intervene. They considered these in-group problems. Participants discussed their individual activities such as building schools “to try to

get our children with other Albanians who either just immigrated or that have been here, and that way, they can at least connect through language” (Focus Group 2). They explain how “we have camps for the kids, we have 5K runs that we do for them, just fun activities that keep them involved, and get them connected to other Albanian kids as well. We promote education. We give scholarships, things like that” (Focus Group 2). While attempts of preserving one’s lingual identity can help members of the same collective overcome internal conflicts and divergences, it fuels the fear of assimilating and fosters tendencies to preserve identity and unification within the same lingual umbrella at the expense of differentiating from ‘others’ with whom contrasts are bigger than the different sounds that a community uses to communicate. An interviewee explains how

Little Italy now is kind of not even Little Italy anymore... It’s hard for me to imagine what it’s going to be like in 20 years from now, and I would love to show my kids this is like where the pizza is, all that. But, I don’t think that’s going to exist 20 years from now because, in the past 10 years, it’s gone from completely Italian to now... half of the families have moved out, which is not a problem, but it’s just like “there’s my identity kind of slipping away”, and all the things that I was comfortable with, as a kid, now, they’re leaving and gone. (Focus Group 2)

One could argue that to do away with the fear or the concern of assimilation could, potentially, also help in increasing contact and communication between groups who differ from the local dominant cultural norms due to their immigration status and skin complexion. However, lack of trust in state institutions or local organizations leads to solutions where “we seek out to fix it ourselves. We don’t wait for, we don’t ask. We kind of take, in a way”, adding that “I don’t know if there are any policies, if there are any initiatives that the city is working on” (Focus Group 2). Instead, participants share the opinion that funding desired to address these issues is instead “lining someone’s pockets” (Focus Group 2). They therefore hold the belief that exposing “long bureaucracy or the notoriously known corruption component” would be a solution for addressing many of these intersected manifestations of socio-spatial segregation. Moreover, if state authorities focused on protecting the cultures of immigrants rather than politicizing them and engraving it into hate speech and media would be effort better spent. One interviewee shares that their “family always joke[s] that things ran smoother when the mob ran the city” (Focus Group 2) because they protected cultures instead of politicized them.

## *Housing, transit infrastructure, and environment*



*Note: Image of a Chicago train holding station with buildings in the background, taken by Constanze Dier via Pexels.*

Housing is a major aspect of socio-spatial segregation and a knot where many other interconnected aspects reinforce and reproduce each other, as well as where new dimensions such as environmental justice become more relevant. It is an aspect covered extensively by research and dominates the political arena. Covered less is how policies aimed at addressing challenges with affordable and accessible housing depend on and interconnect with other segregated domains in the cities, such as transit infrastructure and environment on the basis of race and

SES. Our participants abundantly confirmed how their race and SES intersect with the tight knot of neighborhood, transit infrastructures, transportation services, and environmental conditions (particularly in terms of the quality of air).

**A critical component that tightens this knot of manifestations of socio-spatial segregation is the lack of investment.** Lack of investment freezes the SES of the people living in secluded city areas and prevents upward mobility. Existing programs and tools mentioned by participants could promote either investments infrastructure or family-level wealth adjustments to bolster community investments. Government programs such as *baby bonds*, *INVEST South/West*, or *Neighborhood Opportunity Fund* are “very important to close the racial wealth gap [and therefore support home ownership]” (Interview 8).

Baby Bonds were first introduced at the federal level by Senator Cory Booker and U.S. Representative Ayanna Pressley in the American Opportunity Accounts Act<sup>9</sup> and they represent publicly funded child trust accounts seeded with \$1000-3000 for every child born, with additional deposits every year based on family income. Unlike “policies such as the reductions in capital gains and corporate tax rates that... have caused wealth disparities to widen” (Markoff, et al. 2022), these bonds are envisioned to have a major impact on closing the racial wealth gap. In three steps, it would make investment possible for families: (1) government makes a deposit for each child, (2) funds are invested by the government on children’s behalf, (3) at adulthood, recipients use those assets to acquire wealth.

Interviewees also expressed support and caution for some Chicago initiatives. Launched by the Chicago Mayor,<sup>10</sup> Invest South/West invests \$1.4 billion in communities and infrastructure in the South and West side communities in Chicago that have been historically

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<sup>9</sup> People eligible for the American Opportunity Act receive assistance on educational expenses for the first four years of education after high school. The maximum annual credit is \$2,500 per eligible student (Internal Revenue Services 2022).

<sup>10</sup> Mayor Lori Lightfoot was elected for office on April 2, 2019. She is the 56<sup>th</sup> Mayor of Chicago. She is the first Black woman who has been elected as well as the first member of the LGBT+ community to be elected to the mayor’s office in Chicago (Wade 2020).



underfunded and redlined. The City of Chicago Neighborhood Opportunity Fund finances commercial and cultural projects in neighborhoods that lack private investment such as in Chicago's West, Southwest and South Sides by applying downtown development revenue. Other pilot projects such as *Chicago Resilient Communities Pilot* which will distribute more than \$30 million via \$500 monthly payments to 5,000 low-income Chicago households that experienced economic hardship during the COVID-19 pandemic were also mentioned as expected to make "a huge difference on a family's well-being" (Interview 9). Yet, participants pointed out that these initiatives could "create other dynamics that we need to be mindful of in the form of gentrification and pricing people out of neighborhoods, and there are other policies that need to be coupled" (Interview 9).

