Black Movement, Black Striving:
Perceptions of Place and School Choice Decision-Making in Metropolitan Detroit

by

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Dedication

This dissertation is dedicated to the seven families who participated in this study. Thank you for sharing snapshots of your world. Thank you for opening your homes. I pray that I have treated your experiences with grace and dignity.

I also dedicate this dissertation to my mother and dear friend, Dr. Mary Elizabeth Trotty Nickson. 31 years ago, you worked on your dissertation with a full-time job, husband, two children, and a baby on the way. I am indebted to your perseverance to obtain your doctorate, which in turn made my journey so much easier. You understood my concerns and doubts. Most important of all, you remind me that I am loved and worthy no matter the circumstance.

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may the tide
that is entering even now
the lip of our understanding
carry you out
beyond the face of fear
may you kiss
the wind then turn from it
certain that it will
love your back may you
open your eyes to water
water waving forever
and may you in your innocence
sail through this to that

-Lucille Clifton (2000), Blessing the Boats

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Abstract

Using a critical phenomenological methodology (Salamon, 2018; van Manen, 1990), this study aims to better understand how Black families' perceptions of place shape their physical movement in pursuit of quality schools and educational opportunity in Metro Detroit. By perceptions of place, I refer to the ways in which families think about, feel about, and imagine Metro Detroit municipalities. Moreover, I draw from theories on spatial imaginaries and opportunity structures to emphasize the intertwined nature of place, race, access to opportunity, and sense-making in the U.S. The Metro Detroit region has experienced significant Black demographic shifts over the past 20 years, where what some call "Black flight" has dramatically changed school and communities. Indeed, from 2000 to 2010, Detroit had the largest Black population loss in the U.S., and many Black families relocated from Detroit to surrounding suburbs (Frey, 2011). Given this phenomenon of Black movement and relocation, I chose to study the experiences of seven diverse Black families living in Redford and West Bloomfield Townships to understand how their perceptions of place—particularly, Redford, West Bloomfield, Detroit, and other municipalities identified by families—influenced the school and community choices they made. Redford and West Bloomfield are two Metro Detroit suburbs that have experienced significant growth in their Black population. Yet, the towns present different ethno-racial, socioeconomic, and political dynamics that are consequential to how Black families perceive and experience schools and communities.

Findings show that families' racial and place-based subjectivities played a significant role in informing their perceptions of place and choices on where to live and school their children.

Namely, most families moved and chose communities based on parents' connection and care for Detroit, or other predominantly Black urban cities. Families also chose schools and communities with mindfulness of the impacts of race and racism—particularly the importance of same-race peers and teachers. Importantly, families' ability and desire to access suburban schools and communities were significantly shaped by their socioeconomic status and economic precarity caused by deindustrialization and the 2008 recession.

Based on my findings, I argue that the changing landscape of U.S. metropolitan regions offers opportunities for more diverse schools and more importantly, diverse epistemologies to inform education policy and practice. While families certainly sought to secure advantages for their children by moving to the suburbs, they also held democratic perceptions of public resources and engaged in their own strategic placemaking to create opportunity structures not accessible to Black families in city or suburban municipalities in the region. This aligns with a long tradition of Black movement, placemaking, and opportunity seeking in the U.S. I offer the concept of *epistemologies of Black opportunity seeking* to reframe understandings of Black movement and school choice decision-making. The concept also accounts for both structural and sociocultural dynamics influencing Black families' school and community choices amid widespread demographic change in U.S. metropolitan landscapes.

Chapter I
Introduction

The suburb has a powerful place in U.S. cultural imaginaries. Spacious homes with manicured lawns, accompanied with well-resourced schools, predominately occupied by white, middle-class, and heteronormative families, are common characteristics that may come to mind when thinking about a U.S. suburb. This image is reinforced by popular, political, and educational discourses that often pay most attention to extreme racial and socioeconomic differences between U.S. urban cities and their surrounding suburbs. These perceptions and imaginings are not entirely divorced from reality, yet they fail to recognize the heterogeneity, interdependency, and changing race and class demographics of schools and communities within many U.S. metropolitan regions (Frankenberg & Orfield, 2012; Kruse & Sugrue, 2006; Lacy, 2016; Murphy, 2010; Orfield & Luce, 2013; Posey-Maddox, 2016). Indeed, in 2010, approximately 51 percent of Black households resided in suburbs across the U.S. Additionally, suburban schools now educate over half of the students of color in metropolitan regions (Frey, 2011; Lewis-McCoy, 2018; Orfield & Frankenberg, 2008).

Perceptions of place matter because they can shape where families live, work, and school their children (Lewis, Emerson, & Klineberg, 2012; Posey-Maddox, 2017; Rhodes & Warkentien, 2017; Wells, 2015). Moreover, as explained by Tuck and McKenzie (2015), "individual and collective histories and memories of place also contribute in powerful ways to what is possible or not" (p. 38). Places are not simply physical locations, but are also shaped by history, social relationships, and power dynamics in ways that impact our identities, perceptions,

and decision-making. Hence, individuals' perceptions of place, whether reality or not, are foundational to the social, political, and institutional dynamics that impact families' access to educational resources and opportunity.

Using a critical phenomenological methodology (Salamon, 2018; van Manen, 1990), this study aims to better understand how Black families' perceptions of place influence their physical movement in pursuit of quality schools and educational opportunity in Metro Detroit. The Metro Detroit region has experienced significant Black demographic shifts over the past 20 years, where what some call "Black flight" (Frey, 2015, July 13; Kellogg, 2010, June 24) has dramatically changed school and communities. Indeed, from 2000 to 2010, Detroit had the largest Black population loss in the U.S., and many Black families relocated from Detroit to surrounding suburbs, or left the state altogether for places like Atlanta, Georgia or Houston, Texas (Frey, 2011; Morris & Monroe, 2009). Given this phenomenon of Black movement and relocation, I chose to study the experiences of seven diverse Black families living in Redford and West Bloomfield Townships to understand how their perceptions of place—particularly, Redford, West Bloomfield, Detroit, and other municipalities identified by families—influenced the school and community choices they made in Metro Detroit. Redford and West Bloomfield are two Metro Detroit suburbs that have experienced significant growth in their Black population. Yet, the towns present different ethno-racial, socioeconomic, and political dynamics that are consequential to how Black families perceive and experience schools and communities. By centering the perceptions and lived experiences of Black families, who have been historically marginalized in Metro Detroit's education landscape, school district officials and policymakers can learn from Black families' diverse perceptions of place and agency seeking quality schools across borders and boundaries. Indeed, given the physical movement of many Black families,

they offer knowledge and experiences that shed light on steps needed for a more inclusive and equitable metropolitan educational landscape.

Metropolitan Detroit's Educational Landscape

This research is informed by a historical context of formal and informal exclusionary practices that still impact the Metropolitan Detroit region today. Even with Black demographic shifts, the region is one of the most segregated metropolitan areas in the U.S. (Orfield, 2015; Wilkinson, 2016, December 6). Continued racial segregation in the region grows from historical practices like redlining, restrictive covenants, discrimination in federal home loan programs, and white mob violence that largely confined Black families to Detroit until the 1980s (Freund, 2007; Loewen, 2005; Rothstein, 2017; Sugrue 2014a, 2014b). These practices, coupled with deindustrialization and job loss in the city, have disproportionately impacted Black families, many of whom migrated in preceding generations to Detroit during The Great Migration from approximately 1916 to 1970 in search of social and economic opportunity not afforded in the Jim Crow South (Baugh, 2011; Boyd, 2018; Morris & Monroe, 2009; Sugrue, 2014b). Thomas Sugrue (2014b), author of the foundational work *The Origins of The Urban Crisis: Race and Inequality in Postwar Detroit*, explained that "the complex and pervasive racial discrimination that greeted black laborers in the 'land of hope' ensured that they would suffer disproportionately the effects of deindustrialization and urban decline" (p. 8). Given the confinement of Black Detroiters to select neighborhoods in Detroit throughout the early twentieth century (e.g. Black Bottom and Paradise Valley neighborhoods), and then largely to the city throughout the latter have of the century, Sugrue (2014b) asserts that "blackness and whiteness assumed a spatial definition" in Metropolitan Detroit (p. 9). This means that Black individuals and families were spatially segregated from housing and employment opportunities. Moreover, the intentional

disinvestment and destruction of Black communities by the state (e.g. highways built through thriving Black business districts and neighborhoods in the mid-20th century) created perceptions of race tied to place, where Blackness was associated with a dilapidated urban city, and whiteness with well-kept suburbs.

Segregation and discrimination against Detroit's swelling Black population shaped schools and educational access in Metro Detroit throughout the twentieth century (Baugh, 2011; Green & Gooden, 2016; Khalifa, Douglas, & Chambers, 2016; Mirel, 1993; Riddle, 2000). Most notably, the landmark U.S. Supreme Court Case *Milliken v. Bradley* (1974), which barred an inter-district desegregation busing plan between Detroit and the city's 53 surrounding suburban school districts, casts a long shadow over Metro Detroit's educational landscape. In this case, the majority opinion U.S. Supreme Court Justices opposed precedence set in *The Brown v. Board of Education* (1954) decision that mandated racial desegregation in U.S. schools. The U.S. Supreme Court asserted that it could not control de facto segregation, or white families' private decisions to relocate out of the city. Justice Warren Burger, who wrote the majority opinion, explained that unless suburban school systems had deliberately enacted policies to keep Black students out of the district, these districts were not implicated in being part of a solution to the racial segregation of Black students in Detroit's public-school system. Importantly, this ruling ignored the myriad ways Black families were denied access to suburban communities, and therefore schools given widespread residential segregation and racial discrimination in the region. Throughout the U.S., this ruling signaled the limits of court-ordered school desegregation efforts. Moreover, most significant to today's public education landscape, *Milliken* upheld the sacrosanct nature of families'—particularly white families'—right to make private decisions on where they live and school their children, even when their decisions maintain racial and education inequity

(Erickson, 2011; Green & Gooden, 2016). This logic still shapes Metro Detroit's education landscape today, as local and federal governments have overwhelmingly abandoned school desegregation mandates in favor of school choice policies in the form of charter schools, inter-district transfer programs, and voucher programs (Erickson, 2011; Wells, 2014).

Over 45 years after the *Milliken* ruling, many Black families now live and school in places they were previously unable to access. As residential and housing segregation lessened in the 1970s, coupled with overall population loss in the region, Black individuals and families first moved to suburbs contiguous to long-established Black neighborhoods in Detroit. For instance, Southfield—a suburb bordering the northwest side of Detroit—began to develop substantial numbers of Black residents in the 1980s. Additionally, since the 2000s, Black individuals and families have also relocated to other bordering suburbs, including Redford—a focal place of study in this dissertation. In smaller numbers, Black families have also moved to middle-ring, or further out suburbs like West Bloomfield—the other suburb of study in this dissertation. Hence, despite entrenched racial segregation throughout the region, Black families have continued to pursue place-based amenities like quality schools, space, and home ownership across Metro Detroit (Sugrue, 2014a). The figure below shows a map of Metropolitan Detroit municipalities, which includes Wayne, Oakland, and Macomb counties.

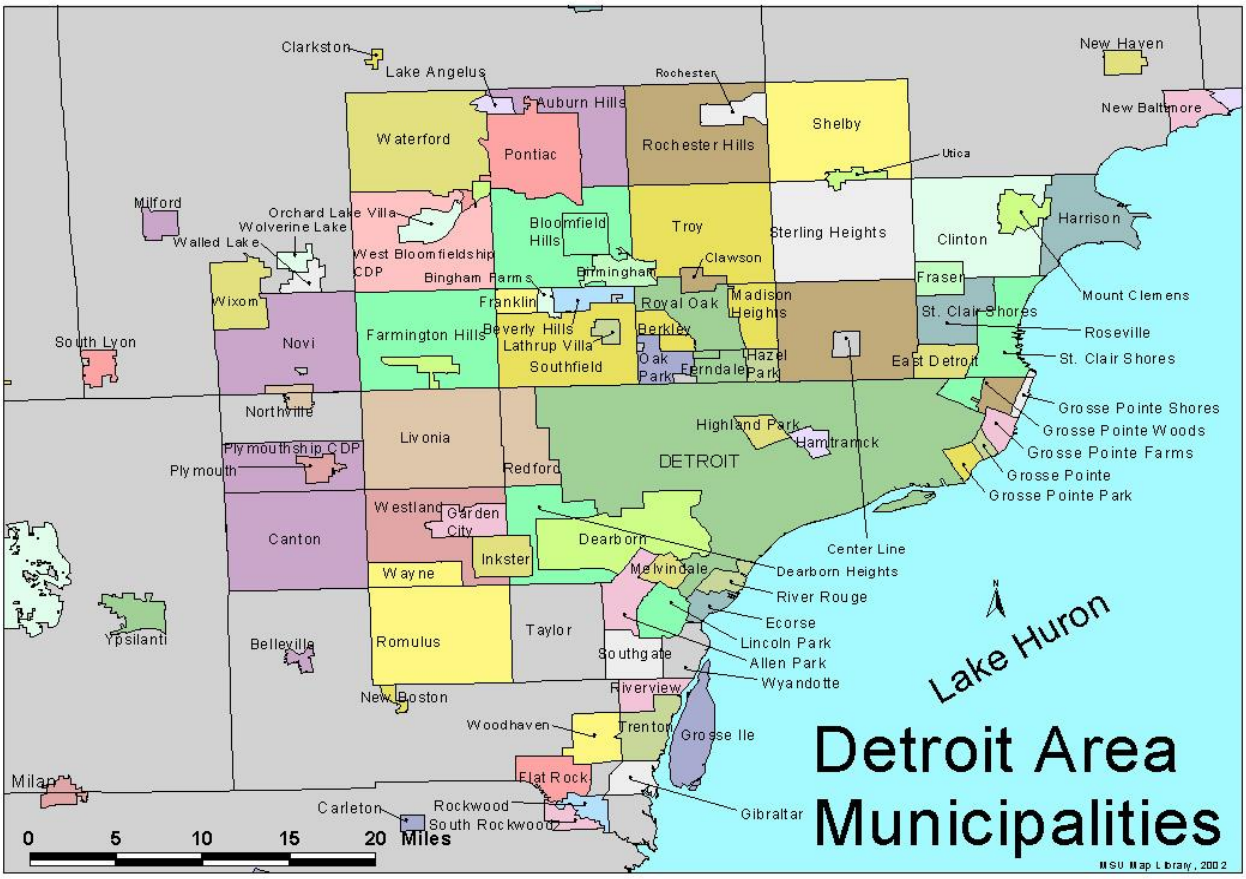

Figure 1.1: Map of Metropolitan Detroit municipalities

Central to this study, Black families' movement out of the city has undoubtedly been spurred by disinvestment and decline in Detroit's public school system. Since 1990, Detroit's population has declined by 34 percent, while public-school enrollment has declined by 73 percent (The Citizens Research Council of Michigan, 2016). Notably, citing fiscal mismanagement and low academic performance, from 1995 to 2005, and again from 2009 to 2016, the state of Michigan took over the fiscal and academic affairs of Detroit's public-school district. Under the leadership of the state, the district stripped overwhelmingly Black and low-income families of institutional mechanisms for democratic influence over their children's schools (Khalifa et al., 2016; Mason & Reckhow, 2017). Markedly, under state leadership, the

school district's debt increased, academic outcomes worsened, and large-scale school closures devastated neighborhood dynamics (The Citizens Research Council of Michigan, 2016; Grover & van der Velde, 2016). For instance, in 2012 alone, 32 public schools were closed in Detroit and the district lost over 15,000 students (Grover & van der Velde, 2016); further prompting families to leave the district. Challenges in Detroit's public school system have in turn provoked an onslaught of neoliberal education reforms including corporate actors that operate charter schools or provide educational services (Binelli, 2017, September 5; Pedroni, 2010; Wilson, 2015). Hence, many families that remain in the city now navigate a metropolitan educational landscape with an abundance of for-profit and loosely regulated school choice options.

Outside of schools, key economic events like the Great Recession of 2008 also contributed to decline in the city. The 2008 recession prompted large scale wage reduction and job loss in the "Big 3" automotive companies (General Motors, Ford, and Chrysler) all headquartered in Metro Detroit. This further exacerbated challenges with employment due to the ongoing impacts of deindustrialization in the city and region at large (Data Driven Detroit, 2014). Importantly, in the wake of the recession, Detroit filed for bankruptcy in 2013. The city's bankruptcy was motivated not only by the large debt the city was unable to pay, but by "service-delivery insolvency," meaning the city was unable to consistently provide services like police, fire, ambulance, trash, and sewer, which are "required for the health, safety, and welfare of the citizenry" (Ives, 2015, p. 45). Most Detroiters were faced with both school and community conditions that made it difficult to consistently access necessary resources and services.

Over time, families and students' departure from Detroit and the district have further lent to the city's shrinking tax base, and therefore, less funding for schools. However, many Black individuals and families' movement from the city is often reluctant. In *Black Detroit: A People's*

History of Self-Determination, Herb Boyd (2017) explained that Detroit is "a forever home" (p.14):

> No matter where we lived, it was a city that had a host of sharing neighbors, all of them willing to guide and watch over us. More than anything, it was a city I explored with wonder, from Black Bottom to Eight Mile Road, from the projects to the beautiful neighborhoods on the far west side… You can't go home again…but what if in spirit you've never really left" (p. 14).

Like Boyd's poetic expression of his attachment to Detroit, even as Black families leave, they often maintain a high level of loyalty, connection, and pride in the city (Kellogg, 2010, June 24). Indeed, Black families' movement out of the city is often a situation where proud Detroiters have exited due to the utter lack of reliable, quality, or affordable social services. For many families with school-age children, this includes quality public schools. Black families and students' movement reflects decades of state and local policies that have contributed to governmental disinvestment and dispossession of the city of Detroit, and economic investment and development of select suburbs in the region (Darden, Hill, Thomas, Thomas, 1987; Khalifa, et al., 2016; Sugrue, 2014b). These dynamics have created an uneven "geography of opportunity" that impacts Black families and students' educational access and opportunity across Metro Detroit (Brigg, 2005; Tate, 1998).

In this study, while I focus on the experiences of Black families residing in Redford and West Bloomfield, MI. I also aim to capture important social, economic, and political dynamics that impact Black families and their access to educational opportunity no matter where they may reside in Metro Detroit. Many Black families and students, including those that still reside in Detroit, are highly mobile in their pursuit of educational opportunity due to the growth of charter

schools and inter-district school choice programs that allow students to traverse district and municipal boundaries to attend school (Pogodzinski, Lenhoff, & Addonzio, 2017). Indeed, Metro Detroit's educational landscape is rife with diverse school choice options that shape dynamics of educational access and opportunity across the region. Like many other U.S. metropolitan regions, that have experienced a significant growth in school choice options, these dynamics significantly altered families' relationships to both schools and the communities where they reside.

Role of School Choice in Metro Detroit

Black students and families in Metro Detroit are navigating an overabundance of school choice options. Inter-district transfer programs and charter schools—both online and in-person—have created an educational landscape that provides families and students with schooling options that are often uncoupled with their housing decisions. This means that students often attend schools outside of the neighborhoods or communities where they live (Bell, 2009; Pogodzinski et al., 2017; Rhodes & Warkentien, 2017). For instance, during the 2014-15 academic year, approximately half of Detroit children attended a charter school, and 33% of Michigan students who enrolled in inter-district transfer programs lived in the Metro Detroit region (Pogodzinski et al., 2017). More recently, enrollment in online charter schools has also grown. In 2017, virtual schools served approximately 14,000 students across the state and continue to add significant numbers of students each year (Van Buren, 2017, July 3). Given this landscape of educational choice, a key driver of the large population loss in Detroit's public school system has also been residents attending charter schools or engaging in inter-district transfer programs.

Importantly, many of these school options are not quality, where in 2016, half of Detroit charters performed worse than, or only as well as traditional public schools. (Zernike, 2016, June

28). Additionally, school choice options can be exploitative, given that approximately 80% of Detroit charter schools are ran by for-profit education management organizations (Binnelli, 2017, September 5). Inter-district transfer programs can also be highly lucrative for participating school districts as students bring their state per-pupil funding to the district they attend. Betsy DeVos, the current U.S. Secretary of Education, has been an avid supporter of the expansion of school choice across Michigan. Notably, DeVos started the Great Lakes Education Project, an organization that has spent millions of dollars to lobby for policy outcomes that support the expansion of school choice programs, even with their lackluster outcomes (Strauss, 2016, December 8). DeVos's advocacy for school choice programs has ultimately resulted in private companies and interests garnering public dollars under the guise or promise of increasing educational access and opportunity.

