What happened to *Chocolate City*?
The Mathematics of Racial and Residential Segregation in Washington, DC

The Quant Shop + Nubian Hueman

Project Team:

Nathan Alexander (Howard University)

Anika Hobson (Nubian Hueman)

Zoe Williams (Howard University)

Qyana Stewart (Howard University)

OVERVIEW

Whatever happened to *Chocolate City*, the term used to refer to Washington DC's Black population?

In this short report, we discuss some key historical and contemporary connections and then we analyze US census data to examine historical and continual shifts in Washington DC's Black population. We focus on racial isolation and residential segregation. We close with a discussion on how modern critical theories, mathematics, and population-level data can increase our general knowledge as a community and inform our perspectives on local policies and social action issues, like voting and community service.

The materials presented here are for the October 2024 workshop at Nubian Hueman studios in DC.

BACKGROUND

The phrase "Chocolate City" has long been used to describe Washington, D.C.'s significant Black population and vibrant Black communities. However, in recent decades, the appropriateness of this label has come into question due to shifting demographics and changing urban dynamics.

Washington, D.C. reached its peak as a majority-Black city in 1970, when African Americans comprised 71% of the population. Since then, the city has experienced a steady decline in its Black population. By 2015, DC's population of Black residents had decreased to 48%. Currently, no racial group is considered to hold a single racial majority, joining others states for whom this is the case, such as California, New Mexico, and Texas.

Several factors have contributed to the erosion of D.C.'s status as a "Chocolate City":

`Gentrification: Rising property values and cost of living have pushed many long-time Black residents out`

`Suburban Migration: Many middle-class Black families have moved to more affordable suburbs in Maryland a`

`Urban Redevelopment: The replacement of public housing projects with mixed-income developments has alter`
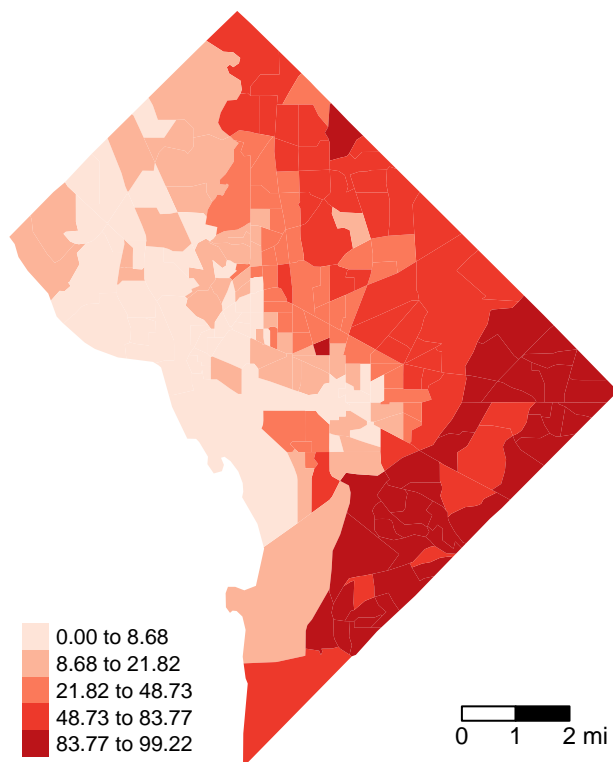
DATA

The discussions and analysis in this report are informed by the US Census microdata, which was accessed through the `tidycensus()` package in R. The American Community Survey (ACS) Public Use Microdata Sample (PUMS) is used to analyze pre-aggregate data at a local level. This data allowed us to make various custom estimates that may not be normally available by the US Census Bureau.

Learn more about PUMS here.

In our data, "totalpopE" is a single number representing the estimated population, while "totalpopM" represents a range around that estimate within which the true population is likely to fall. The designation for "E" and "M" follows in line as the estimate and the margin of error.

Percent Black Population by DC Tracts (2022)

0.00 to 8.68
8.68 to 21.82
21.82 to 48.73
48.73 to 83.77
83.77 to 99.22

0 1   2 mi

Map: Washington, DC