The funds allocated to these initiatives fall well short of expectations. Interview 8 shared that "we need to start making massive capital injections, either \$36 trillion on the high, \$21 trillion on the low in order for us to be able to just have the resources to be able to deal with these issues of segregation and the racial wealth gap". These injections were mentioned in reference to reparations. Participants also point out the need for alignment between "different levels of government [and how they] invest in communities" (Interview 5) so plans can succeed and foster new ideas on equitable investments that address the knot of housing, transit infrastructure, and environment.

Housing is a unique point of concern for our participants. They extensively elaborated on current policies in place and ideas for the future. Besides touching upon assessment tools for affordable and subsidized housing and its unequitable distribution, participants also expanded on *discrimination, homelessness, homeownership, property taxes, reparations, zoning*, and others. They suggest that "thinking about what types of projects and what locations we prioritize providing funding for" (Interview 5) is critical before establishing any programs or initiatives that aim to address affordable segregated housing. We take the next several pages to discuss the myriad of policies and practices that participants shared with us. Some of these ideas are in-place in Chicago while others are ideas that they heard about in other cities.

Participants discussed how California has the *Housing Element Law* and the *Regional Housing Needs Allocation (RHNA)*. The Housing Element Law requires that all cities and counties in California engage in detailed planning for their residential needs by including housing as an element of their comprehensive plans (Lewis 2003, Lewis 2003). RHNA complements it by requiring projections about "how much housing local jurisdictions need to plan for, and then in their Housing Element they develop a plan to actually help spur support and development" (Interview 5). Interview 5 explains the operationalization of the first step: "our AFFH [Affirmatively Furthering Fair Housing] law requires that local jurisdictions... do outreach in an equitable way, analyze the fair housing issues in their jurisdictions, come up with what the contributing factors are to segregation, and then develop specific policies and programs that will address those contributing factors" (Interview 5). Such an approach speaks of *selective funding*. This differs from the "black box of just send us whatever" (Interview 1) proposal on affordable housing in Chicago: Such an approach speaks of *selective funding*, unlike "a black box of just send us whatever" (Interview 1) proposal on affordable housing. This is how it is done currently in Chicago:

When we put out a funding request for proposals to fund, we... expect to see proposals in areas that are gentrifying where people are losing the chance to live there and stay there; we expect to see proposals in low-income disinvested communities where we want to be a catalyst for investment... We don't want to only fund in places where we have traditionally had the biggest presence. (Interview 1)

A complementary tool for this work is the *Racial Equity Impact Assessment* (REIA) on the *Low-Income Housing Tax Credits* (LIHTC)<sup>11</sup> programs. LIHTC is the biggest source for affordable rental housing through issuing tax credits for the acquisition, rehabilitation, or new construction of rental housing for lower-income households. REIAs assist in understanding “how we, ourselves, are funding affordable housing across the city and what changes we need to make in order to get to more equitable outcomes” (Interview 1). Recommendations derived from the REIAs are incorporated in the *Qualified Action Plan* (QAP) which sets forth the rules under which the City offers affordable housing development funding in the form of federal LIHTC. Other assessment tool for affordable housing were brought to the table, such as the “*Fair Housing Task Force*, which is a group of researchers that have developed these opportunity maps that... measure access to resources across neighborhoods or categorize neighborhoods into higher and lower resource categories to understand how resource hoarding is playing out across communities” (Interview 5). Another crucial instrument is the *Chicago Coalition for the Homeless* (CCH) method for quantifying doubled-up homelessness, looking at populations that do “not officially counted as homeless, but [they]’re sleeping on someone’s couch” (Interview 1).

Assessing the needs for affordable housing is a first critical step in building policies and developing approaches to more efficiently target populations in need. Providing equitable affordable housing and fostering homeownership are other complex milestones. References to policies in place to provide affordable housing involve:

- *Subsidized housing* through Housing Choice Vouchers (HCV) also known as Section 8 which targets very low-income families, Alternative Housing Voucher Program (AHVP) for assisting single adults with disabilities who are below the age of 60, Veterans Affairs Supportive Housing (VASH) for assisting homeless veterans.
- *Counseling services* such as the Mobility Counseling Program which assists families in the HCV program to move into Mobility Areas (areas with poverty levels below 20% and low violent crime rates) within Chicago; transformation plans such as the Chicago Housing Authority (CHA) Plan for Transformation on building or renovating 25,000 new units of affordable housing.
- *Hotel conversions* into Single Room Occupancy (SRO) housing such as “the Home Key program, which took hotels and motels and converted them pretty quickly into either interim or permanent supportive housing” (Interview 5).
- *Safe parking* programs such as Safe Parking LA which provides safe lots for people whose only source of shelter is their vehicle.

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<sup>11</sup> The Low-Income Housing Tax Credit incentivizes the development of affordable housing for low-income households by subsidizing the cost of construction for developers who devote a percentage of new development as low income housing. (Tax Policy Center: Urban Institute & Brookings Institution 2020)

- *Tax credit programs* such as Illinois Affordable Housing Tax Credit (IAHTC) which supports private investment in affordable housing by providing qualified with a one-time tax credit on their Illinois state income tax equal to 50 percent of the value of the donation.
- *Transitional justice* measures such as the Evanston Local Reparations and the Restorative Housing Program for home repairs or down payments on property funded through donations and revenue sales of recreational marijuana, and others. Down payments on property are also already a step forward for the switch to homeownership among disadvantaged communities.
- *Housing tenures* such as housing cooperatives with member-based ownership “where people are putting in at a modest level some investments, but they have some ownership over that community” (Interview 4). Homeownership, however, was significantly less elaborated on than rental and affordable housing, which is an indicator that it is not of priority and that are other matters that take precedence.