As noted, inter-district school choice programs, which allow students to traverse municipal and school district boundaries to attend school, are also a popular school choice option in Metro Detroit. Inter-district choice programs particularly complicate the legacy of *Milliken* as many suburban school districts that were formed to exclude students and families of color from educational resources now actively recruit these families from surrounding districts to attend their schools. These programs certainly provide educational opportunities for families and students (Wells, A. S., Baldridge, B., Duran, J., Grzesikowski, C., Lofton, R., Roda, A., Warner, M., White, T., 2009), however, they have also drained students from certain districts in the region, exacerbating fiscal challenges in districts like Detroit that serve the most vulnerable students and communities. Inter-district choice programs have also supported segregation by race, class, and ability (Pogodzinski et al., 2017; Wilkinson & Dawsey, 2016, September 13). For example, white students in a racially diverse suburb may utilize inter-district choice policies

to attend a whiter district, while Black students with more economic means and/or academic achievement may leave the city district through these same policies to attend whiter or racially diverse school districts. Overall, the majority of school choice options in Metro Detroit are colorblind and lack equity measures, meaning that in the design of school choice policies there is no explicit redress of race and class inequity in educational systems (Aggarwal, 2015; Wells, 2014). Hence, Black families are navigating a metropolitan education landscape of choice that exists across city-suburb divides and with scant attention to longstanding race and class inequities in the region. This requires Black families to make hard decisions as they seek educational opportunity for their children and potentially disadvantage schools and communities they care for and/or previously resided. Families' well-intentioned geographic moves and school choices can contribute to continued racial segregation and the financial troubles of select school districts due to a lack of equitable safeguards across district and state education policy

Overview of Literature: Black Movement to The Suburbs

Black movement to the suburbs reflects larger national trends. According to Andrew Wiese (2004), author of *Places of Their Own: African American Suburbanization in the Twentieth Century*, "By 2000, more than one-third of African Americans—almost 12 million people—lived in suburbs" (p. 1). This percentage has only increased over the last 20 years. Wiese explains that, "by virtue of numbers alone, black suburbanization had become one of the most important demographic movements in the twentieth-century United States" (p. 1).

Importantly, Black families' physical movement to the suburbs has been enabled by collective agency. Particularly, the Civil Rights era of the 1950s and 60s, which promoted more protections against housing discrimination and increased accessibility to a range of careers for Black people. This policy change allowed some middle-class Black families to begin moving to

previously segregated suburbs, and this has only increased in the following decades. Hence, it is important to acknowledge that Black movement to the suburbs is predicated on multiple factors including both Black agency and structural disinvestment of Black communities and urban cities (Kruse & Sugrue, 2006; Lacy, 2007; Nicolaides & Wiese, 2016; Smith & Greer, 2019; Posey-Maddox, 2016)

More than ever, the suburbs and suburban schools are important contexts for the study of Black life and Black education. As explained by R. L'Heureux Lewis-McCoy (2018) in "Suburban Black Lives Matter," "to better understand the state of urban education and improve the condition of Black lives in all the spaces they occupy, the changing nature of suburbia and its schools must be addressed" (p. 146). I seek to add to this literature by explicitly centering the meaning-making of Black families as they navigate movement to and within demographically changing suburbs in Metro Detroit.

Suburbs of Study

This study pays attention to the perceptions and experiences of Black families living in Redford and West Bloomfield Townships. These two suburbs have been chosen to reflect the increasing, yet varied racial and economic diversity of U.S. metro area suburbs (Lacy, 2016; Massey & Tannen, 2018; Murphy, 2010; Orfield & Luce, 2013). However, Redford and West Bloomfield are by no means representative of all suburbs in the region.

Redford is a working and middle-class inner-ring suburb that shares an approximate 11-mile border with Detroit. Neighborhoods are characterized by mid-sized post-war homes, some more spacious than others, yet offering well-built, single-family units with large yards. The suburb's infrastructure is physically older and modest; however, Redford still feels vibrant given small businesses, churches, and parks that dot the landscape. Residents, both young and old, are

seen busy with their coming-and-goings. Notably, racial change is palpable as young Black families interact with older white residents or municipal leaders in public spaces like schools or the town community center. A sense of change, and at times, tension, reverberates through the people and interactions that make up community life, reflecting the swift racial demographic change in the suburb over the last 20 years. In 2000, Redford was approximately 8.5 percent Black/ African American. Yet, by 2019 the percent of Black residents had increased to 42 percent (U.S. Department of Commerce, 2019). As shown in Figure 1.2, Redford's public schools are now majority Black, and Redford will soon become a 'majority-minority' suburb.

Approximately 25 miles north of Redford, West Bloomfield is an upper middle-class class suburb further removed from the city. Homes and infrastructure are physically newer. Large, two story homes along winding neighborhood streets convey a sense of privacy and affluence. Moreover, strip malls with offerings ranging from fitness studios to high-end dining demonstrate a demand for lifestyle comforts among residents. In day-to-day community life, Black residents are less readily seen, but nonetheless present among residents and families of various racial, ethnic, and religious backgrounds. While less dramatic when compared to Redford, West Bloomfield has also experienced significant racial demographic change. In 2000, approximately 5.2 percent of the population was Black/ African American, and by 2019, the percent of Black residents had increased to approximately 12.5 percent (U.S. Department of Commerce, 2019). As shown in Figure 1.2, West Bloomfield School District, which serves the majority of students in the suburb, are now comprised of approximately one-third Black/ African American students. There are also significant populations of Jewish, Chaldean, and Japanese students.

In both Redford and West Bloomfield, the increase of Black students in schools has been more dramatic due to the tendency of racial demographics in schools to change at a faster rate than the overall population of a place (Orfield & Luce, 2013). This is also coupled with inter-district school choice plans that have facilitated Black students that are non-residents ability to attend public schools in Redford and West Bloomfield. Together, the suburbs demonstrate the changing and diverse nature of suburban communities and schools.

Redford Township K-12 Racial Demographic Change

School Year	1997-98	2007-08	2017-18
Native	.18%	.66%	0.42%
Asian/ Pacific Islander	.9%	.75%	0.63%
Black/ African American	9.7%	50.9%	73.97%
White	87.8%	43%	16.32%
Hispanic/ Latino	1.4%	3%	2.93%
Multiracial	Not available	.78%	5.71%

Table 1.1: Racial Demographic of Redford schools in 1997-98, 2007-08, and 2017-18 academic years.

West Bloomfield K-12 Racial Demographic Change

School Year	1997-98	2007-08	2017-18
Native	.53%	.27%	0.15%
Asian/ Pacific Islander	6.5%	10.55%	8.37%
Black/ African American	6.5%	20.2%	31.7%
White	85.2%	65.1%	51.06%
Hispanic/ Latino	1.2%	1.55%	4.42%
Multiracial	Not available	2.11%	4.31%

Table 1.2: Racial Demographic of West Bloomfield schools in 1997-98, 2007-08, and 2017-18 academic years.

Black Suburbanization and the Search for Quality Schools

Studies of Black families and students' school choice decision-making predominantly focus on their decision-making in urban school systems. However, as reflected in Redford and West Bloomfield, over the past 20 years, increasing Black suburbanization has changed the racial demographics of many suburbs and suburban school systems in large metropolitan areas in the U.S. (Frankenberg & Orfield, 2012; Holme & Finnigan, 2018; Lewis-McCoy, 2018; Orfield

& Luce, 2013). The image of well-resourced educational environs offers an attractive and popular representation of suburban schools that can influence families' movement (Lewis-McCoy, 2014; Posey-Maddox, 2017; Rhodes & Warkentien, 2017).

For instance, Posey-Maddox's (2017) qualitative study of a predominantly white Wisconsin suburb found that "district and school resources," in addition to "employment opportunities, housing stock and affordability, safety and quality of life" were key factors promoting Black families' move to the suburbs (p. 14). Similarly, in the Greater Cleveland metropolitan area, Rhodes and Warkentien (2017) found that some Black parents sought to couple their residential and school choices by moving to the suburbs. These parents initially believed they would "not have to make tradeoffs between specific school qualities "like academic and extracurricular programs or teacher quality in suburban districts" (p. 177). Both Posey-Maddox (2017) and Rhodes and Warkentien (2017) explain that perceptions of suburban schools and communities in relationship to families' experiences in urban settings shaped their movement and school choice decision-making. Importantly, they also emphasized that socioeconomic status shaped Black families' perceptions of suburban schools, where middle-class Black parents were more attentive to suburban school systems' academic record of educating Black children. Their findings support and offer nuance to quantitative studies that show that school quality is a key driver of Black families' neighborhood preferences (Lewis, Emerson, & Klineberg, 2012). I seek to add to this literature by further exploring intra-racial differences among Black families to better understand the dynamic role of race, class, movement, and place in shaping families' perceptions of communities and schools. Additionally, due to the high level of school choice options in Metro Detroit, yet persistent segregation, I also pay attention to how Black families' location within a metropolitan region and the particulars of

suburban demographic change in Redford and West Bloomfield matter to Black families' perceptions and school choices.

Why Study Black Families' Suburban Moves?

Overall, it is well documented that Black families and students in metropolitan education landscapes can face significant barriers that impact schooling and educational outcomes. Black families' increased access to suburban schools and communities over time has not been a panacea to racial disparities in educational access and opportunity. Even with significant race and class demographic shifts, Black students in many suburban schools encounter educational settings where they are less likely to achieve academically when compared to white peers (Diamond, 2006; Lewis & Diamond, 2015; Lewis-McCoy, 2014; Ogbu, 2003). Additionally, Black students can remain segregated from educational opportunities in schools due to academic ability tracking (Lewis & Diamond, 2015; Oakes, 2005), punitive disciplinary policies (Gregory, Skiba, Noguera, 2010; Ferguson, 2010), teacher and/or administrative bias (Chapman, 2014; Lareau & Horvat, 1999; Lewis-McCoy, 2014; Posey-Maddox, 2017), and bias in school district governance and policy-making (Frankenberg & Orfield, 2012; Holme, Frankenberg, Diem, & Welton, 2013; Siegel-Hawley, 2013). Furthermore, when contextualized in Metro Detroit's landscape of school choice, families' move to the suburbs does not necessarily lead them to couple their housing and school choices. Families may move to the suburbs to access housing or community amenities while still attending schools in other municipalities due to the aforementioned disparities, or other familial and sociocultural preferences. Many families perceive suburban schools and/or communities as offering necessary or desirable amenities given their resources and available options (Lewis-McCoy, 2014; Posey-Maddox, 2016, 2017; Rhodes

& Warkentien, 2017). Yet, the history of racial and spatial divides and widespread school choice options also influence families' movement and school choice decision-making in the region.

Examining how Black families' perceptions of place impacts their school choices and conceptions of educational opportunity sheds light on the accessibility of educational structures for Black children and families. Sustained attention has been given to the perceptions and persistent biases of white parents in their housing and school choice decision-making (Erickson, 2011; Dougherty, Harrelson, Murphy, Smith, Snow, and Zannoni, 2009; Holmes, 2002; Wells, 2015). However, few studies explicitly center the meaning-making of Black families amid meaningful attention to the social, political, and economic impacts of place and metropolitan demographic change. Moreover, through examining Black families' perceptions and experiences of the intersections between place and educational opportunity, this study interrogates the durability of dominant U.S. sociocultural narratives that link place to access to quality education for Black students and families. This study's findings provide insight on how U.S. metropolitan school districts and state policymakers can design education policies and practices that better respond to changing demographic realities, and ultimately work to create and maintain racially equitable K-12 schools that honor the diverse needs, agency, and epistemologies of Black families and children.

Overview of Theoretical Framework

For my guiding conceptual framework, I use George Lipsitz's (2007) theorizing on the intertwined nature of racial and spatial processes in the U.S and john a. powell's[1] (2013)

[1] john a. powell does not capitalize his name in scholarly publications.

conceptualization of opportunity structures. As I detail in Chapter 2, I use these two works to emphasize the overt linkages between race and racism in the U.S. and struggles over place-based resources like public education. Lipsitz (2007) explains that race has continued to serve as a central factor in where people physically live out their daily lives. Work, school, travel, and leisure are all impacted by social systems of power that differentially include and exclude certain racial groups and communities. Lipsitz elaborates that in order to fully understand these racialized and place-based systems of inclusion and exclusion, we must pay attention to not only Black disadvantage, but the privileges and advantages of white people which are historically deeply spatialized (i.e. federal home programs that supported white home ownership often in the suburbs post-World War II, while confining many Black individuals and families to overcrowded and dilapidated housing in the city through restrictive covenants and redlining, among other historical practices). These intertwined systems of Black disadvantage and white advantage to place-based resources continues to shape educational access in U.S. metropolitan regions. As Black families enter suburban schools and communities this does not mean they experience an equal or affirming education (Chapman, 2014; Horsford, 2019; Lewis & Diamond, 2015; Lewis-McCoy, 2014, 2018; Posey-Maddox, 2017). Importantly, families are often entering social and institutional structures founded on exclusion of Black people. These formations matter and shape families' perceptions, navigation of place, and access to opportunity.

Similar to Lipsitz, powell (2013) uses the term *opportunity structures* to capture how the physical location of where an individual or family resides, impacts access to institutions, services, and resources. For example, Detroit's municipal challenges and state disinvestment over time have impacted the quality of schools and other social services in the city. This has created an under-resourced opportunity structure where resources needed to experience social

mobility are often lacking. powell (2008, September 21) explains that "where you live usually determines the school your children attend, your degree of neighborhood safety, your access to public transportation or highways, the availability and quality of finance and credit, your employment opportunities, and your social network" (p. 1). In this way, the particular social, economic, and political processes of place are inextricably linked to access to opportunity and the resources often required to attain stable, opportune livelihoods.

Importantly, Black individuals and communities have resisted the racialized nature of access to place-based resources. Lipsitz (2007) explains that Black individuals and communities' struggle for resources, rights, and recognition have "required blacks literally to take places" (p. 17). "Taking places" entails the struggle to resist, remake, and coopt inequitable place-based dynamics and structures (Lipsitz, 2007). In stratified metropolitan education landscapes like Metro Detroit, this matters in understanding Black families' perceptions of place and decision-making. Many Black families make strategic and agentic decisions in both deciding where to enroll their children in school and also how to navigate this context to maximize educational opportunity and the well-being of their child (Bailey-Fakhoury, 2014; Bell, 2009; Cooper, 2007; Lewis-McCoy, 2014; Lareau & Horvat, 1999; Mazama & Lundy, 2012; Moultrie, 2016; Posey-Maddox, 2017). This study aims to gain a better understanding of how Black families envision not only the educational opportunity offered in Redford and West Bloomfield Townships, but also the agency families must enact by relocating to Metro Detroit suburbs.

Lastly, as I focus on families' perceptions, there is a consequential relationship between individual's sense-making and opportunity structures. powell (2005) asserts that differences in opportunity structures also distribute meanings that shape our racial attitudes. This means that our stratified landscape of opportunity impacts how individuals construct meanings about the

values and practices of people who live in respective places. These meanings are often raced and classed given enduring patterns of segregation. In turn, this raced and classed sense-making can influence our perceptions and decision-making about where to live, work, and school our children. This aligns with the work of Keith and Pile (1993) who use Edward Soja's term of spatiality to explain that social perceptions and place are mutually constituted in one another. They explain that "thinking, feeling, doing individuals" both realize and experience the conditions that make distinct places (p. 6). In other words, places are known and created through our sensibilities and perceptions, just as much as places shape our experiences, or access to educational resources and opportunity. In this way, perceptions of place are deeply intertwined with social, economic, and political processes.

Together, Lipsitz and powell offer frameworks that emphasize how persistent inequities operate through racialized access to place-based resources. Moreover, they helpfully show that inequities are deep rooted in ways that continue to affect not only our access to opportunity, but also our meaning-making and actions.

Research Design

I used a critical phenomenological methodology (Salamon, 2018; van Manen, 1990) to examine the perceptions of Black families and students in Redford and West Bloomfield Townships. Primary methods included in-depth interviews with parents and children, alongside document analysis of relevant education policies and events—as identified by family participants—and archival research on the formations of Metro Detroit schools and communities. The goal was to produce thick descriptions of the families' perceptions and experiences that shape their physical movement, school choice decision-making, and conceptions of educational opportunity in Metro Detroit (Geertz, 2008; Lincoln & Guba, 1985). I employed a constant

comparative analysis (Fram, 2013; Glaser, 1965; Hesse-Biber & Leavy, 2011) to make sense of the data throughout the research process. Hence, I primarily engaged in an inductive analysis that identifies and corroborates commonalities, differences, contradictions, and themes across different families and suburbs to move towards findings. My research questions include:

1. How do Black families' perceptions of place shape their movement to suburban places and their school choice decision-making?

2. How do Black families and students' race, class, and/or where they live shape their perceptions of place and quality school choice options?

3. How do families' and students' perceptions of place and quality school choice options shed light on historical and contemporary social structures that affect educational access and opportunity for Black children in Metropolitan Detroit?

These questions aimed to understand the push and pull migration factors that led families to move to Redford or West Bloomfield. I also sought to understand how families' perceptions are mediated and impacted by their social identities and histories of educational access in Metro Detroit. Furthermore, I worked to understand what role raced and classed cultural imaginaries and historical narratives of place may play, if any, in families' school choices and ultimately, where they perceive that educational opportunity is located and accessible.

Dissertation Overview

In Chapter 2, I further elaborate on literature discussed in this chapter and my theoretical framework to demonstrate the intersections between identity, perceptions of place, and access to educational opportunity for Black families and students. In Chapter 3, I outline my core research design and data analysis methods and provide more context on family study participants and the two suburbs of study. In Chapter 4, I present part of my data to show the importance of movement and place-based subjectivities to families' opportunity seeking. In Chapter 5, I focus on data emphasizing the importance of Metro Detroit's political economy and socioeconomic

status in determining families' access to suburbs and their educational aspirations for their children. In Chapter 6, I then focus on data that shows the importance of families' racial subjectivities in influencing their conceptions of quality schools and communities. Finally, in Chapter 7, I analyze key findings between Redford and West Bloomfield families to offer implications and recommendations for school districts and education policymakers in demographically changing U.S. metropolitan regions. I also explain the concept of epistemologies of Black opportunity seeking to connect families' movement and school choices to larger structural and sociocultural dynamics impacting Black families' perceptions and access to opportunity.

Chapter II
Literature Review

This chapter places in conversation relevant literature on the racialized formations of U.S. suburbs, Black suburbanization, perceptions of place, and Black families' school and community choices. I bring together these distinct bodies of literature to frame historical and contemporary dynamics that shape Black families' movement in pursuit of educational opportunity in Metro Detroit. I aim to illustrate the complex social, political, and economic processes between Black movement, school choice decision-making, and metropolitan educational landscapes. Throughout each section, I also draw on relevant information to provide further context on Redford, West Bloomfield, Detroit, and overall, Metro Detroit's educational landscape. From this literature, I then detail the conceptual framework for this study, which draw from theories on spatial imaginaries and opportunity structures to emphasize the shared importance of structural and sociocultural dynamics to families' perceptions and choices. Together, this literature review aims to demonstrate the need for further study that centers Black families and students' perceptions and experiences amid metropolitan demographic change.

I begin this review by highlighting literature on the formations of suburbs in the U.S. This literature provides a necessary backdrop to understand the contested nature and formations of suburban living and schooling for Black families and students.

The Formations of Suburbs in the U. S.

Suburbs while physical places, as defined by their relationship and proximity to urban cities, are also ideologically charged places that map raced and classed meanings of social

mobility and opportunity in the U.S. As explained by Nicolaides & Wiese (2017) "in the world of popular culture and the imagination, suburbia is the setting for the American dream" (p. 1).

How we think about U.S. suburbs largely originates from governmental efforts to promote home ownership throughout the 20th century (Nicolaides & Wiese, 2017; Rothstein, 2017; Wiese, 2004). Richard Rothstein (2017), in *The Color of Law: A Forgotten History of How Our Government Segregated America*, documents how as early as 1917, the U.S. Department of Commerce promoted an "Own-Your-Own-Home-Campaign" (p. 60). This program marketed single-family home ownership with leaflets and pamphlets that showed images of smiling white couples and families, stating that it was "patriotic-duty" "to build a single-family unit" (p. 60). See Figure 2.1 below for an example of a 1934 Federal Housing Authority advertisement promoting home ownership. Additionally, in the postwar period, federal programs like the GI Bill and mortgage insurance programs, among others, facilitated the homeownership of white middle and working-class families through low-interest loans. Black families were largely barred from participation in many of these programs due to racial housing covenants, exclusionary zoning practices, and white mob violence (Freund, 2007; Hirsch, 2005; Wiese, 2004; Katznelson, 2005; Rothstein, 2017; Sugrue, 2014a). Hence, in Metro Detroit, Black individuals and families were largely confined to Detroit till the 1980s, while white families were supported and encouraged to purchase homes in the suburbs (Freund, 2007; Sugrue, 2014a). Arnold Hirsch (2005) explains that the "cumulative effect of federal housing policies…was to produce a federally sponsored social centrifuge that not only separated black from white but increasingly linked the latter (whites) to placement on the economically dynamic fringe as opposed to the crumbling (urban) core (p. 36). Importantly, the "crumbling" urban core, was increasingly associated with stereotypes and imaginings of Black deviance and crime, with little regard to the

impacts of metropolitan development and exclusionary policies that favored suburbs (Khalifa et al., 2016; Sugrue, 2014b).The government effectively marketed and supported suburbs as the natural and idyllic progression for white families, deeply racializing the formation of suburban municipalities across the U.S. These historical dynamics linger in popular perceptions where suburbs are still imagined as not only white places, but more economically stable places.

