

Segregation and Integration in Cleveland, Ohio: A Case Study of the Shaker Heights and Beachwood Suburbs

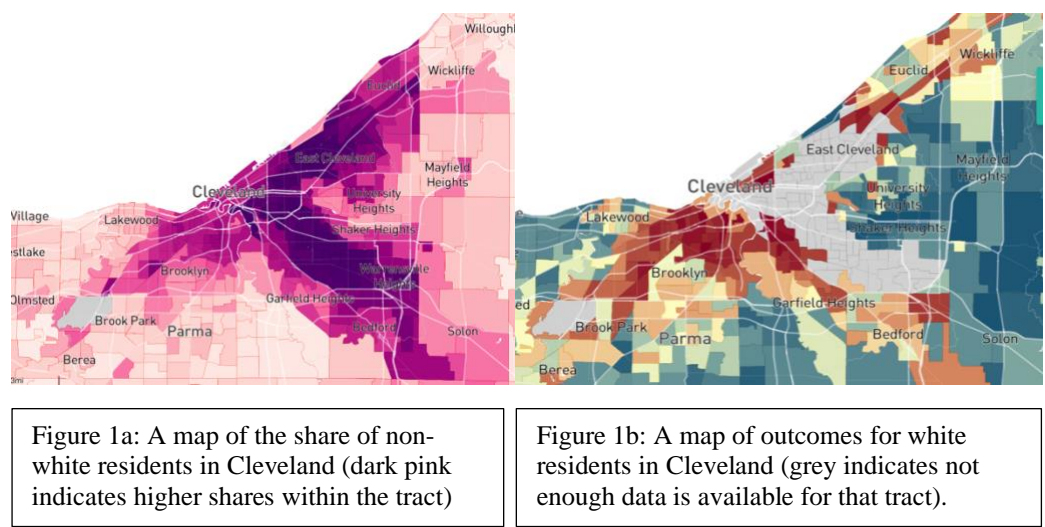
It's no secret that Cleveland has a segregation problem. Despite the rapid growth of a Black middle class in the early 1900s due to the Great Migration and post-war industrialization, integration efforts quickly faded during the 1960s and 70s.¹ Much of this can be attributed to growing white hostility during the era's "culture wars," which mostly manifested itself in the form of unequal housing. As the city's white population moved to increasingly suburban neighborhoods (so-called "white flight"), Black families moved into the east parts of downtown Cleveland. Instead of inheriting the homes white families left behind at market value, however, Black residents were met with unfair "blockbusting" tactics by white realtors.² Blockbusting entailed buying houses for lower prices as white families in increasingly Black neighborhoods "panic-sold" their houses. Once the neighborhood became majority Black, realtors would divide the homes into smaller apartments and sell them to Black buyers for hiked up higher prices.

The inequitable housing arrangement, combined with practices like assigning Black children to majority Black schools, entrenched a racial divide that persists to this day; in the 21st century, Cleveland has consistently been ranked as the city with the fifth-worst racial segregation in the country. This divide is cast in stark relief by the maps provided by the Opportunity Atlas, which links recent census data to federal income tax data across the nation. The share of non-white residents is clearly highest in downtown and lowest in surrounding suburbs (Figure 1a).

¹ Kusmer. "African Americans."

² Ibid.

Perhaps more striking is the complete lack of data provided by the Opportunity Atlas on white residents in East Cleveland – simply because there were none collect data on (Figure 1b).³



Growing up in Cleveland, I’ve witnessed both the extreme segregation and extreme disparities in mobility between white and Black communities. This association forces us to ask how related these two factors – race and mobility – really are. The Opportunity Atlas, which looks at over 20 covariates connected with mobility, offers the optimal dataset to examine this relationship. I first start by attempting to identify the covariates with the strongest correlational relationships to absolute mobility at the 25th percentile in the Cleveland area (Figure 2).