Participants also cited a variety of challenges with the above ideas. Some of these challenges entail:

- *Discrimination* on housing vouchers, particularly Section 8 vouchers, with interviewees reporting that their “parents who own property, never accepted Section 8 because of it’s a class thing [and] there was always a stigma attached to it” (Focus Group 3) as well as challenges of being allocated funding through a lottery system due to limited availability.
- *Delay of plans and manipulation of data*, referring to the CHA Plan for Transformation which was not only delayed in its 10 years target, but also considered to have fallen short of because “the math doesn’t add up” says Dumke (2022) as “[t]he agency boosted the numbers by including apartments that aren’t finished yet or had no direct connection to the public housing communities the CHA promised to redevelop”.
- *Short-term measures*, referring to the hotel conversions into SROs have been met with pushback since they are “not typically set up for long-term or even for families or to meet everyone’s needs; and [they] may not be in all the locations folks are looking for access to elementary schools” (Interview 5), and this goes also for safe parking programs.
- *Incentivizing the wrong type of housing*, referring to the tax credit programs which are deemed as not “necessarily the best thing since vanilla ice cream” (Interview 5). The reasons for this are explained by interviewees as follows:

It doesn’t create the right type of housing... it incentivizes studios and one-bedroom units. You always are constantly talking about leveraging and the ones, the developers that are best able to leverage, are not necessarily representative of the communities that need the housing... [W]hen you are asking JP Morgan Chase, the most woke organization, to do all this... that does not end up flying well because they have a different set of interests and probably stakeholders. (Interview 5)

- *Misplacement of funds*, referring to the Evanston reparation, which though considered an important step forward to acknowledging and accounting for history, have prompted questions about whether funding housing, as opposed to direct payments, can be a satisfactory compensation for slavery at all. “I just think there’s so many housing programs that we already have that does that” (Interview 8) shares an interviewee, “I think it should be direct checks... because reparation is not a gift. It’s a debt”. The interviewee further states: “When the slave master sold the slave, he got paid. I think that should be the same way for Black people” (Interview 8).

Alternatives offered by participants involve:

- *Tightening up rent control* regulations while expressing distress about the Rent Control Preemption Act [or the “ban on rent control” (Interview 4)].
- Amending the *tenant selection criteria* to factor in emergency situations, such as domestic violence, citing here in particular the Violence Against Women Act (VAWA) which offers transitional housing grants and which “a lot of housing providers may not really know about, or even tenants” (Interview 5).
- Dealing with *lending discrimination* which “impacts Black and LatinX wealth” (Interview 4); *suing*, referencing here the Inclusive Communities Project (ICP) non-profit which won its Supreme Court case against Texas with it ruling that those affected by discriminatory housing decisions can sue under the Fair Housing Act (FHA) even if they are not able to prove the bias was intentional (Lindenberger 2015).
- Creating *vacant lands strategies* “thinking about not just rental housing, but entry-level ownership opportunities, income property opportunities for people in those neighborhoods” (Interview 7) and taxing vacant units as (a strategy to get more units back on the market) (Interview 5).
- Maintaining *staff continuity* for roles that are actively engaged in drafting, executing, and assessing housing policies “involving staff at levels that tend to be the kind of staff that stay for 5, 10, 15, 20 years [and] are not leaving because a new mayor comes in” (Interview 1).
- Creating “*variations on affordable rental housing*” (Interview 4).
- Supporting map *visualizations* of housing segregation such as the “Folded Map Project” that are “looking at the maps and the geographies, first the buildings, the houses...” (Interview 3).
- Challenging current *zoning* structures by:
  - Eliminating *ordinances* “that prohibit people from running their property... and prevent[ing] the AirBNB’s... but that also can cut off access to people who rent” (Interview 2).
  - Fixing “the *Affordable Requirements Ordinance [ARO]*<sup>12</sup>” which requested developers to set aside ten percent of their proposed units as affordable housing

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<sup>12</sup> Requires residential developments with ten or more units to either have a percentage of affordable units or pay fees that the city uses to fund other affordable housing developments. In 2021, the percentage of units that

“because it’s actually not getting at the population that needs affordable housing the most” (Interview 4).

- Getting rid of the *Zoning Advisory Councils*<sup>13</sup> “with the stroke of a pen because there’s no law which creates zoning advisory councils. It’s just one of these weird features of Chicago policy” (Interview 4) and with this also getting rid of the “aldermanic prerogative” to block family affordable housing developments.
- Overhauling the *Zoning Code* because “you’re going to continue to see those all-white enclaves unless there’s a meaningful change in the zoning code, that is looking at inequities, census tract ward by ward, and then deciding from there how the code should be shifted while at the same time making important investments and creating opportunities in those under-resourced communities” (Interview 4).