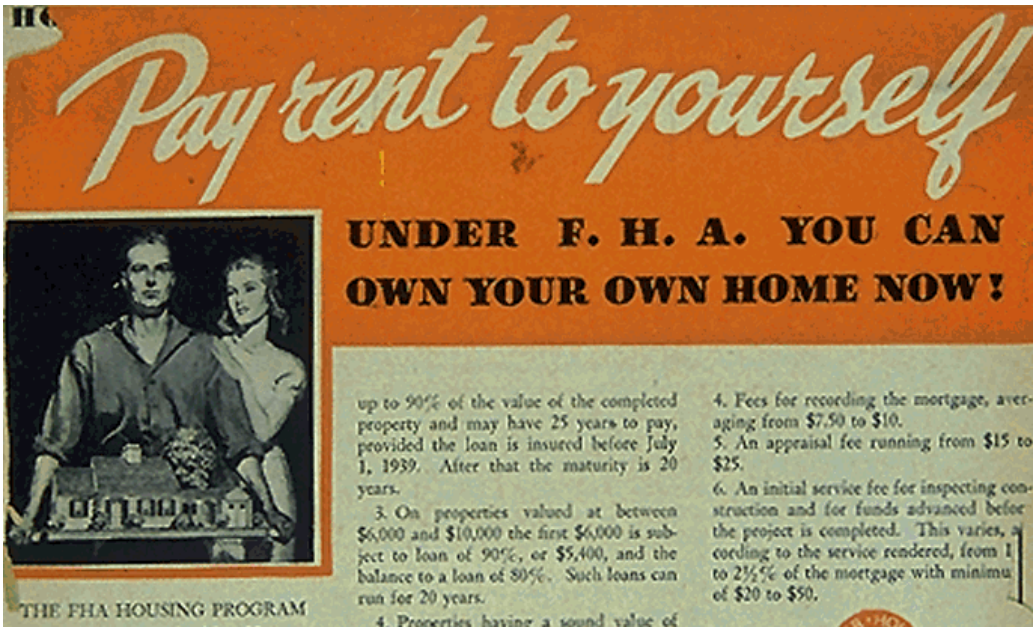

Figure 2.1: 1934 Federal Housing Authority (FHA) home ownership advertisement entitled "Pay Rent to Yourself"

As white families moved to the suburbs, resources like jobs, tax revenue, and educational resources left the city too. This facilitated a real and material divide between economically stable suburbs and urban cities that lacked sufficient structural investment. In Metro Detroit, as white flight rapidly occurred, capital and jobs likewise began to relocate. Sugrue (2014b) details that "between 1947 and 1958, the Big Three (Ford, General Motors, and Chrysler automotive companies) built twenty-five new plants in the metropolitan Detroit area, all of them in suburban communities, most more than fifteen miles from the center city" (p. 128). As the automotive industry relocated, auto-related industries like machine tool manufacturers, metalworking firms,

and parts manufacturers followed behind, further draining Detroit of living-wage employment (Sugrue, 2014b). This created job sprawl, or significant distance between where individuals live and work for many Black factory workers residing in Detroit. Black factory workers now had to navigate transportation and the commute to work in spaces that were predominately white and hostile to Black life. Suburbs of Detroit like Warren, northeast of the city, and Dearborn, west of the city housed automotive plants that employed significant numbers of Black workers. However, virtually no Black individuals or families were able to purchase homes there due to racial exclusionary practices (Riddle, 2000).

Vital educational resources also migrated to the suburbs with white flight. Black families and communities possessed strong networks and determination to educate their children in the city (Boyd, 2017; Baugh, 2011). However, as documented by Joyce Baugh (2011) in *The Detroit School Busing Case: Milliken v. Bradley and the Controversy over Desegregation*, resources were unequally distributed by the state, whereby public schools predominantly serving Black children often lacked proper building infrastructure, culturally relevant and substantive curricula, and up-to-date books. Many Black families and civic organizations saw advocating and organizing for a comprehensive school desegregation plan as a means to secure these resources in Detroit's public-school system; believing that if their children could occupy school buildings with white students, they would gain access to resources denied to predominantly Black schools (Baugh, 2011). However, Detroit's public schools were quickly becoming majority Black. In 1970, when *Milliken I* commenced, only one in three students attending Detroit Public Schools identified as white and schools were still overwhelmingly segregated by race (Baugh, 2011). The majority Black demographic of Detroit's public school system led some Black families and community organizations to propose an inter-district desegregation busing plan that would

involve Detroit's public school system and 53 predominantly white suburban school districts. However, the initial ruling in favor of this plan by U.S. Federal Judge Stephen J. Roth was met with vehement outrage by white suburban communities. Communities personally harassed and attacked Roth. White communities also organized anti-busing groups and elected politicians who ran on anti-busing platforms (Baugh, 2011; Riddle, 2000).

For example, Warren, a suburb northeast of Detroit, had six different small school districts during proceedings for *Milliken*. According to Riddle (2000), these small districts were viewed by residents as a source of unity for neighborhoods within the suburb, and residents quickly organized against *Milliken*. The predominantly white residents of Warren perceived busing as a violation of their right to locally control their community schools (Riddle, 2000). Moreover, they feared that busing would bring racial strife into their suburban communities and schools. In the early 1970s as communities debated *Milliken*, Philip Lee, Chairman of Save Our Children, Warren's first antibusing group, explained at a community forum, "We don't owe the blacks a thing and it's time they learned to live together" (Riddle, 2000, p. 29). As Gooden and Green (2016) explain, white families who moved to the suburbs believed they were no longer beholden to school desegregation efforts.

The threat of mandated school busing across Metro Detroit demonstrated what Lipsitz (1995) calls a possessive investment in whiteness, which captures the ways in which whiteness produces and protects unfair and unearned social gains built upon racial inequality and exclusions. While white students would have likely remained the majority in suburban schools if inter-district busing plans had come to fruition, busing Black students to suburban schools was largely viewed as a threat to suburban community dynamics—dynamics that hinged on a shared whiteness and thus ultimately, white supremacy. The resources within suburban communities

and schools were systemically guarded through governmental policy and white residents' exclusionary practices in both housing and education.

As demonstrated by the *Milliken* case, the formations of suburbs and suburban schools in relation to urban communities and schools are deeply racialized and exclusionary in Metro Detroit. The movement of white families to the suburbs more easily codified racial boundaries that were politically used to justify and absolve governmental responsibility for grossly different levels of access to social resources and opportunities. Khalifa et al. (2015) explain that "*Milliken I* was a case that represented white imaginative understandings and approaches to a Black, subaltern, urban, unruly population that needed to be contained in the Black areas (Detroit)" (p. 8). As detailed by Baugh (2011), this sentiment led some Black families and Black Nationalists organizations to reject integration across Metro Detroit schools. Instead, they advocated for community control of Detroit's public school system. "Reverend Albert Cleage, leader of an anti-integration group [and a highly influential Black political and religious leader throughout the latter half of the 20th century], charged the school system with deliberately miseducating black children and declared that the only way to solve the problem was to have black schools run by black teachers and administrators" (Baugh, 2011, p. 71). Rightfully, some Black families did not perceive racial integration or access to suburban schools as a means to improve educational opportunity for Black children.

Today, while suburbs are more racially and socioeconomically diverse than ever (Frey, 2011; Kruse & Sugrue, 2006; Lacy, 2016; Murphy, 2010), the exclusionary formations of suburbs linger in the ways in which these places are often imagined in cultural and political discourse. Bourne (1996) explains that "the image (of U.S. suburbs) persists because local political boundaries are so crucial to everyday life, status, and well-being. In other countries the

term (suburb) seems less politicized and more a reflection of generic distinctiveness rather than politics" (p. 165). Kruse & Sugrue (2006) further elaborate that while more suburbs demographically present and look more like cities than before, municipal boundaries still play a vital political role. They explain that "municipal boundaries separate and fragment metropolitan areas and govern the distribution of political goods and resources. Suburbs and cities, whatever their commonalities, remain places apart" (p. 5). Hence, perceptions and imaginings of suburbs can still function to create and legitimize boundaries that are politically used to justify inequality and exclusions within metropolitan regions. This continues to shape the inequitable and uneven development of political economies across Metro Detroit (Darden et al., 1987). Moreover, it contributes to a politics of disposability where dire social and material conditions can persist in urban schools and communities due to political dynamics that render poor, racialized, and/or marginalized people and communities as expendable or undeserving of vital social resources (Giroux, 2006; Wilson, 2015). How we perceive suburbs and the resources and opportunity they offer is historical and political, creating a taken-for-granted discourse on who is and who is not worthy of resources. While race and class demographics of suburbs are changing, our perceptions continue to interact with the racialized formations of places across metropolitan areas. In education, we must better understand how the racialized formations of suburbs interact with contemporary dynamics in metropolitan educational landscapes (e.g. school choice, Black suburbanization, school closure, etc.). Understanding these dynamics is key to creating inclusive school district policies, practices, and culture.

Framing Black Movement and Suburbanization

Whiteness figures heavily in the formations and perception of suburban places. Yet, the U.S. is a now predominantly suburban nation, where approximately 55 percent of U.S. residents

live in suburbs (Pew Research Center, 2018). Notably, Orfield and Luce (2013) explain that across U.S. metro areas, most suburbanites live in suburbs where at least 20% of the population are people of color, or the suburb is altogether predominantly people of color. Indeed, focusing on Black suburbanization, 50 percent of the Black population in the U.S. lived in suburbs by 2010 (Orfield & Luce, 2013; Frey, 2011).

Andrew Wiese (2004), author of *Places of Their Own: African American Suburbanization in the Twentieth Century*, asserts that Black suburbanization is one of the most significant demographic movements in the U.S. since the Great Migration. The Great Migration was a mass relocation of approximately six million Black people from the U.S. South to the North, Midwest, and Western regions of the country. Wiese explained that "since the collapse of Reconstruction in the 1870s, African Americans have been a people in motion, seeking peripatetically (by moving from place to place) to improve their lives" (p. 37). Given this rich history, I frame Black suburbanization in Metro Detroit as a part of a long lineage of Black communities' agency and placemaking in search of greater access, equity, and fulfilling livelihoods. However, this framing does not necessarily extend to all U.S. metropolitan areas experiencing suburban demographic change, especially metropolitan areas where gentrification may play a larger role in pushing Black residents out of urban cities. Indeed, the Metro Detroit Region is an especially important context to study the import of Black movement to access and opportunity given that it was a key site for not only the Great Migration, but also the Underground Railroad, which operated from the late 18th century till 1861 (Boyd, 2017). Black suburbanization undoubtedly with different stakes than the previous examples, is also part of this legacy of Black movement in continued search for opportunity in the U.S.

Black Suburbanization

Black suburbanization in the U.S. has increased dramatically over the last 20 years, however, it is important to note that Black people living in suburbs is not a new phenomenon. Particularly in Metro Detroit, as early as the 1920s, Black communities existed in the suburbs of Ecorse, Inkster, River Rouge, and Royal Oak Township (Wiese, 2004). In small numbers, Black people also lived in affluent suburbs to work as domestic help for white families (Loewen, 2005). Notably, Inkster, a middle-ring suburb west of Detroit, was founded in 1926 with a Black population of approximately 27 percent. Many Black residents of Inkster were blue-collar factory workers employed by the Ford Motor Company, headquartered in Dearborn, Michigan. Dearborn was notorious for its exclusion of Black residents. Therefore, homes were built for Black workers in Inkster, which borders Dearborn (Lindsey, 1993). Lindsey (1993) documents that "Inkster was one of the few (Metro Detroit) areas that did not have or did not observe racial restrictions in terms of selling land to minorities" (p. xiv). Hence, where accessible and sensible for jobs and resources, Black individuals and families have lived in suburban communities of Metro Detroit in small numbers since the beginning of the 20th century.

Given Redford's shared border with Detroit, throughout the 20th century, white residents of predominantly German, Irish, Polish, and Italian backgrounds remained especially vigilant about Black individuals and families moving into the suburb. A *Redford Record* (1945, October 11) article in 1945 alarmed residents with the title "White Neighborhoods are Again in Peril." The article described debates among the Detroit Housing Committee to racially integrate or segregate public housing in the city after ongoing unrest over The Sojourner Truth Housing Project, public housing initially designated for Black defense workers near a white neighborhood in 1942. Additionally, in 1965, a "mixed couple," Willie and Barbara Coleman bought a home in

Redford Township. The sellers initially did not know the husband was Black, as the wife purchased the home on behalf of the family. The sellers subsequently sued The Colemans in attempts to back out of the sell after finding out they sold their property to an interracial couple. The Circuit Judge presiding over the case upheld The Coleman's right to buy the home, asserting that the sellers were "extremely naive…(but) morally and legally wrong" (Redford Record, 1965, September 11). The Coleman's contested purchase of a home in 1965 is the first known instance of Black homeownership in Redford.

In West Bloomfield, I was unable to find specific details about Black individuals and families' historical residence in the municipality. Yet, through informational interviews, two community members explained that Black people have largely migrated to areas of the region that were first populated by Jewish communities. Jewish communities predominantly lived in northwest Detroit then relocated to Oak Park, Southfield, and West Bloomfield, suburbs northwest of the city. The shared patterns of Black and Jewish migration have been explained by the Jewish community's more progressive views as compared to other white ethnic groups (Cohen, 2016, December 9). As documented by Cohen (2016, December 9), "Black Detroiters faced less resistance when moving to Jewish neighborhoods. Jews didn't burn crosses; they simply moved out." (p. 1).

Importantly, the Civil Rights era particularly played a key role in increasing Black suburbanization in the latter half of the 20th century. The Civil Rights Act of 1964 and the Fair Housing Act of 1968 lessened housing discrimination and facilitated greater access to a range of job opportunities and professions, especially among the educated, Black middle class who remained in the city primarily due to systemic discrimination. As explained by Nicolaides and Wiese (2016), fights for a racially integrated society during the 1960s and 70s allowed a growing

Black middle class to exercise “unprecedented residential freedom” where Black families began to relocate to suburbs often adjacent to urban cores (p. 440). In Metro Detroit, in the 1980s, Black middle-class professionals began moving to Southfield and Oak Park, which borders the northwest side of Detroit. And since the 2000s, Black Detroiters have relocated to other bordering suburbs to the North and West sides of the city, including Oak Park, Warren, Eastpointe, Harper Woods, and Redford. Black families have also relocated in smaller, yet significant numbers to further out suburbs like Bloomfield, Farmington Hills, and West Bloomfield (Sugrue, 2014a). See Figure 2.2 for a map of Black/ African American population by census tract in 2000, and Figure 2.3 for a map of Black/ African American population by census tract in 2010. Together, these two maps help visualize the increase in Black residents in Metro Detroit suburbs throughout the decade. They show that in 2000, Black individuals and families predominately resided in Detroit, Southfield, and Oak Park. The other significant concentrations of Black residents represent Inkster and Pontiac where Black communities lived throughout the 20th century for automotive jobs with General Motors and Ford. The second map, Figure 2.3, then shows the increased presence of Black individuals and families in Redford and West Bloomfield townships—the two focal suburbs of study—in addition to suburbs north of Detroit.

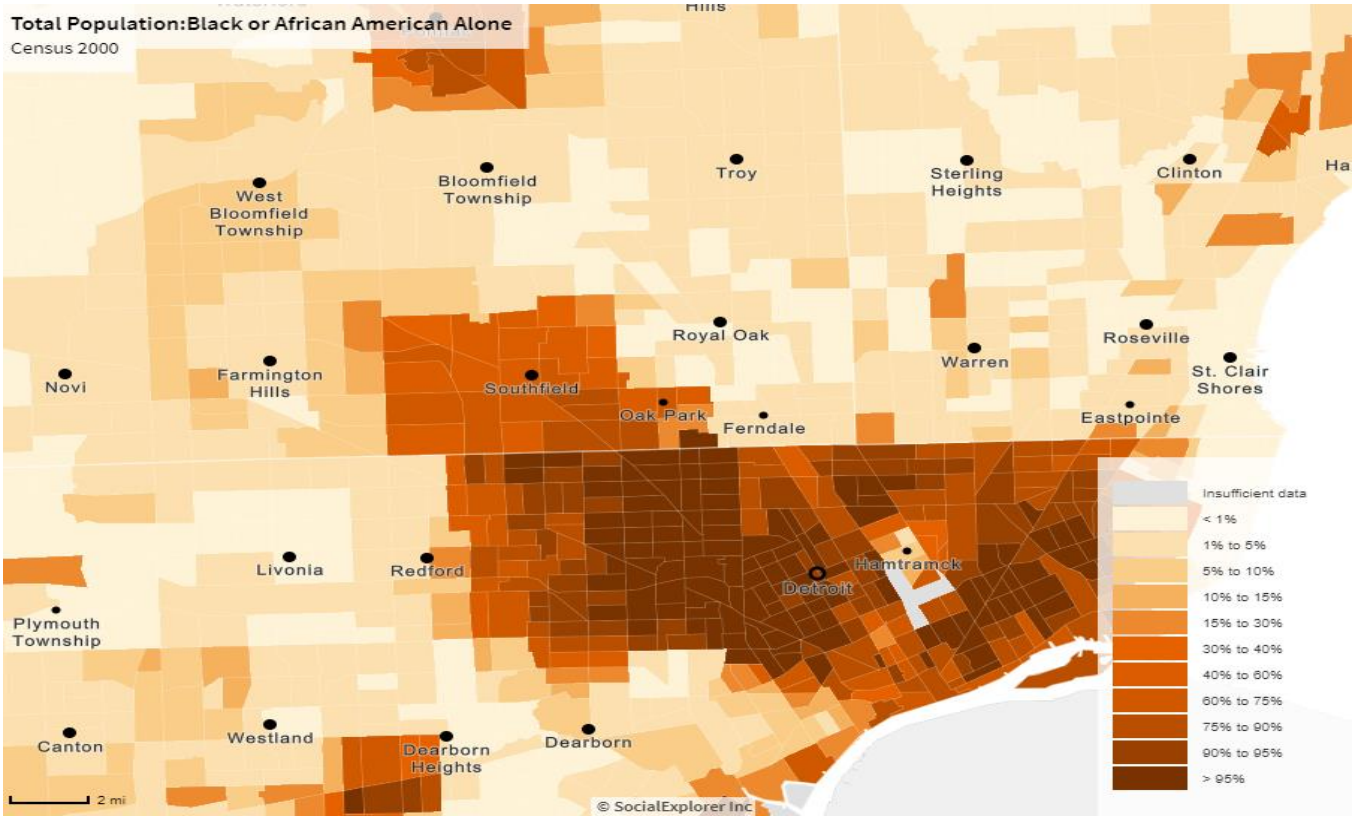

Figure 2.2: Black/ African American population in Metro Detroit by census tract in 2000

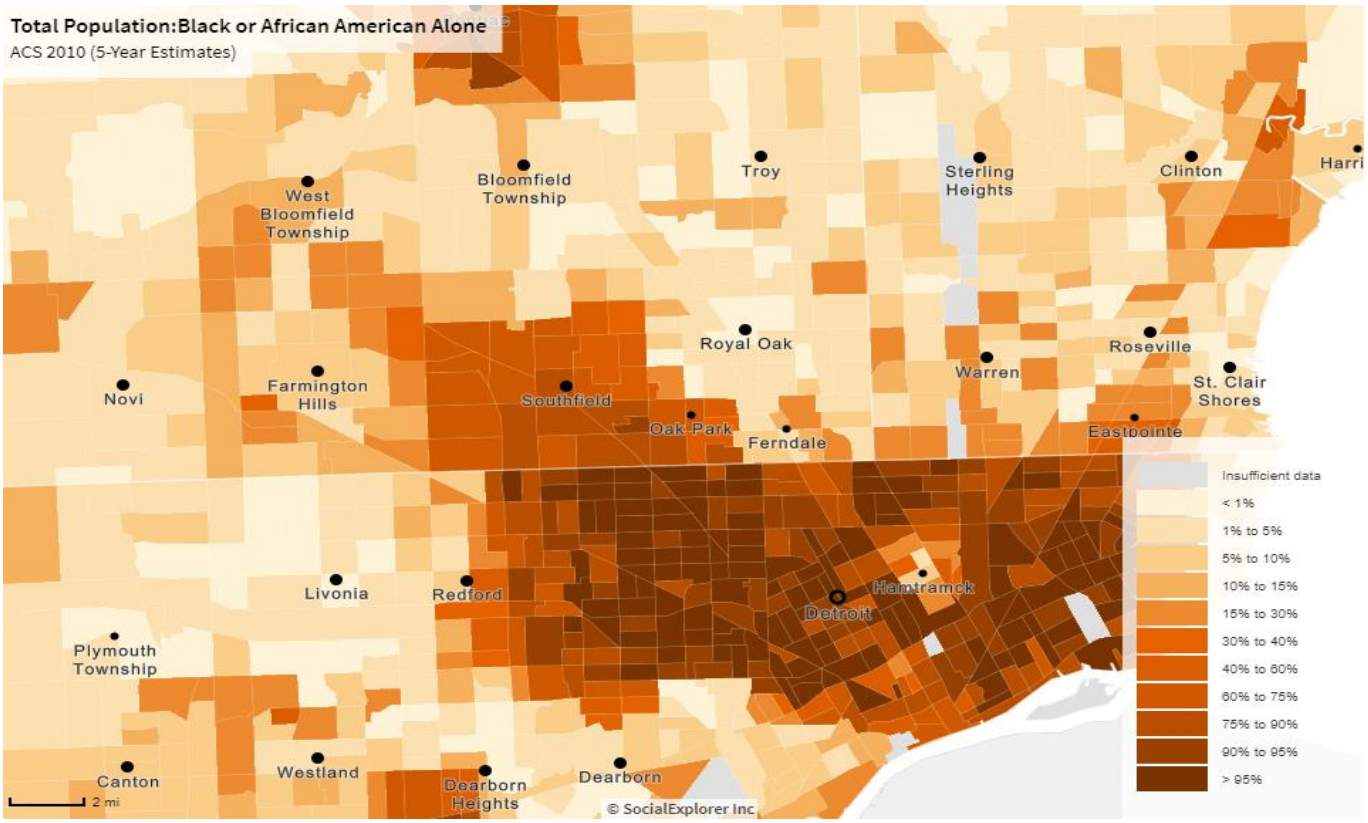

Figure 2.3: Black/ African American population in Metro Detroit by census tract in 2010

Importantly, Black families' move to the suburb is often not about fleeing other Black people but in gaining access to resources (Havekes, Bader, Krysan, 2016; Krysan & Bader, 2007; Lewis et al., 2012; Pattillo-McCoy, 2000; Posey-Maddox, 2017; Wiese, 2004). This is unlike white flight in the postwar era, which was largely driven by governmental discrimination and racial exclusionary politics. As detailed in Krysan and Bader's (2007) study of white-Black residential preferences in Metro Detroit, most Black respondents sought to live in substantially integrated communities and would heavily consider predominantly Black communities. Many Black individuals and families, while more willing to live in a range of suburban settings, recognize the barriers and added stress of living in predominantly white suburbs. A resident of a predominantly Black, middle-class subdivision in Prince George's county explained "We always wanted to make sure our child had many African American children to play with, not just one or two" (Dent, 1992, June 14, p. 449). Another resident explained his decision to move to a predominantly Black suburb as important because of the need for choice and agency in Black families and communities. He elaborated that "We are fighting for the right to go where we want to go, to make the choice to live where we want to live. We have the freedom of choice, which we have exercised" (Dent, 1992, June 14, p. 449).