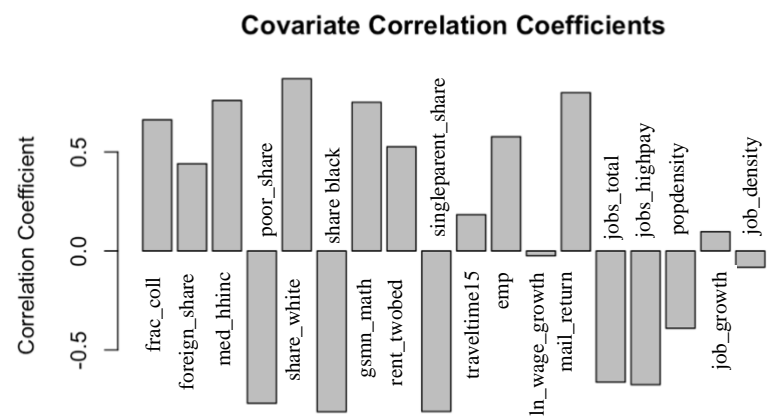


Figure 2: Calculating the correlation coefficients for each covariate with respect to kfr_pooled_p25.

³ As seen in the Opportunity Atlas

This analysis revealed several covariates that have extremely high correlation coefficients with absolute mobility at the 25th percentile (Figure 3). Three of these were median household income (0.76), the share of households below the poverty line, (-0.77) and the share of households with a single parent (-0.81) in the area. The two highest ranking covariates, noticeably, were the share of Black households in the area (-0.81) and the share of white households (0.87).

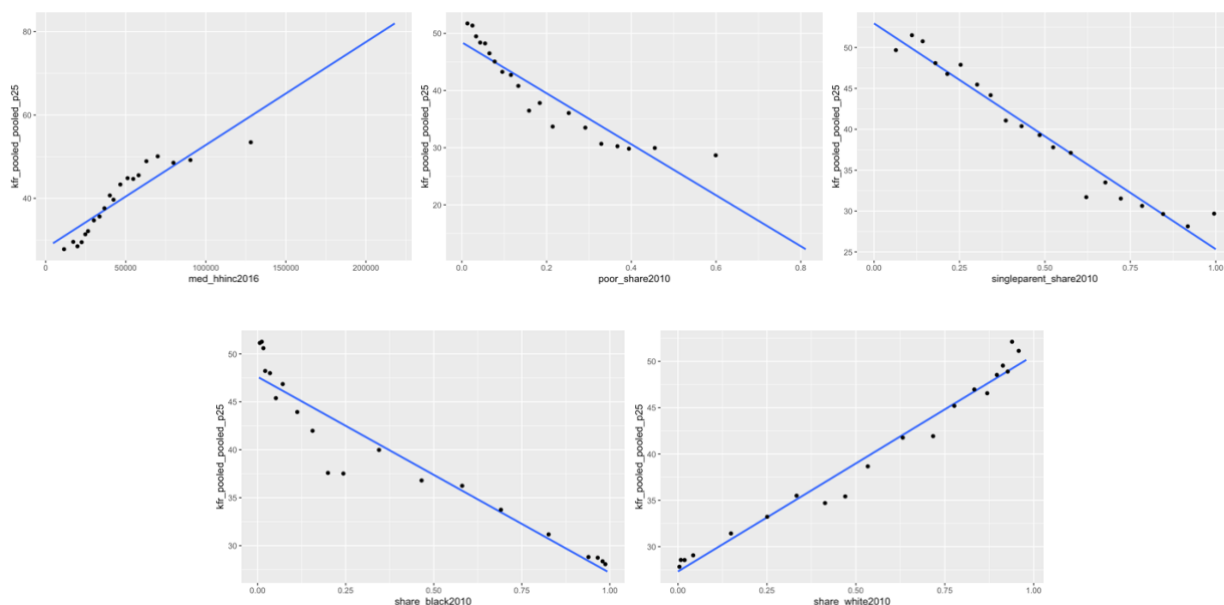


Figure 3: Linear regression for absolute mobility at the 25th percentile versus a) median income b) poverty levels c) share of single parents d) share of Black residents e) share of white residents.