Overall, our participants deem insufficient and problematic current programs and policies, especially for affordable housing. They see them especially prone to deepening socio-spatial segregation rather than eradicating it. Interview 7 explains:

I feel that what we’re seeing now, especially in neighborhoods, mid-south neighborhoods like Brownsville where you have significant investment of subsidized rental housing – you have these two extremes and no middle. You have like the Polo Developments<sup>14</sup>, which are great and provide low, and to some extent, affordable rental housing. You have like the CHA plan for transformation replacement housing throughout Brownsville where Taylor used to be, and other developments used to be. And then, on the other marketing, you have the \$700,000 homes because the proximity of the lakefront... (Interview 7)

Others express that they’re “not for having large concentrations of poor people, or disadvantaged people, or challenged people warehoused in one location. [They] don’t think that works” (Focus Group 5). The interviewees, therefore, suggest initiatives such as the California Department of Public Health (CDPH) analysis that pull together “duration of life and other impacts, air pollution, health, and social factors to identify the most vulnerable areas of the city” (Interview 9). They are pointing out to tools which provide more complex analysis of the different segregated domains of the societies that they are living in, such as maps

where they’re overlaying other harms, a census tract map of the city of Chicago by race and by levels of poverty, and then they overlay flood maps, industrial parks, the number of trees in a community, COVID-19 rates... getting outside the *confines of it being just a housing issue with*

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had to be made into affordable housing increased in areas deemed in need. These areas are called “community preservation areas”. Fees for developers who decided not to provide housing and pay a fee instead also increased (City of Chicago 2023).

<sup>13</sup> Zoning Advisory Councils were initially established in 1921 by Herbert Hoover. Through these committees, zoning became an effective tool to reduce segregation in places nationwide (DeCelle 2017).

<sup>14</sup> A new subdivision is being developed of Naperville IL. There are 401 housing units are being built on 110 acres of land that used to house polo grounds. For the development to be approved, 20% of the homes have to be sold at 80-100% of the area’s median income (Staff 2022).

*just housing solutions*, and that’s important in terms of how to end residential segregation and to address the harms that stem from it, that continue to this day. (Interview 4)

Getting out the confines of it being just a housing issue means, indeed, looking at housing – and for that matter also other manifestations of socio-spatial segregation – as only and always knotted together.

**"getting outside the confines of it being just a housing issue with just housing solutions, and that’s important in terms of how to end residential segregation and to address the harms that stem from it"**

The participants’ insights into housing tightly connect to current and potential responses to environmental and transit infrastructure segregation. As expressed in Interview 9, “failed public housing policies... that took away many of the community elements that maybe folks had in previous neighborhoods... green space and whatnot” (Interview 9). New policies, like the *Chicago Air Quality Ordinance*, regulate the construction and expansion of certain facilities that create air pollution. It requires site plan review and approval by the Chicago Department of *Transportation* (CDOT), among others. This is considered to be “a step in the right direction” because it allies with the Chicago Department of Public Health (CDPH) to increase “compliance efforts making sure that these companies are abiding by the air quality rules” (Interview 9). Other commendable policies include the Chicago Transit Authority (CTA) plans for conversion to *an all-electric bus system* by 2040, as well as Seattle’s efforts “towards total electrification of our buildings [and] sustainability measures... when we build affordable housing” (Interview 10). But these cross-department policies can be “hard because not all the levers of all the different governments that end up funding certain programs have aligned” (Interview 10).

Participants spoke of *cumulative impact ordinances* adopted in New Jersey and introduced in Chicago that incorporate community-based environmental justice efforts. As the Illinois Environmental Council (2021) explains,

the bill would require facilities to receive local siting approval from the municipality prior to applying for an Illinois EPA air permit. This will provide community members with a formal process and forum to raise concerns about a proposed project’s location. It also requires facilities to engage with the community much earlier in the project development process by mandating a public meeting and presentation of an environmental impact analysis prior to applying for a permit from Illinois EPA [Environmental Protection Agency].

Similarly, there are *community action initiatives* “around getting industrial sites cleaned up” (Interview 9). But as Interview 9 explains, in a city like Chicago that is “starting to, from an economic perspective, position itself as a warehouse center... what that means is where those warehouses can go often and where the zoning works for them is in these industrial corridors...

further adding to poor air quality conditions in those areas”. Thus, zoning structures again arise as a crucial component to complex solutions.

**The lack of environmental justice which has traditionally affected communities of color, is related to public transportation as “backbone of our city, in particular for folks that are lower income and need to get around to different parts of the city”** (Interview 9). Interviewees spoke on CDOT’s efforts “to continue to improve the bus system [as] one of the most affordable ways to expand transportation coverage” for “neighborhoods that see higher commute times, lower incomes...communities of color” (Interview 9). Other specific initiatives are:

- “Bike Chicago” as an effort to distribute 5,000 free bikes and accessory equipment over the course of four years to Chicago residents;
- “Bus Ball” “where you actually build out the sidewalk and it makes it easier to board buses and safer for people to do so, but as well it speeds up the bus” (Interview 9);
- “Divvy” as the bicycle sharing system in the Chicago;
- “Vision Zero Network” which aims at eliminating traffic fatalities and severe injuries among all road users, “looking at making investments in bike lanes and pedestrian crossings across the city” (Interview 9), and others.



Note: Image taken by Amardeep Singh via Pexels.