Indeed, many Black families have searched for access to suburban amenities with mindfulness to dynamics of race, racism, agency, and political power. This sentiment has led to the creation of majority Black, middle to upper class suburbs in Atlanta, St. Louis, and Washington D.C. metro areas, among others. In Metro Detroit, Southfield has become a majority Black, middle-class suburb, where families are able to live in "spacious 1950s and 1960s-era ranch houses, colonials, and tri-levels" with Black neighbors and classmates (Sugrue, 1999).

While Black individuals and families are certainly capable of expressing discriminatory views of low-income Black communities, they are typically aware of racial dynamics within a place and the social burdens of living in a predominantly white settings (Greer & Smith, 2018; McGowen, 2017; Posey-Maddox, 2016; 2017; Krysan & Farley, 2002). Hence, patterns of Black suburbanization have been shaped by exclusionary policies and practices, but also by the preferences and agency of Black people to avoid racism and to live in a place where there is a visible Black presence (Krysan & Farley, 2002; Krysan & Bader, 2007).

Socioeconomic Status & Black Suburbanization

Class dynamics play a key role in the neighborhood decision-making and experiences of Black suburbanites. Contemporarily, being able to choose where one lives is a privilege that is most significantly shaped by individuals and families' socioeconomic status. Black suburbanites who live in upper to middle class suburbs have a different and unique set of class experiences and affordances that not all Black suburbanites possess. The majority of Black suburbanites across the U.S. live in inner-ring suburbs where the same deleterious social conditions found in urban cores may prevail (Lacy, 2007; Murphy, 2010; Pattillo-McCoy, 2000; Orfield, 2015). These Black suburbanites often live in "poorer suburbs with poorer services" (Nicolaides & Wiese, 2016, pg. 440).

While I forefront race in this study, socioeconomic status is significant in understanding Black suburbanization and suburban demographic change. Suburbs experience a range of socioeconomic conditions both within and between respective suburbs. Moreover, suburban poverty has significantly increased given factors like the Great Recession of 2008 (Kneebone & Berube, 2013; Murphy, 2010). For instance, from 2000 to 2010, the overall poverty population

of Southeast Michigan, which includes Metro Detroit, increased by 48%, and "the greatest increases were seen in the suburbs" (Data Driven Detroit, 2014, p. 1).

Alexandra Murphy (2010) offers three typologies of suburbs experiencing poverty: symbiotic, overshadowed, and skeletal. She details that *symbiotic suburbs* displays urban-like conditions, where often these towns are close in proximity to the city and have experienced poverty rates over 20 percent prior to the 1990s. Redford aligns most closely to this typology, given its poverty rate of 17% and shared border with Detroit (U.S. Department of Commerce, 2019). However, poverty has significantly increased in Redford over the past 20 years, where in 2000 the poverty rate was approximately 5.1%. Notably, Redford was significantly impacted by the 2008 recession. In Chapter 5, I further discuss the impacts of home foreclosure in Redford in spurring demographic change. Murphy also details *overshadowed suburbs* as generally affluent, however, these suburbs can have hidden "pockets of poverty" that are easily overlooked (p. 561). West Bloomfield aligns most closely to this typology, with approximately 5.9% of its residents experiencing poverty. The hidden nature of poverty in overshadowed suburbs rings true for West Bloomfield, where the large homes, green space, and well-kept strip malls leave no obvious or overt signs that some residents may experience these conditions. Lastly, *skeletal suburbs* display poverty that often springs from deindustrialization and large-scale job-loss creating skeletal-like infrastructure conditions. In these places poverty rates are typically over 20 percent and these conditions also exist prior to the 1990s. While neither Redford or West Bloomfield fit this typology, places in the Metro Detroit region that are particularly significant to the experiences of Black individuals and families in the region do.

For instance, Pontiac, MI, a bordering suburb of West Bloomfield, experienced economic devastation with the closure of General Motors automotive factories in 2009. Pontiac is now a

majority Black suburb where large-scale job loss and dramatic population loss have increased poverty rates to over 30% of the population (Witsil, 2018, May 12). Notably, Pontiac's public-school system has also suffered with large monetary debt and several school closures. From 2013-2018, Pontiac's public school system was under state-oversight, and like Detroit's public school system, many students and families left the district given its challenges. I further discuss Pontiac's economic and educational relationship to West Bloomfield schools in Chapter 5.

Overall, economic precarity in Metro Detroit has dramatically changed not only the demographics of suburbs, but also the economic stability of municipalities where many Black families live. In turn, this impacts schools and families' access to educational resources. For instance, given the struggles of Pontiac and Detroit's public school systems, these students and their per pupil funding now bolster school districts in places like West Bloomfield and Redford, among other districts. Altogether, economic struggle and devastation in majority Black municipalities has shaped Metro Detroit's educational landscape and residents raced and classed perceptions of place. While Black suburbanites have increased socio-economic affordances in comparison to Blacks individuals and communities remaining in the city (Haynes, 2001; Pattillo-McCoy, 2000; Wiese, 2004), as explained by Mary Pattillo-McCoy (2000) "the residential returns to being middle class for blacks are far smaller than for middle class whites" (p. 29). I examined these dynamics in Redford and West Bloomfield from families' experiences accessing suburban housing and public schools.

Given the diversity of settings and social dynamics Black suburbanites encounter, suburban schools and schooling experiences also greatly vary. Suburban school experiences are not homogenous, nor predominantly white. Moreover, some suburban school districts in Metro Detroit experience similar challenges or are only marginally better than Detroit's public-school

system (Orfield, 2015). Education literature has paid attention to the experiences of Black students in predominantly white suburban schools (Chapman, 2014; Diamond, 2006; Lewis & Diamond, 2015; Lewis-McCoy, 2014; Ogbu, 2003), however there remains a dearth of literature that examines the experiences of Black students and families in racially diverse or predominantly Black suburbs. I hope to expand our understanding of how race and class matter in Black families' suburban school choices by studying their perceptions of place in Redford, which has two predominantly Black suburban school districts and many residents who utilize school choice options outside of the suburb. Additionally, while West Bloomfield is a majority white suburb, there is still significant racial and ethnic diversity in schools. By paying attention to families' perceptions of place in two distinct, yet diverse Metro Detroit suburbs, I offer insight into how race, class, and metropolitan schooling conditions interact to shape the choices and experiences of Black families.

The Import of Perceptions of Place to Educational Access and Opportunity

Many scholars have demonstrated that access to an adequate, well-resourced education is significantly determined by the neighborhoods and/or parts of metropolitan areas in which we live (Anyon, 1997; Kozol, 1991; Lareau & Goyette, 2014; powell, 2008). Most notable to educational access and opportunity in the U.S., are the ways in which property taxes predominantly fund public schooling, whereby more affluent and populated communities typically generate more dollars and resources for public education. This is true across Michigan, where even with Proposition A—a state school aid fund that guarantees that all schools receive a baseline amount of per-pupil funding—more affluent districts are still allowed to levy additional taxes to further fund schools (Arsen, Delpier, & Nagel, 2019). This material reality in how educational funding works partly explains disparities between school districts and municipalities

within Metro Detroit and across the U.S. There are tangible policies and actions like school funding schemes, school governance structures, or the number of school closures in a district that contribute to the linkages between place and educational access and opportunity for families and students. However, in turn, these tangible differences between politics of place—or the social, economic, and political processes shaping specific places—create and distribute perceptions of place. Perceptions of place constitute the beliefs, imaginings, and meanings we construct about a place (Keith & Pile, 1993). In this way, politics of place and perceptions of place are mutually constitutive and reinforcing dynamics, where the inequitable access to resources and opportunities impacts how places, and in many cases the people who live there are perceived (Keith & Pile, 1993; Khalifa et al. 2015; powell, 2005). Hence, while Detroit, Redford, and West Bloomfield are different physical locales, places are not static, fixed, or simply physical locations. Places have practices that are shaped by human relationships, power dynamics, histories, and what is real and imagined by diverse social actors both residing in and outside of respective places (Cresswell, 1996; Keith & Pile, 1993; powell, 2005; Soja, 2009; Tuck & McKenzie, 2015). The boundaries between cities and suburbs, and between respective suburbs were erected by human practices and are maintained in different ways by individuals and communities' perceptions, willful actions, and exercises of power.

For example, Grosse Pointe, which borders the Northeast side of Detroit, produces the most economically segregating school district border in the U.S. (EdBuild, 2016). While most predominantly white and affluent suburbs are further removed from the city, the shared border between Detroit and Grosse Pointe has resulted in numerous exclusionary practices by Grosse Pointe's governance. Concrete blocks and sheds have been placed at crucial points along the six-mile border to deter Detroiters—who in some places live right across or down the street from

Grosse Pointe—from utilizing parks and other public spaces in the suburb. A Detroit resident explained that Grosse Pointe police patrol the border "like they're homeland security" (The Center for Michigan, 2014, October 22). Additionally, unlike many school districts in Metro Detroit, Grosse Pointe does not offer an inter-district transfer program. Therefore, families and students who reside in Detroit or other suburbs seeking quality schools cannot enroll and access educational resources in Grosse Pointe schools. Grosse Pointe actively maintains and enforces borders and boundaries through policing and school district policies to control access to resources like public parks and quality schools. These actions are part and parcel of the politics of place in Grosse Pointe, and more broadly Metro Detroit. Importantly, these actions are necessarily driven by the ways in which Detroit and/or Detroiters are imagined and perceived by powerholders and residents of Grosse Pointe.

As further discussed in Chapter 6, exclusionary practices and politics like those present in Grosse Pointe also shape Black families' perceptions of place, where given exclusionary dynamics, families may view these municipalities as undesirable. This leads Black families to access amenities in other suburbs in the region including Redford and West Bloomfield. Therefore, exploring perceptions of place acknowledges that places are as much about physical location as they are the products of human beliefs, decision-making, social relationships, and history.

Perceptions of Place and Decision-Making

Bodies of sociological literature on community perceptions, housing search, and racial residential segregation analyze the perceptions and biases of individuals that both shape the changing nature of suburbs and contribute to continued segregation. This literature shows that how individuals perceive a place remains deeply racialized (Charles, 2005; Dougherty et al.,

2009; Havekes, Bader, Krysan, 2016; Krysan & Bader, 2007; Lewis, Emerson, & Klineberg, 2012). Particularly for white people, research has shown that the racial composition of a community can trump more tangible metrics for community quality like home values, school test scores, and crime rates when determining neighborhoods where they would and would not live (Johnson & Shapiro, 2003; Lewis, Emerson, & Klineberg, 2012; Saporito & Lareau, 1999; Wells, 2015). However, Lewis, Emerson, and Klineberg (2012) found that this is not true for people of color, where "school quality and crime rates are the dominant factors in choosing a neighborhood" (p. 1402). They explain that for most white individuals' race may symbolize proxies for home values, school quality, and crime rates. "The categories 'black' and 'Hispanic' may mean (or connote) for whites higher crime rates, declining property values, and poor-quality schools" (p. 1403). Furthermore, social dynamics of a place can be racialized by whites, whereby they perceive positive social factors of a place as being incompatible with a place being majority Black, or even substantively integrated. This aligns with David Freund's (2007) historical study of Metro Detroit where he found that the language used in the housing marketplace framed white suburbanization and racial exclusions as about economic value rather than race. He explained that "whites concluded that they had consistently demonstrated their ability to own, maintain, and protect the value of homes… And because of this…whites had the right to protect their investments, their families, and their commitments from any kind of threat (including Black individuals and families)" (p. 19). These same racialized formations still matter for how families make decisions about where to live and school their children in U.S. metropolitan contexts.

White families' strong preference to live in predominantly white communities explains the continued growth of exurb (short for extra-urban) communities, which are places further away from the city and more rural in nature (Krysan & Bader, 2007; Orfield & Luce, 2013). In

Metro Detroit, the growth of predominantly white exurbs like Macomb Township and Shelby Township has contributed to urban sprawl in a region that continues to experience population loss (Orfield & Luce, 2013). In many cases, when individuals and families of color—especially Black families—have relocated to suburbs, white families will relocate or employ segregative measures within the municipality (Frankenberg & Orfield, 2012; Orfield & Luce, 2013; Siegel-Hawley, 2013). In Redford, family participants discussed that racial segregation remains between neighborhoods where many Black residents live on the east side of the suburb closest to Detroit. Additionally, in West Bloomfield, many Black residents live in the southern portion of the suburb. In chapter 4, I further discuss how this proved relevant to families' choices on where to live.

Importantly, perceptions of place are not always exclusionary, but can also be deeply inclusive and democratic given social actors' positionalities and experiences (Cresswell, 1996; Hunter & Robinson, 2018; Lipsitz, 2007; Soja, 2009). Tim Cresswell (1996) explains that "just as it is the case that space and place are used to structure a normative [and exclusionary] world, they are also used (intentionally or otherwise) to question that normative world…thus the margins can tell us something about 'normality'" (p. 9). In other words, individuals and communities that have been marginalized by normative politics can often perceive the ways in which space and place operate to exclude. As I detail below, Black individuals and communities have often interacted and engaged with schools in ways that transgress exclusionary politics of place and school dynamics (Lipman, 2018; Lipsitz, 2007; Wilson, Nickson, & Ransom, 2019). Indeed, as will be discussed in Ch.6, families in this study were generally aware of place-based histories of racial exclusions across Metro Detroit. These dynamics shape families' perceptions of place and their school and community choices. Through their experiences, some families

understood the realities of discrimination, racism, and exclusion. Therefore, families advocated for equitable access and opportunity for their children, and often other children, within their social and economic means.

Black Suburbanization, School Choice Decision-Making, and Conceptions of Educational Opportunity

Detroit ranks third in the nation for the number of school choice options, only behind New Orleans, Louisiana & Flint, Michigan. However, families continue to leave the city due to the overall low quality of these options. Former U.S. Secretary of Education, Arne Duncan asserted that Detroit Public Schools are "ground zero for education in this country" (Murray, 2011, April 8). While this language is alarmist and overlooks the valiant community-based efforts to improve schools, Duncan's statement captures the heightened challenges of the city's public school system. Indeed, Detroit's public school system has been significantly impacted by state policy and disinvestment that create the poor state of schools in the city (Khalifa et al., 2015; Pedroni, 2010; Wilson, 2015).

Given these challenges, Black movement to the suburbs is deeply intertwined with school choice decision-making in Metro Detroit. Although not as commonly discussed as a form of school choice, when families have the capital and privilege to choose where they live in order to access a quality school, they participate in school choice decision-making too (Dougherty, Harrelson, Maloney, Murphy, Smith, Snow, and Zannoni, 2009; Holme, 2002; Wells, 2015;). Dougherty and colleagues emphasize that "one of the nation's oldest and largest choice systems (among more frequently discussed school choice methods like charter schools, school voucher programs, etc.), [is] the willingness to pay for better public schools through the private real estate market of suburbia" (p. 523). However, less is qualitatively known about the particularities of

how Black families who relocate to suburbs make decisions about quality schooling, which studies have shown is a key driver of Black families' neighborhood preferences (Lewis et al., 2012).

School Choice Decision-Making

The majority of school choice literature focusing on Black families and students examines urban school systems. However, a lot can be learned from this literature. Namely, how families engage in school choice decision-making is shaped by their identities, perceptions, and the unique circumstances of their lives (Aggarwal, 2015; Bell, 2009; Cooper, 2005; Cooper, 2007; Pattillo, 2015; Pedroni, 2007; Slaughter-Defoe, Stevenson, Arrington, & Johnson, 2012; Wilson, 2015; Wells, 1996). Camille Wilson Cooper (2005) uses the term "positioned choice" to explain that race, class, and gender backgrounds significantly shape Black mothers' school choice decision-making. Cooper explains that school choice decision-making is "informed by how parents are politically situated within greater society and the educational structure" (p. 175). Cooper's work illuminates the importance of identity and positionality to the school choice decisions parents make. For instance, in her work on school choice decision-making in Detroit, Wilson (2015) finds that systems of school choice are often "inadequate for families experiencing poverty" because of a lack of transportation, adequate information, and/or social and economic capital that are often necessary for accessing school choice options across the city's educational landscape (p.13). Most salient to this study, Courtney Bell (2009) also finds that Detroit parents' "geographic preferences (meanings they assigned to both neighborhoods and schools) were always being weighed along with other preferences" including their child's personal and academic needs, in addition to access to transportation and parent's work schedule and flexibility, among others (p. 515). Bell documents that while Detroit parents sought

conveniently located schools, parents weighed this preference against their geographic perceptions. As these studies show, Black families' school choice options are shaped by race, class, gender, and geography among other salient identities and positionalities. I seek to add to this literature by further exploring these dynamics from suburban contexts. Moreover, I also aim to better understand the role of physical movement or relocation in shaping families' perceptions of place, schools, and their decision-making.

Class or socioeconomic status are particularly important to understanding school choice decision-making among Black families in suburban contexts. Particularly, class shapes the range of schooling options families can access. Studies show that Black middle-class families in suburbs can opt out (through private, religious, charter, or homeschooling) of suburban schools that they deem inadequate in educating their children (Holme, Frankenberg, Diem, & Welton, 2013; Lewis-McCoy, 2014; Mazama & Lundy, 2012; Slaughter-Defoe, et al. 2012). For instance, in Lewis-McCoy's (2014) study, white families perceived the Midwestern public-school system to be "stellar," while many Black, middle-class families perceived racism in schools to be "dangerous" for their children (p. 141). Lewis-McCoy found that Black parents who opted out of district schools experienced a greater level of "educational customization, a more welcoming institutional reception, specialized curriculums, and fewer race-related issues such as the achievement gap" (p. 141). Importantly, he emphasizes that not all Black families in this Midwestern suburb had the resources to opt out of public schools. Black families who remained in the district were more likely to be working-class. This weakened Black families and students' ability to organize against educational issues within the district, where Black middle-class families in this suburb "typically said that their children's individual needs outweighed their commitment to engaging with the education issues of the wider black community" (p. 141).

Overlapping with insights from studies of school choice in urban school systems, Cucchiara, Gold, and Simon (2011) found that systems of choice can stifle collective forms of public engagement by positioning students and parents as individual consumers in an education marketplace. Hence, different socioeconomic affordances of Black families in suburbs can likewise offer a greater range of school choice options, yet hinder collective educational change-making efforts.

Significantly, several studies explained that in Black families' pursuit of high-quality suburban schools they often encounter structural and interpersonal barriers (Chapman, 2014; Lewis & Diamond, 2015; Lewis-McCoy, 2014; Posey-Maddox, 2016, 2017; Rhodes & Warkentien, 2017). Rhodes and Warkentien (2017) found that Black families' socioeconomic status in addition to histories of racism and exclusion in the Greater Cleveland Metropolitan area shaped their ability to access the "package deal," or their ability to pair their housing decisions with a quality school. In their qualitative study, the researchers explain that when Black families moved to "suburban neighborhoods expecting to access high quality public schools, patterns of segregation, structured by a history of discriminatory housing policies, *interacted* with the constraints families faced and the resources they had, influencing their children's access to educational opportunities" (p.181). When compared with white families in Rhodes and Warkentien's study, Black families had a much harder time accessing quality suburban schools given a lack of intergenerational wealth and family or social connections in affluent suburban places. Similarly, noting the effects of interpersonal racism and bias, Linn Posey-Maddox (2017) explained that while Black families perceived a predominantly white Wisconsin suburb to offer high quality schools and more community amenities, parents and students experienced frequent microaggressions in school and community spaces. Together, these studies show that Black

families' movement to suburbs can be not only financially costly, but their ability to access educational opportunity in these places is often hindered by systemic and interpersonal inequalities deeply embedded in the formations of U.S. metropolitan regions.