While it is to be expected that race is correlated with socio-economic outcomes, the outcomes of children raised in Cleveland seems to be more race-dependent than that of children raised in Ohio or anywhere else in the U.S. The average child born in the 25th percentile in Cleveland grows up to earn in the 39.8th percentile, about three percentile ranks less than the national average. When separating the results by race, however, we see that this difference is driven almost entirely by lower earnings for Black children born in the 25th percentile; white children in

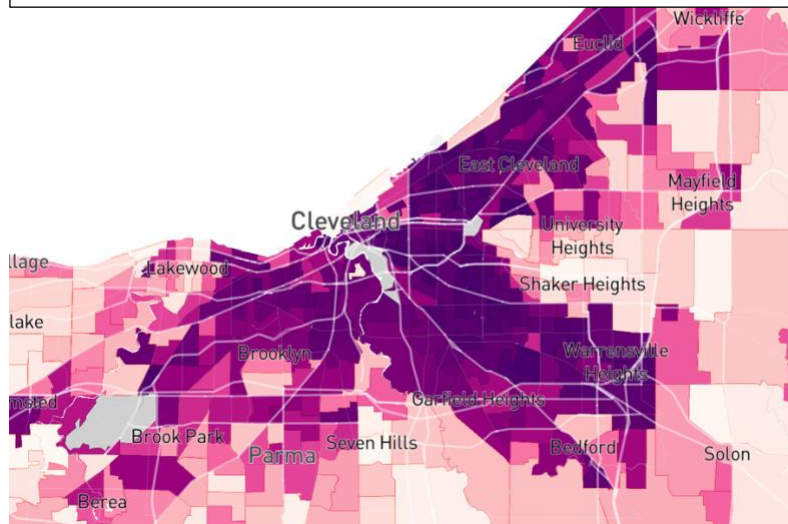
the 25th percentile in Cleveland earn about the same as their peers nationally. Similarly, the gap between white and Black children’s outcomes in Cleveland is also greater than the average gap in Ohio by at least three percentile ranks (Figure 4).

Location	Mean Absolute Mobility at the 25 th Percentile for All Children	Mean Absolute Mobility at the 25 th Percentile for Black Children	Mean Absolute Mobility at the 25 th Percentile for White Children	Earnings Gap by Race
CLE	39.8 th percentile	30.8 th percentile	46.5 th percentile	15.7 ranks
OH	40.4 th percentile	31.9 th percentile	43.3 rd percentile	11.4 ranks
U.S.	42.9 th percentile	34 th percentile	46.3 rd percentile	12.3 ranks

Figure 4.

Despite the obvious correlation between race and outcomes later in life, we should still consider the other covariates used in the correlation coefficient analysis. Many of the high-ranking covariates seem to overlap quite closely with race; for example, the map of the share of single parent households in Cleveland looks almost identical to the map of the share of Black households (Figures 1 and 5).

Figure 5: A map of the share of single-parent households in Cleveland (dark purple indicates a higher share in that census tract).



Given that there are so many covariates closely linked with absolute mobility at the 25th percentile, it’s natural to wonder which covariate we should start by changing first to create more equal opportunities for children in the area. Factoring in how many highly correlated covariates

seem to be related to race, it stands to reason that by changing the racial composition of census tracts, we should also be able to change the influence other covariates have on absolute mobility.

To test this hypothesis, we look to two case studies: the Cleveland suburbs of Beachwood and Shaker Heights. On the surface, the suburbs appear to be very similar. Both are viewed as upper-class enclaves with the same well-paved streets, spacious yards, and “historic” homes. The median household income in Shaker (\$96,460 per year) is noticeably higher than that of Beachwood’s (\$73,083 per year), but families in both suburbs earn more than the median family in the U.S, and significantly more than the median family in Cleveland, which earns only \$47,255 annually. Both suburbs also have an above average rate of overall social mobility; Beachwood’s absolute mobility at the 25th percentile is a little higher at the 45.7th percentile than Shaker’s (44.4th percentile). These commonalities make it much easier to do a comparative analysis across the two of the wealthiest suburbs in the Cleveland area.