More ambitious initiatives incorporate changing legislation, such as the *Connected Communities Ordinance* which seeks to create “jobs by catalyzing investment near transit, makes streets safer for all Chicagoans who walk, bike, drive or roll their wheelchair, and promotes affordable housing options near transit” (Office of the Mayor 2022). The Ordinance reflects *Chicago’s Equitable Transit-Oriented Development* (ETOD) policy plan as a

transactional joint initiative between Chicago’s Departments of Transportation, Housing and Public Health, the Chicago Transit Authority, Planning and Development, and other key stakeholders. This development model aims at increasing

transit ridership and more walkable communities, both of which reduce traffic congestion and greenhouse gas emissions, while also promoting public health... in areas near rail stations that are eligible for TOD benefits but that have not seen TOD project activity [and that] have 40% more residents of color, 23% more low-income residents and 16% more residents with a high school education or less than areas where TOD projects have occurred. (City of Chicago 2021)

As participants explain, this required “some zoning changes that kind of made things easier” (Interview 7) and overcoming “the pushback that [we] got from elected officials...in blocks that are single family homes only... at the suggestion that a two-flat or a three-flat could just pop up next to them” (Interview 1). Further ideas on achieving this which were given by interviewees involve *auto insurance reforms* which “we need to track it to make sure that it’s actually being more affordable for African Americans to be able to have” (Interview 8). Priority, however, is given to improving public transportation and “and that’s one way to make sure that you don’t need to have a car” (Interview 2). Increased investments in transit developments for historically underprivileged communities in the cities, also foster housing opportunities and healthier environments. “[T]ransportation ha[s] an impact on housing and jobs and the environment and all this.” (Interview 10). Without investments in transit developments, such initiatives risk further segregating cities by creating isolated pockets of concentrated affordable housing with low-quality environmental standards.

**"Transportation ha[s] an impact on housing and jobs and the environment and all this..."**

#### *Education, crime, violence, and the justice system*

**Affordable and accessible educative programs can help with reducing crime and violence in spaces where underprivileged communities live, and also impact the current inequities in how the justice system particularly treats men of color.** Current policies in place that aim to address these disparities have to do with new legislation, organizational policies, and community initiatives. Some are reactive and some are proactive.

Regarding the justice systems, participants spoke of *cash bail reform* and *reentry programs*. While cash bail systems prove successful at both maintaining public safety and reducing the harms of pretrial incarceration (Herring 2020), participants expressed concerns about “the no bail thing, and they’re saying people are losing their freaking minds out there. Here’s the person who robbed three people on the subway who gets to go home” (Focus Group 8). Thus, further considerations need to be described for “some of these things for no or low bail [to be] good decisions” (Focus Group 8). Participants also referred to the Chicago Department of Family and Support Services’ *Community Reentry Support Centers* reentry program which, “[i]f you’re exiting the carceral system, what can we be doing proactively to ensure that you can transition into a safe and quality place to live, which will do a lot to ensure you don’t end up back in the system” (Interview 1).

In addition to justice system measures, **participants stressed that gun control measures are essential in reducing crime and violence in these neighborhoods**, with many of them stating that “if you sell guns, sell them to the people that need them... [but] you just sell them to everybody, like these AK-47s, they sell them to 16-year-olds, 17-year-olds” (Focus Group 7). Current “gun laws pretty much favor the criminals” (Focus Group 8). On community policing, participants mentioned initiatives like:



- *CeaseFire*, a violence prevention program by the U.S. Department of Justice that focused on changing the behavior of a small number of selected community residents at high risk for being shot or being a shooter in the immediate future;
- *Moms Demand Action*, grassroots movement of Americans fighting for public safety measures that can protect people from gun violence by encouraging a culture of responsible gun ownership; or
- *Acclivus Inc.* as an organization of “violence interrupters” who “deal with gang intervention, so when someone gets shot because of some beef on social media, ex-gang members and ex-felons go out and they try to tamp down the response” (Focus Group 8), and others.

Reforms needed in policing also surfaced. “[I]f we could change that as one aspect, if we can get the police to have some type of course about deescalating or something” ... “that would help us survive” (Focus Group 1). Participants also brought up concerns with regards to the *war on drugs* where “we treated a healthcare problem like a criminal problem, and we’re still reeling from that” (Interview 8). They suggested that

it’s also very important that we have social equity programs as well for marijuana since that African Americans bear the brunt of being disproportionately impacted by the war on drugs, and now are less represented in terms of those who are making money off a plant where so many Black people were locked up and had their lives destroyed, generationally, because of this prohibition. (Interview 8)

Participants even suggest a way to right this wrong. Like in Evanston, participants suggest to take the money from taxing [now legalized] marijuana sales and apply them to pay for reparations, like Detroit does. These funds would help fund other programs and initiatives whose radiating effects could untangle this knot of crime, violence, justice system, and education.

Education programs and initiatives represent a proactive and preventive approach. *Rebranding schools* can help change the tenor of quality. Schools that have references to underprivileged areas in their names such as “South Shore High School” which is “a barrier right off the bat” (Focus Group 3) would help. In addition, “*more funds* to help the lower-income schools that need help in general” (Focus Group 1).