Conceptions of Educational Opportunity

Black parents, to the best of their ability, prioritize the safety and well-being of their children in the school setting. Families and students will endure significant barriers and risks in the pursuit of educational opportunity, yet there are still limits to the social and psychic harm parents and guardians will allow their children to face (Anderson, 1988; Lewis-McCoy, 2014; Mazama & Lundy, 2012; Posey-Maddox, 2016; Shedd, 2015; Slaughter-Defoe et al., 2012; Rhodes & Warkentien, 2017; Wilson, Ek, & Douglas, 2013). For instance, Lareau and Horvat (1999) explain that "given the historical legacy of racial discrimination, black parents are more likely to begin the (schooling) process suspicious and critical of the risk of unfair treatment for their children" (p. 42). Similarly, Karyn Lacy (2007) documents how Black parents who had access to quality schools in Fairfax County, a suburban area outside of Washington D.C., still struggled to ensure fair treatment and access to educational opportunity. Parents learned to be skeptical of what is commonly known as a quality school. They questioned whether these quality schools would actually be a quality experience for their Black child. One mother from Lacy's study explained:

> I could send my child to Langley [a competitive high school]. But as a *black* child, if there are some teachers over there that don't have a good attitude about black kids, then putting them over there at Langley did me absolutely no good. Even though I moved to that neighborhood because I think the schools are better. Well, yes, they may be [better] overall, but not necessarily for my child. Again, looking on paper, you don't know—you

never know—whether this school is really for your child. And you don't learn until you get there. (p. 216)

As demonstrated through this mother, school choice decision-making for Black parents in suburban school systems often requires that parents look beyond popular perceptions of schools, which often guides the school choices of white parents in "high status" suburban schools (Holmes, 2002; Johnson & Shapiro, 2003; Rowe & Lubienski, 2016). Black parents must take a more proactive role to understand if a school will both educate and treat their child well. Again, shaped by dynamics of class, parents must then make the best decision accessible to them, which might mean engaging with schools in a vigilant and strategic manner, drawing on supplementary and culturally relevant educational experiences, or altogether seeking out other schooling options (Bailey-Fakhoury, 2014; Cooper, 2009a; Lareau & Horvat, 1999; Lewis-McCoy, 2014; Mazama & Lundy, 2012; Moultrie, 2016; Posey-Maddox, 2017).

Bailey-Fakhoury's (2014) study of suburban middle-class African-American mothers in Metro Detroit found that these mothers proactively interacted with and trained their daughters to develop a positive racial-gender identity through mentorship and promoting positive images of Black women, among other strategies. In the school setting, Lareau and Horvat (1999) found that Black middle-class parents navigated discriminatory situations by visiting the school frequently to prevent problems from developing. Some parents also requested their children be tested for gifted and talented programs. Black parents have also organized with other Black families, in some cases filing lawsuits, to contest wide-spread inequities in suburban schools (Lewis-McCoy, 2014). Mazama & Lundy (2012) call this racial protectionism, or Black parents and guardians "strong desire to protect their children from the ill effects of school-related racism" (p. 1). Because suburbs are perceived and in reality, often have better resourced schools than many

urban cities, the maltreatment and increased labor of Black students and families may receive in these schools can go unnoticed and understudied (Lewis-McCoy, 2018).

Overall, research shows that Black suburbanites continue to encounter substantial barriers and challenges, although socioeconomically privileged in comparison to many Black families who remain in the city. The residue of the racialized and exclusionary formations of suburbs lingers in their experiences as they search for educational opportunity for their families. However, this is not simply a phenomenon of interpersonal and structural barriers, Black families and students also enact strategic forms of agency in navigating schools in suburban contexts. Given these factors, more attention is needed to better understand Black parents' perceptions of place and the quality of their school choices as suburbs become more racially and economically diverse. Often the perceptions and experiences of Black families and students engaging in suburban school choice decision-making are marginalized in attempts to better understand the persistent biases in white parents, teachers, and administrators preferences or actions in suburban community, schooling, and political contexts (Dougherty et al., 2015; Holme, 2002; Holme et al., 2013; Johnson & Shapiro, 2003; Lewis & Diamond, 2015; Lewis-McCoy, 2014; Saporito & Lareau, 1999; Wells, 2015). This is not to say that this work is not important or needed. Indeed, it provides important context and impetus for the need to study the experiences of Black families in demographically changing metropolitan contexts. The diverse voices and meaning making of Black families amid demographic change in metropolitan regions must be brought to the center to gain a holistic and nuanced understanding of how to promote education equity and inclusion for Black students in these settings.

In the final section, I detail the conceptual framing for this study. I draw from theories and literature on spatial imaginaries and opportunity structures, to emphasize the intertwined

nature of place, race, access to opportunity, and perceptions in the U.S. I first briefly define place in relationship to space given their close and often overlapping meanings.

Conceptual Framework

Defining Place versus Space

In this work, I predominately discuss place rather than space. Place and space are distinct, but complementary in ways that are important to briefly unpack. I use place to denote the material and physical reality of where Black families perceive and pursue educational opportunity. As discussed earlier, places have particular histories and power dynamics that order and impact social relations. As John Agnew (2011), a political geographer explains, in "Space and Place," place is "constituted by the impact that being somewhere has on the constitution of the (social, economic, political, etc.) processes in question" (p. 3). On the other hand, space is much more abstract than place. Space offers the backdrop or canvas on which a place is created over time and through human interactions. For instance, Detroit, Redford, and West Bloomfield are particular geographic spaces as determined by coordinate systems, and they also contain spaces within them like classrooms within the cities' school buildings or the art room at the local community center. Therefore, places are also spaces. Yet, I use place to capture the politicized nature of geography and location. Places are particular and lived spaces that are consequential to economic, social, and political processes, and most importantly, the people who live, work, and school in these places day by day.

Race, Place, and Opportunity

I draw from Lipsitz's (2007) theorizing on the intertwined nature of racial and spatial processes in the U.S. and john a. powell's (2013) conceptualization of opportunity structures to emphasize the linkages between race and racism, place, and struggles over resources. Both works explain that opportunity and resources in the U.S. are significantly shaped by the places we live and/or are able to access. Furthermore, where we live and our access to opportunity is deeply racialized. powell and Lipsitz acknowledge and center the mutually reinforced role of race and place given widespread U.S. policies and practices that have physically barred Black individuals from places, and thus certain resources and opportunity. Within the realm of public education, inequitable school funding, tracking within schools, segregative school catchment areas and district boundaries, among other dynamics, have particularly reinforced the intertwined role of race and place in access to a quality education.

powell (2005) offers a helpful analysis of how race and place matter in creating opportunity structures. He explains that the intra-connections of various social institutions (i.e. schools, hospitals, governmental services, etc.) work together to create racialized opportunity structures that often disadvantage Black and Brown communities. Moreover, the intra-connections of institutions make it hard to determine the causation of harm. He elaborates:

> From a structural perspective, causation is understood as cumulative within and across domains. It is a product of reciprocal and mutual interactions within and between institutions. Institutional racism shifts our focus from the motives of individual people to practices and procedures within an institution. Structural racism shifts our attention from the single, intra-institutional setting to inter-institutional arrangements and interactions. Efforts to identify causation at a particular moment of decision within a specific domain understates the cumulative impact of discrimination. (powell, 2005, p. 24).

In this way, it is the history of places, policies within and around places, political relationships between places, and as will be further discussed, the meanings we then derive and perpetuate about places that knit together racialized opportunity structures.

Historically, federal home loan programs that supported white families' movement to suburban cities like Grosse Pointe and economic incentives to locate jobs in the suburbs, among others, have produced lasting impacts that reverberate and contribute to present-day inequality in opportunity structures. This plays out contemporarily in Metro Detroit's educational landscape where the city struggles to adequately provide social services and quality public schools to all neighborhoods given its strained tax base and significant population loss. Now, the concentrated poverty within select Detroit neighborhoods not only restricts parents' resources and engagement with schools, but further limits the city's overall tax base to fund schools. Without any reparative or justice-oriented interventions, historical injustice and harm continue to live through contemporary dynamics like school closures and systems of school choice, even when social actors work with good intent to improve schooling conditions. As emphasized by Lipsitz (2011) in *How Racism Takes Place,* it is not only Black disadvantage that we must pay attention to in order to fully understand the linkages between race and place, but long-held white advantages and privileges that have contributed to racialized and spatialized opportunities in the U.S.

powell (2005) clarifies that institutional disparities in under-resourced opportunity structures often reinforce each other to create systemic issues. For example, scholars have established the strong link between educational attainment and health outcomes (Ross & Wu, 1995). Considering this association in light of powell's opportunity structures, if access to quality and affordable healthcare in your neighborhood is limited, this can result in unaddressed health issues that can make it hard for students to concentrate and learn in schools. Therefore, the

lack of quality institutions and services across the network of institutions reinforces disparities in access to opportunity. This ultimately creates neighborhoods where individuals and families must assert tremendous effort to access opportunity and experience social mobility. This occurs in Metro Detroit's educational landscape where a parent can spend three hours driving nearly 100 miles per day in attempts for her children to attend quality schools (Einhorn, 2016, April 11). On the other hand, the opposite is generally true for well-resourced opportunity structures, where the effects of adequate resources and meaningful investment in social institutions creates an environment where individuals exert significantly less effort to access opportunity and experience social mobility. This helps explain why some Black families relocate to suburbs even when aware that they will encounter racism and bias. Additionally, even with families' relocation to suburbs they can continue to exert extra labor given the historical and embedded nature of white privilege and power in many suburbs (Loewen, 2005; Khalifa et al., 2015; Posey-Maddox, 2016; Riddle, 2000; Rhodes & Warkentien, 2017; Rothstein, 2017). Hence, even when suburban school districts encounter similar demographics of an urban school system, their political and social dynamics are not the same. Governance structures, curricula, school disciplinary policies, and teacher demographics and training, among other issues can be vastly different than urban school systems, where Black people may have amassed more political power.

powell (2018) juxtaposes the image of an ascending and descending escalator to capture the difference between well-resourced and under-resourced opportunity structures. With well-resourced opportunity structures, most individuals can simply step on the escalator to participate in favorable outcomes and social mobility. However, in under-resourced opportunity structures, individuals must run against a descending escalator in their attempts to attain social mobility and

progress. The collective disinvestment of the network of institutions that they reside in, or the bias and racism in the network of institutions, actively works against their efforts towards progress. Contrary to cultural discourses that may label Black and/or low-income individual as 'lazy,' their personal efforts are often similar or increased in comparison to the efforts of individuals in well-resourced structures. However, the resources they have at hand from which to work against this descending escalator are often fewer and may be underrecognized and undervalued by mainstream institutional norms and cultures that are likewise racialized, classed, and gendered (Lareau & Horvat, 1999; Yosso, 2005). Again, the uneven and racialized development of metropolitan regions impacts the lived experiences of Black families and students whether living in urban cities or suburbs contemporarily. For instance, even in predominantly Black or racially diverse suburbs, political power and decision-making may still be predominantly held by white residents given the racialized formations of many U.S. suburbs (Lewis-McCoy, 2018). Moreover, many Black suburbanites maintain meaningful ties and affiliation to urban cities (Nicolaides & Wiese, 2016). For instance, in this study, many parent participants held immense pride and care for Detroit due to their upbringing in the city and having family members who still reside there. They still see themselves as a part of rich community legacies and efforts to improve social and economic conditions in Detroit. Overall, being Black in Metro Detroit's contested and stratified educational landscape proved consequential to both ascending and descending "escalators" ability to support Black families and children.

The stark differences in the structural contexts of places have led many education scholars and advocates to use the term "opportunity gaps" to capture the continued race and place-based disparities that impact access to a quality education (Milner, 2012; Schott

Foundation, 2018). Importantly, Ladson-Billings (2006) extends this discourse by citing historic, economic, sociopolitical, and moral oppressions that have created an "education debt" for children of color in U.S. schools. Additionally, paying attention to the role of white privilege and advantage in contributing to differential access and outcomes, Tilly (1998) coined the term "opportunity hoarding" to explain how the control of resources allows privileged social groups to exclude and limit other social groups access to resources. This work shows that disparities that exist in schools and across school systems in metropolitan regions like Detroit are therefore not the product of some innate deficit, but the product of historical and persistent inequity and maltreatment.

Opportunity Structures Distribute Meaning

Place-based structural differences are also imbued with meaning. The identities of individuals who inhabit structures and how others perceive these identities helps perpetuate differential outcomes. powell (2005) explains that "the structures that we inhabit not only distribute material benefits and burdens across society, but also distribute meaning, which in turn shapes racial attitudes and influences the formation of racial identities" (p. 811). Given that opportunity structures are racialized and contribute to racial disparities, powell asserts that places can be "race-making situations," reinforcing racialization processes and difference in society (pg. 811). This means that social actors use differences in places to construct meanings about the people who live in certain places; constructing schemas for how people live and what they value. As previously noted, research shows that in many places as race and class demographics change in schools, white families will begin to relocate or employ segregative measures within neighborhoods or districts (Frankenberg & Orfield, 2012; Orfield & Luce, 2013; Siegel-Hawley, 2013). Their relocation can be spurred by deficit beliefs of families and communities of color as

harmful to school and community dynamics (Lewis et al., 2012). Actions like this are driven by the meanings that individuals and groups construct of places and the people who live there. These meanings are not necessarily the truth nor based in reality; nonetheless, they shape our perceived choices and subsequent actions.

Khalifa et al. (2015) demonstrate how educational policy enacted in Detroit is linked to the "White imaginative" of Black Detroit. They explain the "White imaginative to be perceptions, notions, descriptions, thoughts, or assumptions that White people have of people of color that are based on racialized stereotypes" (p. 10). They detail that the White imaginative in Detroit fueled the *Milliken* decision, the state takeovers of Detroit's schools, and mass school closures, among other regressive educational policies. Furthermore, Khalifa and colleagues assert that anti-democratic policies are sparingly enacted in districts predominantly serving white families and students, which may affect some Black families' relocation to suburban districts. Importantly, Khalifa and colleagues explain that Black individuals are not immune from enacting a White imaginative mindset, due to its prevalence and power in mainstream society. While Black families have moved in significant numbers out of Detroit, the White imaginative can still shape their experiences in schools and communities and their perceptions and decision-making too.

Importantly, these meanings can be both deficit and exclusionary as in the example provided, or inclusive and democratic, where given families positionalities and experiences, they may recognize structural disinvestment and the deep humanity and strength of people and communities who live and school in under-resourced opportunity structures (Boggs & Kurashige, 2012; Cresswell, 1996; Davis, 2017; Fullilove, 2016; Lipsitz, 2007; Hunter & Robinson, 2018; Hunter, Pattillo, Robinson, & Taylor, 2016; McKittrick & Woods, 2007;

Rosario-Ramos & Sawada, 2019; Soja, 2009; Wilson et al., 2019). Overall, this meaning-making becomes a part of people's racial and spatial imaginaries guiding their perceptions and decision-making. Where we live and the opportunity structures we inhabit are tied in part to how the attitudes, values, norms, and behaviors of individuals who live there are perceived by ourselves and others.

This plays out in suburban schools where the actions of Black parents and students, many of whom may have relocated from urban cores, are misperceived or even criminalized (Ferguson, 2010; Lewis-McCoy, 2014; Posey-Maddox, 2017). For example, Black students are often over disciplined in comparison to their white peers in suburban schools because teachers and administrators implement and enforce school disciplinary policies in ways that lead to harsher punishment for Black students and more leniency and discretion for white students (Gregory, Skiba, & Noguera, 2010; Lewis & Diamond, 2015). Black students are more readily perceived as a "troublemaker" or "unsalvageable" and therefore receive punitive discipline (Ferguson, 2010, p. 117) In this way, the school as an opportunity structure is less accessible to Black students because of social and cultural beliefs that misperceive Black children and even white teachers and administrators implicit beliefs about the schools or classrooms where Black children belong. This leads to Black students and families exerting more effort and energy to be deemed compliant and/or to counteract these dynamics. In suburban schools, Black families often exert increased labor in order to access educational opportunity. This grows from U.S. histories of raced and classed exclusions that have shaped structures, and in turn local and national cultures, even as policy change has facilitated more access and inclusion to suburban places and a range of schooling options.

Black Families "Take Place"

In conclusion, Lipsitz (2007) explains that Black individuals and communities' efforts to gain access to more equitable opportunity structures has often required Black people to knowingly enter spaces where they are unwelcomed, unwanted, and/or physically threatened with violence (Anderson, 1988; Baugh, 2011; Khalifa et al., 2015; Rothstein, 2017). Lipsitz captures these actions, by explaining that Black individuals and communities have had to "take place," meaning that their struggles for public resources have often been tied to struggles to coopt and transgress exclusionary place-based dynamics. Notably, Lipsitz (2007) illuminates that Black peoples' ability to "take place" can be motivated by a Black spatial imaginary. Black spatial imaginaries grow from histories of place and race-based exclusions that required resource constrained communities to engage in communal sharing and creative use of what they did have. In turn, many Black individuals and communities have developed a belief in the democratic and equitable use of public expenditures given their exposure or familiarity with marginalization and structural disinvestment.

As seen in the racial demographic differences between Redford and West Bloomfield school districts, Black suburbanization looks very different across suburbs and suburban school districts. All suburbs are not the same and therefore they offer different place-based dynamics and social climates. However, even when Black individuals and families relocate to suburbs that have a critical mass of Black families, they still often must negotiate histories and social structures that were not designed with their interests and needs in mind. "Taking places" entails struggling to resist and remake inequitable place-based dynamics and structures. It is a willingness to enter and actively struggle against a racialized opportunity structure that was not designed for Black individuals and families. It is a transgression and resistance of racialized structures that normalize the exclusion of Black people and communities. Omi and Winant

(2014) call this type of resistance a racial project from "below" where racialized social actors that are constrained or oppressed by dominant structural dynamics work to resist and reshape social dynamics in order to gain greater freedom and/or access to opportunity. This supports the long lineage of Black communities' continued struggle for educational access through desegregation, community control, independent schools, and culturally relevant curricula, among other efforts (Anderson, 1988; Baugh, 2011; Morris, 2008b).

In search of greater opportunity, Black individuals and families have perceived and recognized barriers and harm, yet many still see the benefits to be gained as worthy of pursuing. By centering Black families and students' perceptions of place, I aim to gain a better understanding of how Black families perceive not only the educational opportunity offered in places and schools, but the structural barriers, forms of agency, and identities that shape their school choice and community decision-making. Ultimately, I believe that there are valuable lessons teachers, administrators, and policymakers can learn from families' actions and efforts. Every Black parent who moves, demands, and/or provides more for their child where public education systems have not, provides insight, knowledge, and guidance on how to better educate all students—who bring a range of identities and experiences to classrooms and communities.

Chapter III
Research Methods and Design

The aim of this research study is to gain a better understanding of how Black families' perceptions of place shape their school choice decision-making and ultimately, their conceptions of educational opportunity in Metro Detroit. Moreover, I seek to understand how identity mediates this phenomenon. Specifically, how families' race, class, and where they live shapes their perceptions of these dynamics. Ultimately, the purpose of this study is to extend or complicate understandings of structural and sociocultural factors that have affected educational access and opportunity for Black children and families in Metropolitan Detroit. Fundamental to my epistemological approach as a researcher is my belief in the vital agency of Black families and students amid continued educational and racial injustices. This grows from my own experiences working with Black students, parents, and community members in different contexts where educational access and opportunity resembled apartheid-like conditions. However, despite these realities, I witnessed families and students navigate limited structural opportunities with creativity, collective agency, and ultimately, in the best ways they could. In this study, I have aimed to amplify Black families' voice and agency by examining how their perceptions of place, lived experiences, and identities matter in the ongoing struggle for educational opportunity as significant demographics shifts occur in Metro Detroit, and many other U.S. metropolitan regions.

In this chapter I unpack my core research design by explaining the critical phenomenological methodology I employed, and the methods used for data collection and

analysis. I importantly first begin this chapter by detailing my positionality as a researcher, which is integral to my motivation and approach for this study.

Researcher Positionality

In 1995, before the start of my first-grade year, my family relocated to Allen, Texas, a predominantly white suburb north of Dallas. My family moved from Missouri City, Texas—a racially diverse suburb bordering southwest Houston. In Missouri City, I attended an all-Black religious private school a few blocks from our family home. This small school named Ubora—a Swahili word for excellence—provided a warm and familial environment where I learned with fellow church members and neighbors. We all knew each other's families and as I remember my early childhood experiences in this school, memories of play, laughter, yet discipline are most salient. When my family relocated to Allen, the change was stark. Notably, on the first day of school, I can remember looking for other Black students throughout the day and disappointingly finding very few. Although I did not have the language to express what I was feeling, I still can remember feeling confused that a school could exist with so few other children that looked like me. As a six-year-old child, I had limited exposure to predominantly white spaces, and this school presented an unsettling conceptual shift. Fortunately, as I progressed through this suburban educational system, the classrooms and hallways I inhabited gained more racial diversity. Today, the Black/ African American population has quintupled in the suburb where I grew up and my parents still reside, moving from a predominantly white to racially diverse suburb. Additionally, the Dallas metroplex showed the most "dramatic pattern of racial change in its inner suburbs from 2000 to 2010" in the U.S. (Orfield & Luce, 2013, p. 408). Indeed, I witnessed this diversity throughout my K-12 schooling experiences.

In part, this study is motivated by my own K-12 educational experiences, which were not without significant barriers and a palpable sense that the educational system me and my family navigated was not designed with our cultural and social needs in mind. My parents have explained to me that if they would have been more aware of the issues we would encounter in this suburban school system, they may have made a different choice on where to live when we relocated. However, when I return home, I remain heartened by the growing racial and socioeconomic diversity and the rich opportunities that can accompany increased political power among marginalized groups in suburban communities and metropolitan regions as a whole.

Importantly, I am an outsider to the Metro Detroit region, which presents different historical, ethno-racial, social, and economic dynamics than I encountered in my own schooling experiences. Throughout my doctoral program, I have actively worked to gain contextual knowledge of political and social dynamics in the region through both study and research. I have worked with three community-based research projects in Detroit where I have interacted with parents, youth, and community members that are highly knowledgeable of Metro Detroit's educational landscape. Additionally, some of these parents and students have accessed suburban schools in the region in their search for quality schools. I also conducted a pilot study interviewing youth in one of Redford Township's high schools, and before interviewing families for this study, I held several informal conversations with various community members, including teachers, school district officials, and long-time residents of the Metro Detroit region. As an outsider to Detroit and non-parent, I have remained sensitive to areas of needed learning.