What separates the two suburbs from each other is the way they have historically handled race. Beachwood was a town built mostly by the Van Sweringen brothers, founders of the RTA Transit who insisted on keeping out “non-Caucasians.”⁴ Although the brothers were also heavily involved in the building of Shaker Heights, when the Van Sweringen Company went bankrupt in the 1950s, the company foundation maintained greater sway over its former assets in Beachwood than in Shaker. As a result, the Van Sweringen Company Foundation reserved the “right to pass on any individual purchasing a residence” and arbitrarily turn down Black homeowner applications in Beachwood but not in Shaker.⁵ While Beachwood was heading down a road of segregation, the bombing of a Black homeowner’s house in the 1950s spurred the local Shaker

⁴ Dawson, “Protection from Undesirable Neighbors.”

⁵ Ibid.

community to make integration a priority.⁶ Voluntary busing began in 1970, and Black and white families alike made concerted efforts to integrate their children.⁷ Half a century later, the maps of the Beachwood and Shaker Heights look very different. Black residents comprise 25-55% of the population in the vast majority of Shaker neighborhoods, whereas they make up only 7-8% of most Beachwood neighborhoods but 68.8% in Beachwood’s Highland Hills neighborhood.

Calculating the correlation coefficients for each of the five highly-ranked covariates identified earlier in the paper tells us, perhaps unsurprisingly, that race is less related to outcomes in Shaker than it is in Beachwood. Interestingly, this pattern also extends to other covariates that are not explicitly race-related (Figures 6 and 7).

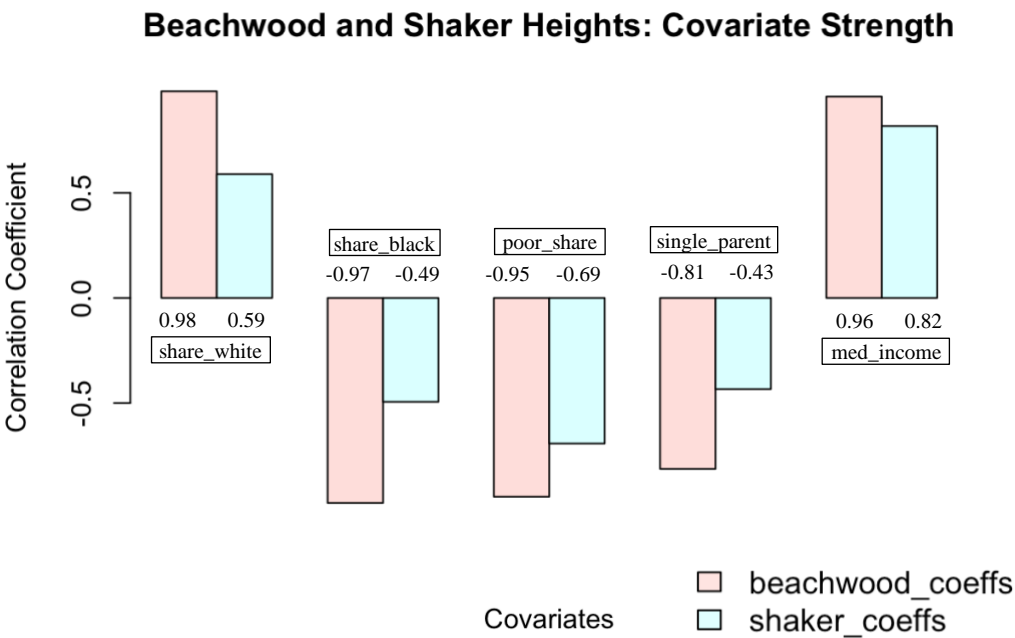


Figure 6: A bar plot comparing correlation coefficients between selected covariates and absolute mobility at the 25th percentile for Beachwood and Shaker residents.

⁶ Meckler “This trail-blazing suburb.”