Participants deemed engaging youth early as most helpful in preventing gang violence. Those programs that involve internships and employment for youth and young adults were touted as effective. Some of these programs are:

- *MAPSCorps*, a non-profit based on Chicago's South Side that works on youth employment, but which, according to a participant, is hard to get in touch with because “first of all, MAPSCorps does not have a working phone number” (Focus Group 3);
- *One Summer Chicago* programs which offer employment and internship opportunities to youth and young adults which are considered to not “do a good job of marketing themselves to the people in the community, to the people who really need them” (Focus Group 3); and

- *Raise Your Hand* that engages with parents in protecting and strengthening public education for all children in Chicago but, yet again, its program seems illusive to many. As a respondent explains:

I was working on with an organization called Raise Your Hand Illinois... Sometimes I go to their meetings, and they were talking about things like “Did your school get that funding for the after-school time?”, and almost half of the people that were on the call were like “What are you talking about?”. (Focus Group 1)

Other emerging thoughts and ideas that were brought up by participants involve *apprenticeship programs* “not just in the skilled trades, but also in the tech sector” (Interview 8) that would “focus on the black and brown kids because they’re the most at risk” (Focus Group 8). Here is how a participant explains the need for apprenticeship programs:

When you get a kid who’s going to go to trade school or go to college, there’s a lot of things that they’ve got to think about what they have to do with their lives. They’ve got to watch the alcohol and no drugs, not become fathers too soon, got to stay out of jail... That’s the benefit of getting kids into something formidable post-high school, because not only are they thinking about the things they have to do, [but they’re also] not thinking about the things they can’t do. (Focus Group 8)

According to our participants, more efficient and targeted marketing and outreach of current programs and initiatives could improve empowering youth and reducing daily risks of engaging in crime and violence.

As adults, participants consider *eliminating college debt* “a good step” (Interview 8) to loosen this knot. But as one interviewee says, “[t]he question is, can we muster the political will or prioritize the funds to do it?” (Interview 3). Among our participants, there seems to be hope that current reforms to criminal law and the justice system are moving in the right direction. Educational programming still holds promise if it can reach everyone and not a select few. The continued prevalence of guns and gun violence keep the knot tight.

## Conclusions

“[T]he *intersectional* lens has been used in policy analysis and policy construction, and I think that recognizing that it is also an important part of it; and embedding that in the policy solutions that we’re making, embedding intersectionality in there, is really what it is.”

– Interview 10

Segregation doesn’t exist in isolation. It creates and combines across and through multiple systems and policies. The multiple identities a person holds not only shape how one views themselves, but also where they are allowed in a place and how they will succeed in a place. Using and analyzing intersectionality as a framework is vital to understanding the differential impacts of socio-spatial segregation. Intersectionality is necessary to build new systems and policies for equity to loosen the tight knots of socio-spatial segregation. This paper gives insight into challenges faced by individuals and communities based on a history of discriminatory

practices and gives insight into how the identities an individual holds shapes their experiences and outcomes in a city like Chicago.

This paper offers starting points for collaborative work. This paper contextualizes the experiences of individuals and addresses how practices and policies impact real life in childcare, employment and healthcare; hate speech, media and politics; housing, transit infrastructure, and environment; as well as education, crime, violence, and the justice system. Each of these systems work together and impact people depending on their intersection of race and other identities. These results can be transferred into future research by looking deeper into multifaceted issues in a better understanding of how to address and disrupt cycles of harm.

Working across departments, fields, and specialties is key to addressing all parts of identity and improving experiences. Segregation cannot be understood or challenged without an intersectional understanding. To particularize solutions and to break them down into feasible executable plans, experts from different fields need to work together.

Through a range of voices and backgrounds, the study analyzed a diverse sample of people and communities. It analyzed different knots of challenges, their impacts, and potential solutions. Analyzing people's experiences of segregation allows us to better understand how segregation has been institutionalized across communities. An intersectional approach is necessary to un-design it. Solutions presented in this paper, such as increasing funding of community programs to fit the demand of the programs, affordable afterschool programming, and universal healthcare, come from the community members and municipal leaders themselves. In their experiences, these are the types of solutions that will address needs that would contribute to an individual's success and health as well as but a more equitable and just future for everyone.

## **Annex 1: Focus Group Questions**

\* Questions were amended to reflect the specific intersectional character of the focus group. While in one group participants were asked “Can you think of instances where you have felt segregated due to being a Black, Brown, or White woman?”, in another group the question was “Can you think of instances where you have felt segregated due to being a Black, Brown, or White Muslim?”.

### Warm-up questions:

- “How did you find out about this study?”
- “Can you introduce yourself and provide some background?”

### Opening questions:

- “What brought you to live where you currently live?”
- “Since when have you lived in Chicago?”
- “What about your family? (When) did they move here?”
- “Why did they move here?”

### Introductory questions:

- “What does the word “segregation” mean to you?”
- “Do you think Chicago is spatially segregated, and how?”

### Transition questions:

- “Can you think of instances where you have felt segregated due to being a Black, Brown, or White woman?”
- “Can you think of instances where you have felt privileged due to being a Black, Brown, or White woman?”
- “How do you think that the spaces you are living, working, or functioning in on a day-to-day basis are specifically connected to your identity as a Black, Brown, or White woman?”

### Key questions:

- “Based on your experience, what do you see as some of the main issues facing Black, Brown, White women in this community that lead to you being spatially segregated?”
- “Do you know of someone or an organization, institution that is working on this?”
- “What do you think the city has done to address these issues?”
- “Has the city done enough? If yes, what? If no, what do you think it could do?”
- “If we were to develop and/or deliver these policies and practices, what kind of barriers come to mind?”
- “Do you have any ideas on how those barriers can be overcome?”

### Ending questions [let them know this is the last question]:

- “Is there anything else you want to share that we haven’t talked about yet?”
- “Do you think other communities outside of the U.S. face similar issues?”