As I approached study participants, I aimed to be clear about my identity as a doctoral student and outsider to the Metro Detroit region. I explained my interests and experiences with learning about schools in the region over the past four years through my studies and working

with community-based research projects in Detroit. I recognized that my identity as a young Black woman provided a greater level of approachability and familiarity with families. Yet, as I gained a level of rapport and familiarity, I shared with families, especially child participants, my own K-12 educational experiences in the suburbs of Dallas to be clear about my motivations for the study, my outsider status, and how my own educational experiences may have been similar or different.

Continued reflexivity and awareness of my own experiences and interpretations were integral to understanding families' perceptions and meaning making. I was not neutral in my approach to the research, nor did I aim to be given commitments to advancing education equity and access for Black families and students. However, as I sought to represent Black families and students' perceptions and experiences, and not my own, it was important that I remained aware and reflective of my own feelings, reactions, and motives throughout the research process (Hesse Biber & Leavy, 2011; Mobley, 2019). This aided in my ability to approach families' perceptions and experiences as a "perpetual beginner" or with "epistemic humility" (Beven, 2014; Ryan, 2013). Ultimately, I approached building rapport with families and students with the goal to engage in a "knowledge producing conversation" that positions the families and students as the expert and/or teacher (Hesse-Biber & Leavy, 2011, p.105). I also aimed to be useful to families and student in ways that they may deem helpful. For example, where appropriate, I shared information with families about schools, events, and programs in the district or metropolitan region based on my own learning. Also, all families were interested in discussing findings in different ways in order to increase their understanding of Metro Detroit's education landscape.

Lastly, as a young Black woman working to complete my PhD, some families offered forms of encouragement and support during and after the interview process through texts and

emails. One mother surprisingly even offered to help coordinate a member-checking meeting, which I declined, as I desired for meetings to also be an opportunity to thank families for their time and insights provided during interviews. Nonetheless, messages and offerings of support especially encouraged me and indicated that some families felt invested and collaborative in the completion of this study.

Core Research Design

This critical phenomenological study examined seven diverse Black families' perceptions and lived experiences of geographic movement and seeking quality schools in Metro Detroit. A phenomenological approach seeks to understand how objects and events are understood through study of human consciousness and first-person experience. Indeed, a phenomenon is defined as something that happens or exists in society that can be known through human senses and experience (van Manen, 1990). Hence, a phenomenological methodology centers ontological subjectivity by seeking an individual's perception, memory, imagination, embodied action, and social activity. These varied forms of human consciousness in turn inform the sense making we have of our experiences (Kay, 2009).

Importantly, I utilized an interpretive approach to phenomenology. This departs from classical or transcendental phenomenology which seeks the essence or immutable characteristics of a phenomenon by attempting to 'bracket' participant's sense making and experiences from cultural contexts and the researcher's influence on participants' understanding (Dowling, 2006; Husserl, 1962; Moustakas, 1994; Polkinghorne, 1983). As explained by Dowling (2006), the purpose of bracketing, or phenomenological reduction is that descriptions are captured without reflection or theoretical understanding. However, this traditionalist approach leaves little room

for “being-in-the-world,” or the importance of context in shaping human consciousness and knowing (Dowling, 2006, p. 133).

Instead, interpretive, or hermeneutic traditions of phenomenology emphasize the importance of understanding context as opposed to simply description of consciousness (Dowling, 2006, van Manen, 1990). Therefore, interpretive phenomenology is attentive to social, cultural, political, and historical contexts that influence participant’s lived experiences (Kay, 2009; van Manen, 1990). Kay (2009) explains that an interpretive methodology requires an understanding of the “social rules that agents are acting within” (p. 53). For instance, policy dynamics and economic resources, among others can form social rules. This means that as a researcher, I worked to understand how participants interpret and construct these social rules and how context matters to families’ understandings of their experiences. Notably, Dilthey (1996) particularly explains the importance of history to understanding human’s meaning of experience. Dilthey asserts that we are ‘historical beings’ in that all modes of knowing of past and contemporary events inevitably spring from an individual knower and their lived experiences. In turn, humans’ meaning making is also inevitably shaped by social, cultural, and political events that structure our expression and ways of knowing (Linge, 1973; Mills, 2000).

Hence, as I aimed to center Black families’ lived experiences, I also asked participants about historical dynamics that have shaped Metro Detroit and potentially their sense-making. For instance, I asked participants about enforced and informal mechanisms of segregation in schools and communities in Metro Detroit. I also asked families about cross-generational experiences with movement and opportunity seeking. Importantly, interpretive phenomenology acknowledges that the sense-making of the phenomenon of study involves the researcher, who poses questions, engages in dialogue with participants, and ultimately, becomes instrumental in

interpreting participant's meaning making and lived experiences. Hence, interpretive phenomenology recognizes the generative and reciprocal nature of participants' understanding of the phenomenon (Dowling, 2006; van Manen, 1990). These dynamics proved integral in moving from a descriptive re-telling of experience to an analytical and contextually sensitive understanding of participants' experiences.

Interpretive phenomenology ultimately lends well to a critical methodological approach. As explained by Gayle Salamon (2018) in "What's Critical About Critical Phenomenology?," interpretive phenomenology coupled with a critical approach offers us a means "to describe what we see…to illuminate what is true" and it "insists that we also attend to the power that is always conditioning that truth" (p. 15). Hence, critical phenomenology, which is interpretive by nature, takes seriously the role of power in shaping individual's perceptions and lived experiences. Salamon (2018) disturbs the white male, European origins of classical phenomenology that would assert "anything I perceive must be true" (p. 14). Instead, she emphasizes that critical phenomenology can be attentive to intersubjectivity, or the meanings we construct as social beings in relationship to others or group identities like family, race, and place-based affiliations. Moreover, as explained by Sara Ahmed (2006), who forwards a queer phenomenology, our social orientations including race, class, gender, and sexuality, among others, affect one's attention and labor available to devote to any particular phenomenon. She offers that we consider "how individual's background affects what it is that comes into view, as well as how the background is what allows what comes into view to be viewed." (p. 547). Lastly, as explained by Mobley (2019), a critical phenomenological approach can also call "attention to the way(s) that Blacks are often represented with broad and sweeping generalizations that are void of the rich intersections that are inherent in Black communities" (p. 104). In this way, critical

phenomenology engages with how identity, power-laden contexts, and pressing social matters shape diverse individual's sense-making of their lived experiences.

As I sought the perceptions and experiences of Black families and students who have been marginalized in Metro Detroit's educational landscape, a critical phenomenological methodology offers an approach that aims to understand and amplify the nuance of Black families' unique experiences. All families and students have distinct histories and social lives that impact their perceptions of schooling and subsequent decision-making (Bell, 2009; Green, 2017; Khalifa, Jennings, Briscoe, Oleszweski, & Abdi, 2014; Wilson, 2015). Recognizing Black families and students as dynamic and diverse actors in larger education policy narratives honors families and students as agentic knowers of the Metro Detroit's region's highly stratified and contested educational landscape.

Research Questions

As documented in chapter one, the three guiding research questions include:

1. How do Black families' perceptions of place shape their movement to suburban places and their school choice decision-making?
2. How do Black families and students' race, class, and/or where they live shape their perceptions of place and quality school choice options?
3. How do families and students' perceptions of place and quality school choice options shed light on historical and contemporary social structures that have affected educational access and opportunity for Black children in Metropolitan Detroit?

These questions sought to understand how families' perceptions and decision-making are mediated and impacted by their unique identities and histories of educational access. I sought to understand the push and pull migration factors that have led families to move to suburban places. Furthermore, I wanted to understand what role raced and classed cultural imaginaries of place may play, if any, in families school choice decision-making and where they conceive of

educational opportunity to be located and accessible. Following from my conceptual framework, this is connected to powell's (2005) assertion that opportunity structures distribute racialized meanings. Additionally, it connects to Lipsitz's (2007) theorizing of the Black spatial imaginary, which provides a framework for how identity, race, and resources influence social actor's perceptions and decision-making.

Methods

Methods used in a phenomenological study often involve in-depth interviewing to gain a "thick description of social life" as understood by the participant (Geertz, 2008; Lincoln & Guba, 1985). I employed broad and open-ended questions focused on the phenomenon of study so that participants could explicate their perspectives and experiences. Particularly, phenomenological interviews are structured to 1) elicit contextualization of the lifeworld participants are operating within, 2) understanding of the participant's experience of the phenomenon of study, and 3) to elicit the meanings participants have of the phenomenon (Beven, 2014). In-depth interviews served as the primary source of data in this study and assisted in answering all three research questions.

To a lesser extent, I also drew on archival research, literature review of historical studies, and document analysis. Review of relevant literature and archival research helped to better understand the history and formations of communities and public education in Redford, West Bloomfield, and Metro Detroit overall. This literature provided me with valuable social and political "guideposts" as I worked to understand families' lived experiences and decision-making (Stanfield, 1987). Additionally, while there are extensive and well-done historical studies of Metro Detroit, archival work helped me to learn and understand relevant information and dynamics pertaining to Redford and West Bloomfield that were largely not the focus of regional

or Detroit-focused studies. Literature review and archival research were integral in addressing research question three.

Lastly, I particularly used document analysis as a tool to contextualize Metro Detroit schools, policies, and/or places, among others, that families referenced during their interviews. I predominantly found documents via online and library search engines and conducted a content analysis surveying the document to yield relevant quotes or excerpts that may situate or clarify participant's perspectives and experiences (Bowen, 2009). Document analysis was particularly helpful in providing needed context to answer all three research questions given my critical approach to phenomenological research.

Contexts of Study

I chose Redford Township and West Bloomfield because of their distinct ethno-racial, economic, and historical differences. I desired to capture the diversity among suburban places to avoid reproducing narratives of U.S. suburbs as racially and economically homogenous. However, these two suburbs are by no means representative of all suburbs in Metro Detroit. Notably, both school districts that serve the majority of students in Redford and West Bloomfield are ranked as one of the most racially diverse districts in their respective counties. Hence, I did not aim for generalizability, which is typical for qualitative research given small participant sample sizes (Hesse-Biber & Leavy, 2011). Moreover, in seeking families' first-person lived experiences, I aimed to explicate the meanings as participants live them in their "everyday existence and lifeworld" (van Manen, 1990, p. 11). Hence, this requires description and detail of dynamics that are specific to the people and places of study. This may result in some level of transferability to other families or suburbs in the region, meaning that with additional study,

myself and other researchers may compare patterns and themes across families and/or municipalities (Hesse Biber & Leavy, 2011).

Redford Township

Redford is an inner-ring suburb located in Wayne County. The term inner-ring is a locational definition that refers to towns that are in close proximity, and in many cases border the city (Forsyth, 2012). Founded in the early 19th century, Redford was initially an expansive and quaint township. However, over time, Redford has physically changed through annexation of land by other suburbs and the city of Detroit. Redford has also demographically changed with a drastic increase in its overall population in the 1950s and a gradual population decrease over the past 40 years.

Notably, Redford's Black population substantially increased after the 2008 recession which significantly impacted Redford's housing market. Property values fell by more than half between 2008 and 2016, and Redford ranked 7th behind municipalities like Flint, Pontiac, and Inkster for loss in taxable value of property across the state of Michigan. As will be discussed in Chapters 5, the 2008 recession presented economic losses for some and economic opportunities for others. Indeed, in 2017, Redford along with Southfield, accounted for more mortgage loans to Black buyers than in Detroit (Gallagher, 2019, March 21).

As shown in Figure 1.1, Redford schools are now majority Black, and the suburb will soon become a 'majority-minority suburb.' However, racial segregation persists in Redford between neighborhoods with most of the Black/African American residents living in the Southeastern portion of the suburb, which borders the city of Detroit. Notably, the majority of Black residents in this area are homeowners signaling a degree of stability and commitment to living in Redford for a substantial period. The growth of Black individuals and families in

Redford has been met by a historically white population, many of whom are 2nd and 3rd generation residents of the township. Redford has also experienced its own white flight with some long-time, white residents relocating out of the township as racial demographics change. Additionally, with a predominantly Black student population in both of its school districts—Redford Union and South Redford—a substantial number of white students utilize inter-district school choice to attend schools in another district.

As Black families relocate to Redford, and schools and communities in the suburb experience demographic change, this does not ensure that Black students receive an equitable education. For example, at one of Redford's high schools, the student population was approximately 72 percent Black/ African American during the 2016-17 school year. Yet, the school has significant racial disparities in outcomes on the Michigan Student Test of Educational Progress (M-STEP) scores, the state's standardized student assessment. At this high school, 21.7% of Black students demonstrated proficiency in English Language Arts, while 45.7% of white students demonstrated proficiency. In mathematics, 3.8% of Black students demonstrated proficiency, compared to 28.3% of white students. Many factors can mediate these scores including cultural and ability biases that can influence students' expression of their understanding. Yet, racial disparities in test scores are still stark. This may signal unequal access or bias in teaching and instruction. Despite these disparities, Black families continue to move to Redford. This reality reflects the utter lack of quality schools across city and suburban school systems for many middle and working-class Black families in the region. Importantly, many Black residents in Redford also engage in school choice programs outside of the municipality's two public school districts in attempts to secure educational opportunity for their children.

West Bloomfield Township

West Bloomfield is a middle-ring suburb located in Oakland County. Middle-ring is used to denote suburbs that are further removed from the city center—often bordered by other suburbs (Forsyth, 2012). Founded during the mid-19th century, West Bloomfield was previously a farming and vacation community for affluent residents in the region. Connected by a railroad line between Pontiac and Detroit, wealthy businessmen would spend their summers in West Bloomfield which is known for its scenic lakes and green space. During the early 20th century, with the rise of the automobile industry and the building of highways, West Bloomfield continued to develop, also experiencing a housing and population boom during the mid-20th century. Today, West Bloomfield is one of the largest and most affluent townships in Michigan.

As shown in Figure 1.2, West Bloomfield schools now have a nearly one-third Black/African American student population. Importantly, as briefly discussed in Chapter 2, a substantial portion of the Black student population in West Bloomfield is the result of their inter-district school choice program. As opposed to Redford's predominantly Black and white population, West Bloomfield while predominately white is also racially and ethnically diverse. There are significant Jewish, Chaldean, and Japanese populations residing in West Bloomfield. Throughout the town there are visible markers of different religious groups including Chaldean Catholic churches and Jewish temples. The town often prides itself on its diverse population, citing it as an attractive feature of the municipality. However, like Redford, there are also social divides at play in West Bloomfield. Although West Bloomfield is overall an affluent suburb, there are noticeable class and neighborhood differences across the suburb. Neighborhoods surrounding the town's Orchard Lake, an attractive geographical feature near the north central part of the suburb, often have large, stately homes, and are valued higher than neighborhoods in

the southern part of the suburb. Markedly, more Black residents live in the southern portion of West Bloomfield.

Importantly, West Bloomfield schools have been consistently ranked as one of the top school systems in the region which also serves as an attractive feature of the suburb. Moreover, gaps in test score outcomes between Black and white students in West Bloomfield are less stark when compared to Redford. While data is limited, English Language Arts scores for the Michigan Student Test of Educational Progress (M-STEP), reported 40 percent of Black students as proficient during the 2016-17 school year as compared to approximately 49 percent of white students. Notably, in West Bloomfield, the increased economic affordances of families and schools may work to mediate test score gaps. However, in 2012 six of West Bloomfield's nine school were designated as Focus schools by the state of Michigan; meaning they were identified as within the 10 percent of Michigan schools having the widest gap in test scores between their lowest and highest performing students (Michigan Department of Education, 2013). This designation required that teachers and administrators receive training and ultimately narrow racial differences in test score outcomes to be removed from the list.

Access & Sampling

As previously stated, I conducted a pilot study where I interviewed Black secondary school youth at one of Redford's public high schools. Therefore, I had some level of access and a greater understanding of Redford's public-school systems through interacting with these students in their school setting. In West Bloomfield, I initially did not have any level of access. Prior to selecting West Bloomfield as a context of study, I conducted an informal informational interview with a Black couple who raised children in West Bloomfield and have connections in the area. During this interview, we discussed racial demographic change in the suburb and why they

decided to move there from Detroit in the 1990s. This couple proved helpful in understanding social dynamics in West Bloomfield, particularly differences between West Bloomfield and Redford that would enrich analytical understandings of Metro Detroit's educational landscape.

Given that I am an outsider to the region, I started data collection by conducting informational interviews with community members and observations at key community sites. Interviews were largely conversational in nature where I explained my study and interests in Redford or West Bloomfield as contexts of study. I then asked community members how they understood the impacts of demographic shifts in their municipality, schools, and if this had shaped their professional roles and relationships to families they served in any way. All but one of the community members I interviewed identified as Black/ African American. Also, many of these community members were parents whose children attended or had attended schools in Redford or West Bloomfield. Many individuals expressed personal commitments to serving Black students and families in Metro Detroit.

Observations, for instance at a West Bloomfield public school and a prominent Redford church, also played a small, but helpful role in further understanding the suburbs of study. Observation particularly helped with further understanding social and political dynamics in West Bloomfield, which I had little familiarity with at the beginning of the study. During informal interviews and observations, I took brief jottings when appropriate. Overall, informational interviews and observations proved instrumental in building rapport with families, refining interview questions, and affirming my conceptual framework (Maxwell, 2013). In Table 3.1, I include a list of informational interviews and observations completed in Redford and West Bloomfield.

Informational Interviews & Observations	Total Time
Interview w. Redford Township Trustee	.25
Interview w. Redford Union School District Principal	.50
Interview w. Redford Mother	.25
Interview w. Pastors of Predominantly Black Church in Redford	.25
Observation at Large Predominantly Black Church in Redford	1.5
Interview w. West Bloomfield Teacher	.5
Interview w. West Bloomfield School District School Board Member	1
Interview w. Former West Bloomfield School District Leader	.75
Interview w. West Bloomfield Principal	1
Observation of West Bloomfield Public School	1
Observation of West Bloomfield School District Strategic Planning Forum	4
Total Hours: 11 hours	

Table 3.1 Informational interviews and observations completed

Where appropriate, I asked individuals I conducted informational interviews with for recommendations for participants in the study. I also requested to post recruitment flyers in locations like local libraries, churches, and community centers. I particularly posted the recruitment flyer and a one-page informational on the study in the following Facebook groups: Redford Township Community Events, The Black Women's Roundtable Metro Detroit group, and The West Bloomfield African American Parent Association group. I also sent informational emails to local National Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) chapters, local Jack and Jill Chapters—a Black mother's organization that predominantly serves middle to upper middle class families, and local chapters of historically Black fraternities and sororities. Lastly, I also

reached out to individuals in my personal and professional networks that are natives of Metro Detroit to share information about the study among their networks. Hence, I engaged in structured snowball sampling (Noy, 2008), by asking individuals I met during informal interviews and observations, study participants, and various networks of Black individuals to recommend families for participation. I remained mindful of my desire to recruit diverse Black families, yet some family participants are within the same personal or professional networks. Yet, participants are generally not sampled from the same networks.

Gaining access to families took longer than I anticipated. I predominantly spent the summer (June-August of 2019) conducting informational interviews and working to recruit families for the study. Individuals were generally receptive to talking about the study and racial demographic shifts in the region, which encouraged me of the worthiness of my study. However, it proved more difficult to get families to agree to interviews. I underestimated the time and work necessary for sampling outside of an institution. I should have planned for more time to engage with communities through social events or volunteering. Additionally, I believe some of my difficulties in recruiting families were a result of the summer, where families may travel or in general be less connected to schools.

Gratefully, in September I gained some traction from my recruitment efforts. In Redford, I was able to recruit two families from posting on their community Facebook group. One of these families then recommended another family that participated. I also recruited one Redford family for participation through my own personal network. In West Bloomfield, I recruited one family to participate through my personal network and another through study information disseminated by a local chapter of a fraternity. One of these families then recommended another family that participated. Importantly, I did not personally know any of the families who agreed to participate

through personal networks. However, the mutual connection did allow for a quicker level of trust and rapport in discussing the study and conducting interviews.

All families self-identified as Black or African American and had varied family structures. In Redford, I was able to capture different socioeconomic affordances among participants. However, in West Bloomfield family participants were all upper-middle class and have resided in West Bloomfield for over 15 years. Additionally, two of these families no longer have school age children. Class wise this reflects the overall demographic of the suburb, but misses the experiences of families who have recently moved to West Bloomfield and families that have younger school age children. This presents a limitation in the study; however, I believe that families still provided sufficient diversity to particularly address my second research question which asks how identity and positionality shapes families' perceptions and meaning making. Overall, families who participated did not reify the narrow perception of Black suburban families as two-parent, middle-class households, but reflect the diversity of Black family structures. In Tables 3.2 and 3.3, I provide key demographic information for each Redford and West Bloomfield participant family. I offer information on each family's structure, former place(s) of residence, their year of relocation, and parent's educational background, among other pertinent details.