⁷ Ibid.

	share_white	share_black	poor_share	single_parent	med_income
R² Values for Beachwood Residents	0.96	-0.94	-0.90	-0.66	0.92
R² Values for Shaker Residents	0.35	-0.24	-0.48	-0.18	0.67

Figure 7: Table containing coefficients of determination for five covariates divided by residential area.

Consider the covariate `single_parent`, for example, which measures the share of single parent households in the area. The correlational coefficient for Beachwood residents is -0.81, on par with the national value. For Shaker residents, that value is -0.43, almost two times smaller. When it comes to the R^2 value, which measures how much variance in absolute mobility can be explained by covariate changes, Shaker's coefficient (-0.18) is multiple factors smaller than Beachwood's (-0.66). Across this analysis, we see that living in an integrated suburb reduces the influence that even non-explicitly racial factors like single parenthood have on outcomes.

Given the lower dependency of mobility on both explicitly and implicitly racial factors in Shaker Heights, we would expect outcomes for Black children raised in the suburb to be higher than in the rest of Cleveland. The data does show that the mean percentile rank for a Black child growing up in the 25th percentile in Shaker is in the 38th percentile, higher than the Cleveland, state, and national average. Notably, however, the mean percentile rank for a white child is 59th, forcing us to ask whether we are willing to settle for greater inequality in outcomes in exchange for greater mobility for Black children. Even more surprisingly, it seems at first glance that absolute mobility at the 25th percentile for Black children in Beachwood is higher than in Shaker at the 44th percentile.

To get a more nuanced understanding of these results, we can segregate them by census tract. Specifically, we look at majority-Black census tracts in the suburbs. While most Shaker

suburbs are evenly split between white and Black residents, a few neighborhoods like Moreland are primarily populated by Black residents, who make up 55-75% of the population. If we follow the precedent established by other majority-Black Cleveland tracts, the outcomes for Black children should look considerably bleaker in these areas. Unexpectedly, the average Black adult who grew up in the 25th percentile in a majority-Black tract in Shaker Heights ends up earning in the 38th percentile, only one percentile off from the Shaker average and still significantly above the national average. By contrast, average earnings as an adult for a Black child who grew up in majority-Black Beachwood neighborhoods fall into the 29th percentile, *below* the Cleveland, Ohio, and U.S. average.

When we stop looking at mobility for Black children who grow up in communities with less than seven percent Black residents, a clearer picture emerges. Black students growing up in majority-Black census tracts in Shaker Heights are still exposed to and benefit from the city's integration efforts. They are still bused to integrated schools, live close to community integration programs, and have access to services provided by a government that prioritizes integration. In contrast, Black children growing up in majority-Black census tracts in Beachwood live in a highly segregated city that keeps Black and white students apart and puts less effort into providing equitable services to majority-Black neighborhoods. The analysis conducted in this paper suggests that the impacts of integration (or lack thereof) may outweigh the impacts of covariates listed in the Opportunity Atlas. In other words, single parenthood may be correlated with mobility, but it is not necessarily that single parenthood always causes lower mobility. It may be that the benefits of racial integration erases many of the associated disadvantages of single parenthood and makes them irrelevant, while the harms of racial segregation exacerbates them. This could explain why Shaker Heights, which has a higher share of Black and single-

parent households than both Beachwood and the rest of the U.S., defies expectations and has higher mobility rates for Black children than both.

The impacts of segregation and integration on socio-economic mobility are an interesting area of future study. Some questions to consider include whether integration is really beneficial, or whether the benefits of integration in Shaker Heights are really just the effects of its residents' comparative wealth. Merely looking at two Cleveland suburbs does not prove or disprove a relationship between integration and socioeconomic outcomes; more analysis is needed on data from across the country, in the obvious absence of a randomized control experiment. More importantly, we need to look at how and why integration comes about, and where its limitations are. As Shaker Heights and other modern neighborhoods continue the arduous process of bringing about true integration,⁸ we will hopefully see increasing socio-economic opportunity for non-white children in those areas.

⁸ Meckler

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