### Questions to repeat:

- “Do you have anything to add to that?”
- “How is everyone doing with time?”
- “Do you need a break?”

## **Annex 2: Interview Questions**

\*The questions are extracted from Hankivsky, O., Grace, D., Hunting, G. *et al.* An intersectionality-based policy analysis framework: critical reflections on a methodology for advancing equity. *Int J Equity Health* 13, 119 (2014). <https://doi.org/10.1186/s12939-014-0119-x>. They have already been applied by other research in a health research-related context.

### Warm-up questions:

- “Are you participating freely in this study?”
- “How did you find out about this study?”
- “Can you introduce yourself and provide some background?”

### Descriptive questions:

- “What knowledge, values, and experience do you bring to this area of policy analysis?”
- “What is the policy ‘problem’ under consideration?”
- “How have representations of the ‘problem’ come about?”
- “How are groups differentially affected by this representation of the ‘problem’?”
- “What are the current policy responses to the ‘problem’?”

### Transformative questions:

- “What inequities actually exist in relation to the ‘problem’?”
- “Where and how can interventions be made to improve the problem?”
- “What are feasible short, medium, and long-term solutions?”
- “How will proposed policy responses reduce inequities?”
- “How will implementation and uptake be assured?”
- “How will you know if inequities have been reduced?”
- “Are you familiar with and have you engaged with intersectionality-based policy analysis? If yes, how? If no, do you see it as useful?”

### **Annex 3: Positionality Statements**

The following are positionality statements from all researchers involved in drafting out the research protocol, conducting the focus groups and interviews, as well as coding and analyzing the research material. The reasons behind sharing these with the readers are: one, exposing authentic experiences that have shaped our identities as human beings and that have, therefore, also shaped our lenses as researchers; and two, encouraging a humanistic approach to the results of the study presented here, to our biographies, and to the stories of the people who are confronting socio-spatial segregation daily.

#### *Liridona Veliu Ashiku*

Attributes that have been invoked while writing this paper and of which I am aware of are my gender, civil status, age, physical ability, sexuality, socio-economic status, religion, immigration status, language skills, ethnicity, and race. As a young, hetero, abled, and married woman, I have been brought up in deeply masculinist cultures and have experienced misogyny in all places I have lived in: North Macedonia, Slovenia, Switzerland, Sweden, Austria, Ireland, Denmark, and the United States. I have also come to observe and feel how I have been uniquely affected by certain modes of operationalization of these societies which have come with different ranges of rights and responsibilities. As a first-generation and international student of Political Science and International Relations, I have felt underprivileged in the face of peers who have enjoyed intergenerational wealth, intellectual support, and the privilege of choice to study where they wished. I have, however, come to feel privilege in the face of others who are trapped into paying for their college debts. Being brought up culturally as a Muslim who became an atheist, I have felt deeply for protecting the right of disbelief, critique, and questioning as much as that of belief. As someone who is White, I have enjoyed privileges in all the places I have lived, though my awareness on the same has been enhanced only after moving to the United States. As an immigrant who moved here only a few years ago, as well as an immigrant in all the other aforementioned places excluding North Macedonia as my country of birth, I have felt unceasingly othered and an ‘other’ whose accentuated language has always preconditioned perceptions of insufficiency, incapability, and inadequacy. Being an Albanian from North Macedonia, whose name is deeply political [from Albanian, “dona” – want; “liri” – freedom], I have developed a strong interest in segregated societies based on complex and intersected dimensions of identity and for which citizenship is not the only and dominant defining attribute. As a European with a trans-Atlantic experience, I have come to understand that racism, segregation, and power structures built systematically at the advantage of and the disadvantage of some groups of people are not a unique feature of the United States. Europe, I believe strongly, must confront, acknowledge, and act upon its also deeply segregated, xenophobic, and racist reality. I can only hope to play a role in that journey.

### *Anna Huber*

I am a twenty-one-year-old queer able bodied white woman from Duluth Minnesota. I moved to Chicago, specifically Rodgers Park, when I was eighteen. I am currently working on obtaining an undergraduate degree in sociology with a minor in women studies and gender studies. I was drawn to this degree based on my experiences with navigating identity and to make sense of what my place in the world is while looking to understand why the systems currently in place are structured in the ways they are. I am a full-time student while also working part time. I am responsible for the majority cost of my education. I can attend college because of scholarships, loans, and working a part time job while in school. I went to public school up until attending Loyola University of Chicago. I grew up with a parent who is chronically ill giving me insight to both disability and care work. This perspective, along with my studies, allows me to be observant regarding how disability and illness are talked about, as well as perspective into care work and pressures on women to fulfil this care work. My purpose for doing this work is to look at how systems keep people apart and how to change those systems to bring people back together.

### *Carter Alvarado*

I am a twenty-two-year-old White man who is ethnically German and Mexican. I spent the first several years of my life living in Wicker Park Chicago. However, I came of age and lived in Wilmette, a predominately White suburb from the time I was seven to the time I was eighteen. My elementary, middle school and high school education took place in schools that are majority white. This holds true in my college education as well since the majority of my college education has been at Loyola Chicago, a predominately white institution. Living in Chicago has exposed me to diverse environments throughout my life and since the fall of 2021 I have been living in Rogers Park, an ethnically diverse neighborhood. I come from a privileged middle class but not particularly wealthy socio-economic background. Throughout my life finances have been a restriction on the schools I can attend, the places I live and otherwise. However, never once in my life have I been in a position where I am food or housing insecure. I come from a privileged background in terms of my socio-economic class, race, and gender. I got into my discipline of sociology and social research because I have been outraged by the level of social and economic injustice in America and on a global scale for years. I see sociology as a discipline that began in an effort to analyze the social world in order to change it including theorizing how to do so. I see myself as continuing in the long line of sociologists who used theory and qualitative and quantitative research in an effort to make the world a more equitable place.