Family[2]	Family Structure	Child Age	Year of Relocation	Former place of residence	Type of schools enrolled in	Parents' education	Parents' employment
"The Naders"	Remarried grandmother of 3 children; helping to raise grandson	9 y/o grandson	2011	Ecorse; Westland; Canton; Detroit	Zoned public for Grandmother's home	Grandmother has graduate degree; Mother has high school diploma	Grandmother owns a tax preparation business
"The "Muhammads"	Divorced mother of 5 children; grandmother residing in household	17 y/o daughter; 13 y/o son; 3 y/o son triplets	2009	Detroit	Online charter; Public charter	Mother has some college	Mother is a school bus driver
"The Robinsons"	Married mother of 5 children	20 y/o daughter; 19 y/o twin daughters; 18 y/o son; 16 y/o son	2006	Detroit	Zoned public school; public charter	Mother has bachelor's degree; Father has graduate Degree	Mother is a stay at home mom and civic leader; Dad is a graphic designer
"The Nelsons"	Married mother of two children	22 y/o son; 9 y/o daughter	2010	Detroit	Private; Public charter; Zoned Public	Mother has bachelor's degree and currently pursuing graduate degree; Father has bachelor's degree	Mother is an insurance professional; Father is a restaurant owner

Table 3.2: Redford family participants' demographic information

[2] All families have been given pseudonyms to protect their identities. Also, certain demographic information has been presented in a more abstract manner to ensure protection of families' identities.

Family	Family Structure	Child Age	Year of Relocation	Former place of residence	Type of schools enrolled in	Parents' education	Parents' employment
"The Fosters"	Divorced mother of two children	37 y/o son, 22 y/o adopted daughter	1995	Detroit	Parochial; Zoned Public	Mother has graduate Degree	Mother is a dentist and former Detroit public school teacher
"The Johnsons"	Married mother of three children	37 y/o daughter; 31 y/o son; 22 y/o son	1995	Southfield; Lancaster, PN	Zoned Public	Mother has bachelor's degree; Father has graduate degree	Mother is an insurance professional; Father is an engineer
"The Okafors"	Married father of 3 children, grandmother lives in home	20 y/o daughter, 19 y/o daughter, 13 y/o son	2002	Lathrup Village	Zoned Public	Mother and Father have graduate degrees	Father is a human resource professional; Mother is a business manager for a cultural Institution

Table 3.3: West Bloomfield family participants' demographic information

Guidelines for Sampling

Prior to the first parent interview, I asked families if they lived in Redford or West Bloomfield and if they had relocated to the suburb after having children. This was to ensure that families were considering K-12 schools and educational processes in some fashion prior to their movement. Initially, my IRB required that families have a child currently in K-12 schools, however, after struggling to gain participants, I submitted an amendment to allow for families who no longer had children in K-12 schools. I still required that children had attended schools in Metro Detroit. This proved to be a fruitful change as it allowed me to better address families navigating schools amid the 2008 recession which was consequential to many families' sense making of demographic change in the region. Moreover, I was able to interview adult children, many of whom had their own analyses of their families' choices. Overall, two out of seven families no longer had school age children. Additionally, four out of seven families relocated to Redford or West Bloomfield directly from Detroit. The other three families relocated to Redford or West Bloomfield from other Metro Detroit suburbs and only one of these families did not have parental ties to Detroit, meaning at least one of the parents grew up in the city.

I also remained mindful of socioeconomic status while recruiting participants. I did not discuss with families their class status before conducting interviews to ensure an appropriate level of rapport was established before families shared personal or sensitive information. However, I remained aware of indicators of socioeconomic status like parent's profession or networks by which they heard about the study. During the parent interviews, I asked participants to further discuss markers of socioeconomic status like their profession, educational attainment, and homeownership status. I also asked families if and how they perceived socioeconomic status and financial resources to shape their access to what they deemed as quality schools in the

region. Through this question, families typically disclosed information about their socioeconomic status and how they perceived class dynamics in Redford, West Bloomfield, and/or Metro Detroit. I recognized that a myriad of factors (number of individual's supported, educational attainment, parent's upbringing, job stability, etc.) impact how families' may understand their class, and this too was noted by some family participants. Hence, through memos and fieldnotes, I remained conscious of families' socioeconomic affordances and limitations, and more importantly, that I was led by their own perceptions and understandings of how class matters to their experiences.

Lastly, another important facet of sampling was recruiting Black families with diverse family structures. Many Black families do not fit the traditional nuclear family household model, where approximately 57 percent of Black children live in an extended family household at some point during their childhood due to social and economic needs (Cross, 2018). Additionally, approximately 54 percent of Black households are led by a single parent (Pew Research Center, 2016). I was able to capture the diversity in Black family structures in both Redford and West Bloomfield, where overall I interviewed two single-parent households—one being an extended family structure, and five two-parent households—two being and an extended family structure.

Data Collection & Analysis

In-Depth Interviews

Through conducting in-depth semi-structured interviews, the centerpiece of data collection, I worked to understand:

(1) Families' narration of their overall educational journey
    a. Parent's educational experiences
    b. Their children's educational experiences
    c. Intergenerational educational experiences and trends in their extended family

d. How key moments or experiences shaped their understandings and beliefs on educational attainment and opportunity in Metro Detroit and more broadly, the U.S.

(2) The perceptions, beliefs, identities, and/or events impacting families' relocation to the suburb they reside in
   a. Why they exited their prior town
   b. Why they chose Redford or West Bloomfield
   c. If reputation of/access to their local schools mattered at all, and if so, how it mattered

(3) The perceptions, beliefs, identities, and/or events impacting families' school and community decision-making

(4) Families' meaning making of educational opportunity afforded in their suburban school system and other schools they have accessed and/or considered accessing

(5) Families' meaning making of the benefits and barriers to educational opportunity in their suburban school system and other schools they have accessed and/or considered accessing

In order to capture families' perceptions, I interviewed seven parent/guardians—four in Redford and 3 in West Bloomfield—twice. I also requested to interview at least one of each families' children once, totaling two to four interviews per family. See Appendices A and B for interview protocols that guided parent/guardian and child interviews. I interviewed the parent/guardian first. For all two-parent/guardian households, I only interviewed one of the parent/guardians, however I asked participants about how other adults in the household, family, or networks of support may shape their perceptions and decision-making. In total, I interviewed five mothers, one father, and one grandmother. Additionally, I interviewed at least one child for all families but one. The children I interviewed ranged from ages 9 to 37. Overall, I conducted 21 interviews. Parents' first interview ranged from approximately 120 to 60 minutes, while the second parent interview ranged from 90 to 30 mins. Child interviews ranged from 60 to 15 minutes. Seidman (2019) suggests that researchers interview participants three times to adequately capture participant's lifeworld, experiences, and meaning making in phenomenological studies.

However, I did not see this as feasible given the varied demands of families, along with my request to interview at least one child in the family. See Table 3.4 for further information on family interviews.

Family Interviews			
Participant Families **(P): Parent/Guardian Participant** **(C); Child Participant**	**Child Interview? (Y/N)?**	**Total Family Interview Time**	**Total Interview Time**
The Naders - Michelle Nader (P) - Dathan Nader (C)	Y	4	**Redford:** **13 hrs.**
The Robinsons - Nita Robinson (P) - Imani Robinson (C)	Y	3.5	
The Muhammads - Jade Muhammad (P) - Curtis Muhammad (C)	Y	2.75	
The Nelsons - Tasha Nelson (P) - Erin Nelson (C)	Y	2.75	
The Fosters - Rhonda Foster (P) - Terry Foster (C) - Monet Foster (C)	Y (2 children)	3.5	**West Bloomfield:** **8.75 hrs.**
The Johnsons - Debra Johnson (P)	N	2.5	
The Okafors - Carl Okafor (P) - Amanda Okafor (C)	Y	3	
		Total Interview Hrs.	**22 hrs.**

Table 3.4: Table of participant family interviews

Interviews were conducted at families' home or local cafes in Redford or West Bloomfield. All but one interview was audio-recorded and transcribed. I transcribed the first two interviews, then used a transcription service for the remaining interviews. I also provided

parent/guardians with a $40 visa gift card after completion of the first interview, and child participants with two movie ticket vouchers as a small token for their time and insights.

The first parent/guardian interview focused on understanding the families' educational journey, the push and pull factors that brought them to the current place where they reside and the schools their children have attended. I also asked parents about the perceived benefits and barriers to their decision-making. This interview aimed to better understand families' lifeworlds in relationship to education, and most importantly, I aimed to establish a level of openness and trust in the interview process. I then interviewed children individually to understand their perceptions of the quality of their schooling and community experiences. I then followed up with parent/guardians for the second interview, where I particularly addressed their overall meaning-making of their perceptions and experiences. I further probed families' experiences offered in the first interview, by asking how identity and sociopolitical dynamics may have mattered to their perceptions and decision-making. Additionally, I asked how their families educational experiences may fit within their understandings of Black movement and opportunity seeking in Metro Detroit and the U.S. at large. Finally, I also asked any questions sparked from the interview conducted with their child.

Following Beven's (2014) guidance on structuring phenomenological interviews, I aimed to draw out participant's lifeworlds, experiences, and the meanings they ascribed to their experiences. Second interviews tended to be more open and conversational in nature, given parents increased familiarity with me. This demonstrated that to a certain extent parents felt more comfortable after extended interaction during the first interview and informal conversations handling the logistics of scheduling interviews (Hesse-Biber & Leavy, 2011).

I took jottings where appropriate to note important insights and themes during each interview. After each interview, I then completed fieldnotes, expanding on my jottings during interviews. I also recorded audio memos after each interview. Audio memos reflected on the following, among other salient questions and wonderings about the data collection process: *How have families made decisions about where to live and school their children? How did they feel about the decisions they made? What are families' perceptions of the suburbs they live in? What seems to be influencing these perceptions? What data am I not receiving that I initially anticipated? What data am I receiving that I did not anticipate? What are my own reactions to emerging themes?* Once I completed interviews for one family, fieldnotes and memos became comparative in nature. Memos addressed findings at the individual level and cross-participant levels, eventually focusing on how data is addressing research questions (Miles, Huberman, & Saldaña, 2013, p. 96). These memos addressed: *What is distinct or surprising about Redford families? West Bloomfield families? What are commonalities and differences among families and the two suburbs of study? What themes may be emerging across the data? What are potential contradictions in the interview data?* Completing fieldnotes and memos were a key part of engaging in an inductive thematic analysis process throughout data collection in order to identify patterns, outliers, and exemplars that informed coding and ultimately, moving towards analytic findings (Boyatzis, 1998; Miles et al., 2013).

Document Analysis

Document analysis particularly assisted in answering research questions one and two. Document analysis was secondary to families expressed understandings in interviews, but provided helpful contextual insights in working to further understand families and students' perceptions and experiences in the contexts they navigate. I primarily used news articles and

educational data to further understand different events, educational and regional policies, or social dynamics families referenced in their interviews. For example, as school choice programs in Redford and West Bloomfield were discussed by parents, I sought out school district and state data on school choice programs in these districts. I also found further information about charter and private schools families discussed as school options. Overall, I collected approximately 25 relevant documents, scanned and read all documents, and then captured relevant quotations, excerpts, and passages to make appropriate linkages between families meaning-making and experiences (Bowen, 2009). Through memos, data was organized into larger themes and categories like inter-district school choice programs or home foreclosure in Metro Detroit, which I was able to connect to family data while coding and writing.

Archival Research/ Historical Literature Review

Lastly, archival research and historical literature review assisted in addressing research question three and gaining an understanding of the formations of Redford, West Bloomfield, and the Metro Detroit region overall. In Redford, I particularly read news articles from the *The Redford Record* and *The Redford Township News*, former township newspapers throughout the 20th century. Articles curated by the Redford Historical Society documented racial strife and unrest in Detroit often from the perspectives of white Redford residents. These articles illuminated the ways in which Redford's border with Detroit was historically maintained throughout the mid-20th century through exclusionary real estate practices and deficit narratives of Black people and communities that incited fear of integration. In West Bloomfield, I primarily read documents curated by the West Bloomfield Historical Society on the formations of West Bloomfield Schools in a series entitled "Our School History." The series documented school closures within the district that have been enacted due to population loss, in addition to instances

of busing within the district to rectify inequities among schools. I also read documents on West Bloomfield's historic relationship to Pontiac and ultimately, Detroit, given railroad systems that connected these different municipalities.

In my archival work, I was first guided by secondary literature review of historical studies. This provided me with cogent ideas about "critical issues" relating to race, place, and Black families' educational access in Metro Detroit (Stanfield, 1987, p. 370). In turn, my archival work aimed to "fill in gaps of secondary literature" pertaining to Redford and West Bloomfield, as these suburbs were sparingly addressed in historical studies I read about Metro Detroit (Stanfield, 1987, p. 370). I surveyed archival materials including both primary and secondary materials to better understand dynamics relating to research questions including suburban and school district formations and racial and housing segregation, among others. I also chose archival and literature materials based on "a preconceived theoretical hunch," meaning if I believed materials would provide further insight on relevant sociopolitical dynamics in the suburbs of study or Black individuals and families' experiences (Stanfield, 1987, p. 375). For instance, this led me to explore materials on the development of Pontiac, Michigan's railroad system which proved helpful in understanding the historical relationships between Pontiac and West Bloomfield. This illustrated the interrelated nature of suburban municipal and economic development. I also noted key chronological occurrences as they related to salient topics like race, schools, municipal formations, segregation, and demographic and economic change in the municipalities (Hill, 1993). Through fieldnotes, I aimed to indicate broader sociopolitical and cultural forces shaping education in Redford, West Bloomfield, and Metro Detroit over time. This allowed me to better understand families' sense-making and educational experiences

"within the broader contexts of time and space" (Horsford & D'Amico, 2014, p. 864). See Table 3.5 for a table of archives I visited, and materials examined.

Archival Sites	**Materials Examined**
Redford Historical Society	• Curated collection on racial segregation from *The Redford Record* and *The Redford Township News* • 1973 Thurston Yearbook • 1974 Redford Union Yearbook
West Bloomfield Historical Society	• Curated collection on History of West Bloomfield Public School District entitled, *Our School History* • Documents on Pontiac Railroad System • Documents on Founding and Formation of West Bloomfield

Table 3.5: Table of materials examined at Redford Historical Society and West Bloomfield Historical Society

As documented in chapters 1 and 2, historical literature review is also a significant part of framing the import of this study and the movements of Black families in search of educational opportunity. Through memos after in-depth interviews, I placed key themes from historical literature review and archival work in conversation with families' perceptions and experiences to analyze how they may connect, complicate, and/or extend our understandings of the linkages between historical and contemporary social structures in Metro Detroit. Among many sources, Joyce Baugh's (2011), *The Detroit School Busing Case and The Controversy over Segregation*, Herb Boyd's (2017) *Black Detroit: A People's History of Self Determination*, and Thomas Sugrue's (2014b) *Origins of the Urban Crisis: Race and Inequality in Postwar Detroit*, provided firm historical grounding to understand the import of Black movement in relationship to educational access and opportunity in Metro Detroit.

Overall Data Analysis

I used a constant comparative analysis (Fram, 2013; Glaser, 1965; Hesse-Biber & Leavy, 2011) to make sense of the data during and after the data collection process. Hence, I examined fieldnotes, analytic memos, interview transcripts, and documents to engage in an inductive analysis of data that identifies and corroborates commonalities, differences, contradictions, and themes across different pieces of data (Boyatzis, 1998). An inductive analysis is integral to phenomenological approaches given the researcher's desire to understand participants' first-person experiences (van Manen, 1990). Also, to a lesser extent, I engaged in deductive analysis as I remained mindful of connections to my research questions and conceptual framework throughout data collection and the beginning stages of data analysis (Crabtree & Miller, 1999; Fereday & Muir-Cochrane, 2006). For instance, I established a small group of a priori codes relating to movement, perceptions of place, identity, school choice decision-making, and opportunity structures to track connections between existing literature and my conceptual framework. I primarily utilized ATLAS.ti v.8 data analysis software to complete coding. I also utilized an excel spreadsheet to track codes, their definitions, and my own wonderings or questions related to codes. Both ATLAS.ti and the excel codebook aided in identifying and synthesizing codes throughout data analysis.

In my first round of coding, I engaged in descriptive and process coding of interviews. Descriptive coding helped identify relevant expressions (emotions, beliefs, imaginings, etc.) and social dynamics (events, relationships, key encounters, life changes, etc.) that shape families experiences (Miles et al., 2013; Moustakas, 1994). This helped in gaining an initial understanding of families' experiences, lifeworlds, and key perceptual commonalities and differences between families' experiences. Process coding, which captures participants' actions

in the data, was particularly helpful in summarizing how families and students pursued what they deemed as quality schools or communities (Miles et al., 2013). Together, descriptive and process coding helped in beginning to cluster and thematize meanings that are core to families' meaning making and experiences (Moustakas, 1994). Particularly, these two methods of coding helped illuminate differences between families' beliefs and desires in comparison to their actions and access. This was integral to understanding how structural factors supported or challenged families' ability to obtain the types of schools they sought.

Lastly, I then engaged in thematic coding after all data had been collected to identify larger trends and analytic concepts in the data. For instance, I coded data for how opportunity structures may shape families' meaning making or how identity matters to families' pursuit of educational opportunity. While I coded for these dynamics in limited ways throughout the coding process, I revisited these codes to examine commonalities, differences, and contradictions. This allowed me to further understand nuances in respective codes and to consolidate select codes by identifying what the pattern most accurately represents or asserts across the data (Saldaña, 2009). Memoing also assisted in reflecting on how thematic codes related to descriptive codes across the data, and ultimately how codes may or may not fit together in understanding the phenomenon of study. While I did not code fieldnotes and memos collected during data analysis. I frequently referred to my fieldnotes and memos throughout the coding and drafting process to check any initial impressions I had about data. See Table 3.6 for examples of descriptive, process, and thematic codes from data collected.

Type of Code	Codes	Example Quote
Descriptive	**Detroit ties** *Families' relationships and engagement with Detroit*	"I'm not a real big churchgoer, but my grandmother's church is Church of Eastside (of Detroit) Church of God. So we go there. First Sunday is family Sunday and we do family things."
Process	**School Decision-Making** *Families' decision-making processes on schools*	"But I've always picked schools based on how is it socially, how is it convenient, like it has to be a mixture. My son's school, it has a beautiful number of after school programs, things to choose from. Also, how are the other parents and families? Nobody is perfect. You're going to have fights, but how many fights? What's the culture of the school?"
Thematic	**Importance of Black Teachers** *Importance of Black teachers and administrators to families' school decision-making and/or perceptions of educational access and opportunity*	"Because he understood them. He knew a lot of history, and he understood why people think the way they do. Why students act the way they do in predominantly white schools, because he understood the culture of students who are black but not from West Bloomfield. He was really relatable, and he was really like a mentor. He knew a lot about a lot of stuff, and he told people about opportunities, and he was just great."

Table 3.6: Examples of descriptive, process, and thematic codes

In summary, my analysis allowed me to develop a deeper understanding of families' identities, perceptions and experiences amid their physical movement and suburban demographic change. It also provided insight on the accessibility of educational structures for Black families and students from a metropolitan lens. I sought to produce findings that can assist education practitioners and policymakers, mainly school district officials and administrators, in recognizing and utilizing the educational journeys and insights of Black families to construct more equitable and inclusive school environs. For example, findings may assist districts in partnering with Black parents to ensure their student's achievement, or in school districts collaborating to better serve

families given the high level of school choices and transience across the region. I further discuss how formal educational leaders may learn from Black families' pursuit of quality schools in Chapter 7.

Presentation of Findings

In the next chapter, I examine how families' life histories and experiences in Detroit influenced their geographic moves and decision-making to relocate to Redford or West Bloomfield. These findings illuminate how families' decisions and navigations aimed to meet not only their children's educational needs, but also cultural and familial affiliations and legacies. Chapter 4 lays an important foundation for Chapters 5 and 6 which respectively discuss the role of Metro Detroit's political economy and race and racism in influencing families' school and community choices.

Chapter IV
Children of Movement, Children of Place

"the American dream was a moving target that had to be chased down"
-Sarah M. Broom (2019), *The Yellow House*

Detroit's rich heritage of Black culture and community life was formed through migration and movement. As briefly discussed in Chapter 2, Black people from Southern states like Alabama, Georgia, and Mississippi journeyed to Detroit in search of employment opportunity and improved sociopolitical rights throughout the early and mid-20th century, forming The Great Migration. Between 1910 and 1920 alone, Detroit experienced a 611 percent increase in its Black/ African American population, making it "the fastest growing African American urban center" in the U.S. (Boyd, 2017, p. 93). Additionally, between 1950 and 1970—the latter years of the Great Migration—Detroit's Black/ African American population grew from 16 percent to 44 percent, due to continued migration and white flight (Baugh, 2011). Put simply, the increase in Detroit's Black population was unprecedented during The Great Migration. Importantly, Herb Boyd (2017) provides helpful historical context on The Great Migration to Detroit by noting the shared pathways and routes between this large-scale U.S. demographic shift and The Underground Railroad. He explained:

> Many of these migrants traveled along the same byways as the fugitives on the Underground Railroad, perhaps with less fear but with a similar apprehension about what waited them on the other side of the Cotton Curtain, and how real was the so-called promised land.

Boyd illuminates that the Great Migration stood within a longer physical and ideological tradition of Black freedom and opportunity seeking that spurred movement and migration in the U.S. Migrants left the Jim Crow South, where Black communities lived, loved, labored, and schooled under legally enforced segregation in social and public institutions. Black people were largely constrained in the spaces, places, and opportunities that they could access. Moreover, some Black communities lived in a climate of fear and uncertainty, where white supremacy and violence were subject to affect individuals and families at any moment. Individuals and families left their homes, family, and what they knew driven by uncertain perceptions of place, but ultimately hope for different structural and social realities.