### *Elani Williams*

I am a twenty-one-year-old, queer, cis-gender African American woman who was born and raised in Harvey, Illinois, a poor Black suburb on the south side of Chicago. Growing up in Harvey, I have personally seen the disinvestment of my hometown. Many homes are boarded up and deteriorating. It can take half an hour or longer to get fresh produce from a grocery store and the streets are riddled with potholes. During 2013, my family moved to Birmingham, Michigan, a predominantly White, affluent suburb. Having lived in communities that were

starkly opposite from one another, I have always been hyper aware of my race as well as my socio-economic status. When I came to my high school, it was a completely different world for me. The streets were smooth, there were so many different plants and parks and most students' parents at my high school owned multiple homes. Being one of thirty Black students in my high school, I became extremely involved in the Black Student Union. Every Thursday, we talked about a variety of Black issues, with environmental racism being a prominent one. This led me to taking an English seminar about poverty during my senior year of high school instead of taking A. P. Literature. In this class, which was led by one of very few Black faculty, we openly discussed topics of gentrification and classism. It was actually very alarming hearing my White, wealthy peers discuss the topic of poverty. A defining moment in this class is when a White boy in my class said that gentrification helps "cleanse" the city. When I often spoke against claims like this, I was often called a communist, in a derogatory sense. I believe these experiences have made me realize that some people who are wealthy do not understand the issues and do not want to and that it is the burden of poor people to fight for better living conditions.

### *Jonathan Nerenberg*

I am a 20-year-old straight white man who was raised in South Bend, Indiana, a small post-industrial city with a racially segregated landscape. My parents are both employed in academia and raised me with progressive values. I lived in an upper middle-class household in a middle class, mostly white neighborhood, but I attended an urban public high school with a racially diverse student body. I moved to Chicago for college and have lived in Rogers Park on the north side of the city for my entire stay here. I have always had financial support from my parents and have never had to worry about paying for food, housing, or other necessities. My social circle is currently composed almost entirely of white, middle-class college students. I have spent a significant amount of time exploring Chicago, but I almost never venture to the south side, meaning that I spend most of my time in majority-white spaces. I am studying sociology and urban studies in college and had previously worked on another research project studying the link between race and evictions in Chicago prior to joining this project. I have a deep interest in urban planning and design, so I have a bias towards interpreting issues through analysis of the built environment. I politically identify as a socialist and have a bias towards non-market solutions to policy issues. I have not personally experienced the effects of racial spatial segregation, so my knowledge on the issue is informed by what I have observed, what others have told me, and what I have learned from classes and other research.

### *Sophia Duque*

I am a twenty-three-year-old woman, and a recent college graduate of Loyola University Chicago. I am also half Hispanic and half white, and my ethnicity and culture are relevant in my daily life. I grew up in a middle-class small town in Indiana but have lived between both my hometown and downtown Indianapolis for much of my life with divorced parents. My small town was predominantly white, with my Colombian father being one of the very few people of color. However, I went to high school in downtown Indianapolis which was much more culturally and racially diverse than the schooling I had growing up. I am very aware of the



differences in living in both a rural and urban environment, as both have been influential to my education. At Loyola, I was a first-generation student and double majored in theatre and communications with a focus on advocacy and social change. I began working for the Institute for Racial Justice during my senior year and have continued as a researcher in my post-baccalaureate career. I am now a hired part-time staff with the IRJ, working as a program assistant and doing marketing and communications. My perception of coding this research has been influenced by the majority of my studies being in the arts. Analytically, I found myself paying most attention to the personal details and recollections in this project and coding based on those similarities. In the understanding of my background and education in the arts, I went into conducting research with this team as a true observer and was able to mitigate any bias or unintentional influences while coding our findings.

### *Heather Price*

As a middle-aged, White, able-bodied, married, American woman with multi-generational family ties to Milwaukee, I come to this project with a long history of family stories that try to explain, justify, and challenge segregation. Like Chicago, Milwaukee is one of the most segregated cities in the US. I was raised with keen awareness of the lines that separated White from Black, the Mexican from the Polish from the Italian from the Croatian, Serb, and Greek immigrants, and the Catholic from Protestants from Eastern Orthodox from Jewish neighborhoods. My grandparents and parents are living testaments to the challenges that arise when you marry “across the lines” of the city. In some cases, they were banished from a family, in other cases, they were “allowed in” with limited permissions. In both cases, my siblings and I were raised to celebrate a whole host of religious and ethnic holidays to keep our motley of traditions alive. The complex balance of keeping in-group traditions alive while not discriminating against others has been part of my professional social inquiry since my undergraduate education where I majored in Ethnic Studies. This project offers me a look into others’ lives and how their families, histories, and daily lives interact with this complexity. As I continue to study this phenomenon, the roles of trust and relationships seem to more clearly come into focus as key importance. I am humbled that people trusted us with their stories and their experiences. My hope is that our summary of their experiences works to do something to change things for the better.

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