I begin this chapter by detailing two families' experiences with movement and opportunity seeking over multiple generations. I first offer the historical experiences of The Nelsons, a Redford family, to capture how their families' decisions were influenced by legacies of migration, opportunity seeking, perseverance, and collective support. I also share the experiences of a West Bloomfield family, The Johnsons, to shed light on their families' experiences of contemporary movement and decision-making given economic change and precarity in Metro Detroit and the U.S. at large. Together, I aim to show how families' experiences of movement were part and parcel of cross-generational and collective efforts of Black individuals and families to find opportunity even amid uncertainty.

I then draw from family participants' experiences to elaborate how their place-based subjectivities oriented their movement and community choices in Metro Detroit. *Place-based subjectivities* refers to families' attachments and care for places central to their experiences and sense of identity. I primarily focus on Detroit, as most parents in this study were born and raised in the city. However, I also briefly discuss other places that were integral in shaping families'

perceptions of place. In this section, I discuss how despite most families' movement from the city, it still oriented families' decision-making on where to live, and how they constructed their lives in search of not only educational opportunity, but also social and cultural affiliations that supported their family holistically. Finally, I also discuss the structural conditions that led many families to relocate from Detroit. In this chapter, I aim to show that families were both children of movement and children of place, meaning that families were descendants of individuals who had sought opportunity through movement and/or through struggle, which set a precedence for their own relocations and opportunity seeking. Yet, families were also anchored by meaningful experiences in places they loved, places they cared for, and ultimately places that helped form their identities and sense of self.

The Nelsons: "I'm standing on their shoulders"

Tasha Nelson, a married Redford mother of two and insurance professional in her mid-40s explained that both her and her husband's families migrated to Detroit from Alabama. Sharecroppers on both sides, Tasha and Don Nelson's grandparents—Don being Ms. Nelson's husband—first moved to Detroit in search of jobs that paid fair and decent wages in less oppressive conditions. Ms. Nelson recounted:

> (My grandparents) moved up here during the Great Migration to the North because of Chrysler, and GM (General Motors), and Ford—when they opened up and had these opportunities. That's what made my family come to the North initially, for the great opportunity…My grandparents, who are still living in their 80s…moved up here. And everyone down there (referring to the South) knew the North was better.

Detroit, home to the U.S. automobile industry, brought The Nelson's grandparents to the Motor City in search of employment opportunity that paid good wages and recognized their humanity.

As Ms. Nelson and I had primarily discussed school and community perceptions prior to this question, Ms. Nelson clarified that her families' historical movement from the South was primarily driven by employment opportunity, as opposed to educational opportunity, offering that "I don't know if they were talking about education back then." Ms. Nelson assessed that her grandparents "might not have known from an educational standpoint [what Detroit would offer], but they knew it was a better opportunity and more opportunity for our race, overall." Hence, Ms. Nelson understood her grandparent's movement as motivated by racialized geographies of access to labor opportunity. Their grandparents left Alabama in pursuit of automotive and other industrial jobs that recruited and hired Black workers throughout the 20th century in Detroit (Boyd, 2017; Meir & Rudwick, 2007; Sugrue, 2014b).

While Ms. Nelson's grandparents first moved to Detroit, they were not bound to the city. A few years after their arrival from the South, they moved to Albion, MI, a small college town in Southcentral Michigan about 100 miles west of Detroit. Ms. Nelson described Albion as a "true, true suburb," to seemingly capture its quiet, green, and idyllic nature from her childhood memories. Importantly, throughout the 20th century, Albion also offered industrial jobs to Black workers as home to agriculture and automotive allied industries like the Albion Malleable Iron Company, which produced automotive castings and recruited Black workers as early as 1916 (Passic, 2002). These opportunities led Ms. Nelson's grandparents to relocate to the town where she eventually was born and raised. Her husband's family remained in Detroit after his grandparents migrated, eventually becoming members of the city's Black middle class through restaurant ownership.

Ms. Nelson asserted that while automotive and other industrial jobs have largely disappeared in the region, the striving instilled in families from The Great Migration has created a mentality of hustle and hard work among Detroiters. She stated:

> You have a lot of people whose parents, grandparents moved here to work at the Big Three (automotive companies) and made really good money back in the day…and that wasn't so common back then. So, now that we can get it, we're going to get it (referring to different opportunities). Or I can do whatever, because I'm knocking out this overtime kind of thing. So, I think that played a part of it too, which is a great thing.

Indeed, Ms. Nelson acknowledged the impacts of movement and opportunity seeking in her own career and educational experiences. As a single mother with her then toddler son, Marion, Ms. Nelson moved from Albion, MI to Detroit in the early 2000s. She recounted that "I worked for State Farm and I applied for opportunity and I got it, it was a promotion, and they moved me. They paid for me to come here… So, I moved to Detroit." She explained that while she moved to pursue a job promotion with State Farm, where she still works, it was difficult to secure quality schools for her son in the city. "It definitely was a sacrifice," Ms. Nelson reflected, "because I was a single parent at the time…I didn't have the extra income over and above" for costs associated with extracurricular educational activities like scouting, summer camps, and tutoring. After briefly attending a Detroit Public School, she decided to enroll her son in a private school, which he attended for most of his elementary years. She resigned that "the alternative—it didn't seem like I had an alternative. So, you do what you have to do."

Generations prior to Ms. Nelson were a key source of motivation, perserverance, and support amid the sacrifices she made to educate her son and herself. Tangibly, she explained that shortly after moving to Detroit for work, she also decided to pursue her bachelor's degree at

University of Detroit Mercy. Her great grandmother typically watched Marion when she attended class in the evenings after work. She made clear that her great grandmother's support was so instrumental that upon completion "This was our degree. We earned this, because if she hadn't kept him, I wouldn't have been able to go (to school). She would pick him up from school, keep him, feed him." Ms. Nelson took great pride in being the first person in her family to receive a Bachelor's degree, asserting that she was "the academic" of the family. Nonetheless, she realized and honored that her degree was a collective effort, enabled by familial support and strength. With reverence expressed through the slow and thoughtful nature of her speech, she emphasized:

> I definitely know I'm pulling from their (her family's) strength and all that they've overcome…So, I feel like I'm standing on their shoulders, ultimately, from their sacrifices…I think about all that I can do here in 2019 that even 50 years ago people couldn't do. I come from a close-knit family, so what they think and them being proud of me does matter.

Ms. Nelson contextualized the sacrifices she made to provide for her children, especially her son, within the movements, efforts, and political contexts her family encountered over time. Ms. Nelson's recognition and sense-making of a legacy of opportunity seeking oriented her own efforts for educational and employment opportunity in ways that reflect traditions of Black agency and communal support even amid formidable structural barriers (Anderson, 1998; Baugh, 2011; Boyd, 2017; Morris, 2008b; Rooks, 2017). The Nelson's understanding of cross-generational experiences shed light on what was possible—even if difficult—providing motivation for their own opportunity seeking.

The Johnsons: "We had to do what we had to do"

While six out of seven family participants were descendants of individuals who participated in The Great Migration, The Johnsons, a West Bloomfield family, is the one family that was not. The Johnsons moved to the Metro Detroit region from Pennsylvania in the early 1990s, with no familial roots or ties to the region. Deborah Johnson and her husband met at Tennessee State University, a historically Black university in Nashville, TN. Ms. Johnson, originally from Memphis, TN, and her husband from Nigeria, West Africa, left college together and proceeded to move several times for her husband's training and profession as an engineer. First, they moved to Saginaw, MI, a city in central Michigan approximately 100 miles from Detroit, where her husband completed an engineering cooperative education program. They then moved to Lancaster, Pennsylvania, where her husband worked in a General Electric manufacturing plant—a large employer in the city. Now with a young child, The Johnsons settled in Metro Detroit. First in Southfield, MI, a bordering suburb of northwest Detroit that at the time was experiencing a rapid influx of Black middle-class residents. In 1995, they then moved to West Bloomfield. In detailing her families' movement, Ms. Johnson reflected that "we used to move quite a bit, but we had to do what we had to do to get the jobs, to get the education, to try and get to where we want to be."

Ms. Johnson perceived a necessity for movement in her husband's access to employment opportunities. Moreover, she further explained her families' multiple moves as connected to efforts to secure and provide opportunity for her children. She shared:

> You work all those years for your education and stuff, you and your children, you want to do the best possible for your children. You want to make sure they get a great education. You want to make sure you do all you can possibly do to try to prepare them for this world

> outside of here. It's preparation. And sometimes all the preparation in the world, all you can do is what you can do. Sometimes it works, sometimes it doesn't. But more likely than not, it's going to help push them a little bit further. That's why we moved out here, just trying to give them the best opportunities that we can do, that we can give them.

Overall, Ms. Johnson emphasized the importance of movement to access opportunity, and more importantly, her obligation to prepare her children to succeed in the world, in the best ways her and her husband could.

While the Johnsons moved four times as a young family, she explained that she eventually sought stability. Ms. Johnson acknowledged a tension between movement for opportunity and the benefits of being stable and settled in one place. She recounted that as they moved to Pennsylvania from Michigan, it was "tiresome" to start over after moving. She desired for her children to build long-term, stable relationships with their peers, similar to her own childhood experiences. She reflected:

> There was no family (in Michigan), so you just start all over. Things are brand new. You know nothing, no one. That's kind of exciting for a while, and then it gets tiresome with your kids, because you can't keep moving your kids like that, because I feel like they need stability. They need to be in a place where they can grow up with their best friend. My best friend I know 50 years because of the stability we had growing up.

Ms. Johnson emphasized the emotional and relational labor of movement for opportunity. She further explained that, "I had no ways of knowing (about communities and schools), but I got a lot of input from a lot of people, a lot of good people who gave me really good direction." Indeed, The Johnsons first resided in Southfield due to the guidance of employees at General Motors, where her husband worked.

The Johnsons established meaningful relationships in Metro Detroit over time. Yet, the absence of home and family were still very present for Ms. Johnson, who shared that she has not lived near her family since the age of 17. Now, having lived in Metro Detroit for approximately 27 years and in preparation for retirement, Ms. Johnson and her husband were selling their large West Bloomfield home, and planned to move back to Memphis, TN. She resolved, "I'm a 60-year-old now. It's time to go home. It's time." Despite having lived the majority of her life away from Memphis, home had not changed. Their anticipated move back to the South reflects the continued importance of the communities and cities in which Black people are born and/or raised despite time or community change (Fullilove, 2016). Moreover, it shows the contemporary trend of Black individuals and families' reverse migrations from cities like Detroit and Chicago to Southern cities including Memphis, TN (Frey, 2011; Morris & Monroe, 2009). Black individuals and families have again returned to the pathways and routes historically traveled in search of what they need—in search of opportunity.

With three adult children—ages 37, 31, and 22—Ms. Johnson also expressed a keen sensitivity of the necessity of movement in her children's ability to establish themselves and their own families. Particularly, Ms. Johnson shared that her children, especially her two eldest children who both have master's degrees, have struggled to find jobs in Metro Detroit that align with their educational attainment and fully support their independence. Ms. Johnson stated:

> They (her children) are having to do the same things. Move around from state to state pretty much after school. The employment opportunities are supposed to be here (in Metro Detroit), maybe they are. I just think that the wages and stuff are just, (long pause) with the cost of living here, it's not worth it. It's just too expensive or these young people that are already straddled with all this (student loan) debt, so they have to move a lot of

> times. They need to bring more jobs here with better pay to keep our young folks here, otherwise you're going to lose them to other states such as Texas, North Carolina…They are moving because they can't find the employment and the wages and the benefits…Nothing wrong with the service jobs, but after you've gone through school, paying all this debt and to be in service, nothing wrong with it, I did it for years…but that's not why you go through higher education. You go into higher education to get better positions so you can have a decent living…With all this debt, it's hard to get a house. It's hard to get a car. Your rate and insurance and stuff are so high here. It's just incredible.

Through her children's own post-secondary experiences, Ms. Johnson recognized how in Metro Detroit, the economic and labor climate provoked movement given the limited number of professional jobs and industries in the region (Data Driven Detroit, 2014; Wilkinson, 2018, December 19).

Ms. Johnson's 31-year-old son now lives in Texas with his family, and her other two children reside at their family home in West Bloomfield due to the high cost of living in Metro Detroit. Although an upper-middle class, professional family, movement remained an integral means to secure opportunity. This dynamic also indicates the precarity of middle-class Black families' ability to maintain their socio-economic status across generations (Lacy, 2007; Pattillo-McCoy, 2000). Contemporarily, movement and migration were still central to the Johnsons and their quest for economic and educational opportunity. The Johnson's movements in search of economic opportunity did not resolve this need for their children. Like generations prior, they collectively felt the promise, necessity, yet uncertainty of movement in search of opportunity.

Together, The Nelsons and Johnsons show the import of movement to Black opportunity seeking across multiple generations. Indeed, each family had their own understandings of familial migration experiences and undergirding each families' retelling was an awareness of a tradition to pursue fulfilling livelihoods and opportunity, even in the face of unjust or uncertain circumstances. Where social and economic opportunity were denied, limited, or precarious both historically and contemporarily—albeit to a different extent—movement has been an integral tool to Black families securing greater choice and agency (Lipsitz, 2007; Wilkerson, 2011; Wiese, 2005). This background emphasizes the importance of place, yet the necessary departures from places of home and belonging as families searched for resources and opportunities over multiple generations.

In the next section, I discuss families' perceptions and experiences of Detroit. Like families' cross-generational experiences of movement, their perceptions of places and schools cannot be understood without grounding in their deep connections and care for the city of Detroit—a homeland for most families in this study.

Detroit as a "Foundation": Life Histories and Place Based Subjectivities

Detroit provided a foundation for families' place-based subjectivities, where most families oriented how they perceived Redford and West Bloomfield through their experiences in the city. All five families who moved from Detroit decided to move due to structural disinvestment and challenges in the city. However, Detroit was not a place forgotten or avoided by families. Like a person you know very well and over time, families were aware of Detroit's challenges and struggles, yet these dynamics were not all encompassing, or a deterrent from recognizing strengths within the city. Some families' life histories and experiences were tied to this place. Moreover, Detroit contained emotions, memories, and relationships that families

valued. Therefore, their movement from the city was not about escaping people, but about accessing structural conditions, or opportunity structures, that they perceived as beneficial and necessary for themselves and their children.

Rooted in Detroit

Rhonda Foster, a single mother and dentist in her early 60s, moved to West Bloomfield in 1995, the summer before her son began high school. In reflecting on her families' move from the city, Ms. Foster decisively stated that her son accessing a quality high school that she was confident would prepare him for college was the primary reason she relocated from Detroit to the "quiet" and "well-resourced" suburb. However, Ms. Foster explained that when she moved to West Bloomfield, "it was the first time other than when I was at school I had lived out of the city." Ms. Foster spoke about Detroit with fondness and familiarity, consistently locating formative life experiences within Detroit's geography. She shared that she was born on "Pallister…near the (Grand) Boulevard and 12th street," which is near downtown Detroit. In this neighborhood, her parents, who were postal workers, owned a four-family unit, and she explained that the neighborhood was a mix of Black people with different socioeconomic affordances. "Some people had money, (some people had) a little bit more than others." However, she explained that Black families lived, schooled, and played together across this difference in the neighborhood where she was born. During Ms. Foster's middle school years, her middle-class family then moved to a neighborhood in northwest Detroit, on "Santa Rosa (street), which is near Livernois and 7 mile…near Palmer Park…(where) we had a lot of doctors' kids and professional parents." Palmer Park is a Detroit neighborhood known for "beautiful and spacious" single family homes (Farley, Danzinger, & Holzer, 2002, p. 25). Notably, in this neighborhood, Ms. Foster's family was not far from 8-mile, an iconic road in Metro Detroit that

holds physical and psychological significance for most Detroiters as a barrier between the majority Black city and predominantly white suburbs north of the city (Detroit Historical Society, 2020). Although in Detroit, Ms. Foster explained that when her family moved to Santa Rosa, family and friends felt they were "so far out" from where they previously lived. As Ms. Foster recounted the neighborhoods and streets she grew up on, she noted how movement was present in her own childhood experiences. She resolved that "unless we go back to segregation, people are going to move." Notably, Ms. Foster also recognized how socioeconomic divisions were more present among Black communities residing in Detroit, as they gained access to neighborhoods in the city where they were previously unable to live. Nonetheless, when she relocated out of Detroit proper it was with reluctance given her care and connection for the city. Ms. Foster explained:

> The only thing I felt is as a Detroiter—and I still consider myself a Detroiter—you kind of feel like you're letting your city down and you know, you're taking away the tax base and all of that kind of stuff.

Detroit's expansive geography was Ms. Foster's homeland, her place of birth, and to a certain extent her two children's as well. Rhonda Foster's 22-year-old daughter, Monet, never lived in Detroit, yet she explained that her grandmother's home in the city was a "second home." For the Fosters, and four other families across both Redford and West Bloomfield, their movement out of Detroit was in search of continued access and opportunity for their families, yet their moves required emotional labor. Detroit was a place and landscape that held formative neighborhood and childhood experiences.

Similarly, Nita Robinson, a married Redford mother of five in her early 50s, relocated from Detroit in 2006. Ms. Robinson particularly linked her care and attachment to the city as

growing from positive and affirming experiences in the city's public-school system. During Ms. Robinson's schooling in Detroit in the 1970s and 80s, she reflected with a reminiscent smile that "I had wonderful experiences" attending neighborhood schools during her elementary and middle school years. She particularly talked at length about how much she enjoyed making friends with other children in her neighborhood at school. Ms. Robinson emphasized that she enjoyed her neighborhood schools in West Detroit—named DePaul and Drew—so much so that she didn't want to take the test to attend Cass Technical High School, a selective enrollment magnet school outside of her neighborhood. However, once she eventually enrolled at Cass, she relished the varied extracurricular activities and resources that were available to her. Ms. Robinson explained:

> Back then art was still prevalent. Band (pause) I was in band my entire time I was in school. We had debate teams, and we had a lot of things in DPS (Detroit Public Schools) back then, and then I got to Cass and it was ridiculous. Everything was available…We had great teachers back then, and it was great. Had a lot of resources. I was trying to find that for my own kids.

Ms. Robinson's positive experiences were not only integral to her own development, but they informed how she thought about educational quality and opportunity for her children. While her three eldest children briefly attended schools in Detroit in the early 2000s, she explained that "DPS was going down at that point," and she desired for her children to attend school in a system with a "close-knit feel," similar to her own neighborhood schooling experiences as opposed to a charter school across the city or in another municipality. This prompted The Robinson's movement to Redford. However, Ms. Robinson explained that when they moved it

brought up emotions for her because “I'm a Detroit person…I didn't really want to leave the city.”

Nita Robinson’s experiences support studies that find that families have distinct histories and social lives that impact their perceptions of what constitutes quality schooling (Bell, 2009; Green, 2017; Khalifa, Jennings, Briscoe, Oleszweski, & Abdi, 2014; Wilson, 2015). Furthermore, it emphasizes that even as families’ move in pursuit of opportunity, their perceptions of place and what constitutes quality schooling can still be place-bound, where parents’ perceptions are oriented by place-based subjectivities and affiliations given the positive and/or negative experiences they may have experienced during their own schooling. Another Redford mother, Tasha Nelson, whose family experiences I shared in the previous section, explained that “there were a lot of neighborhood schools in Detroit, and that’s why “it was a big deal (for Detroiters) when Detroit went through their transition…[and] they closed a lot of schools.” By transition, Ms. Nelson was referring to the large scale school closures under state emergency management that occurred in Detroit’s public school system from 2000 to 2013.

For families who relocated from Detroit, it was not due to a lack of love or care for the city. Indeed, data revealed that being a Detroiter and knowing Detroit, was a culture of its own and it meant being part of a proud tribe. Tasha Nelson, explained that although she had frequented Detroit due to family ties, when she moved there in 2001, she always felt like an outsider due to the high degree of pride and attachment to the city most Detroiters possess. She described that “it's very much like, ‘Oh, I'm from the west side. Oh, I'm from the east side.’ It's that kind of thing. And it's just its own culture.” Ms. Nelson further explained that “people who are longtime, life-long residents of here, who've grown up here, they can talk about like, ‘Oh yeah, back in the day, the skating rink or this was popular.’” Ms. Nelson offered that while parts

of the city look physically different due to the closure of businesses, the razing of homes, and now gentrification; for Detroiters, the city was enlivened by a continued culture of belonging that is bolstered by memories of popular hangouts and schools that remain sites of shared experience and community. Importantly, this is in addition to robust networks of community, civic, and family life that have remained in the city and continue to serve Detroiters who never left and those that now reside across the metropolitan region (Boggs & Kurashige, 2012; Boyd, 2017; Wilson et al., 2019). Hence, Detroit as a place, held vital significance to some families, representing what Mindy Fullilove (2001) calls a "root," which captures the importance of community, emotional investment, and pride tied to place for many Black individuals and families, despite urban disinvestment and anti-Black policies and perceptions.

Importantly, all families in this study did not previously live in Detroit. The Johnsons and Okafors relocated to West Bloomfield from other northwest Metro Detroit suburbs. Yet, while these families did not live in the city during their children's K-12 educational journeys, they still maintained meaningful ties and high regard for the city. Particularly, Debra Johnson, a West Bloomfield mother whose family experiences I also detailed in the preceding section, initially lived in Southfield. She candidly explained that her family had never considered living in Detroit as an outsider to the region. However, she was quick to explain that this was not due to any perceived deficits in the city. She talked at length about the exciting entertainment and cultural offerings in Detroit, and more importantly, she was adamant that challenges related to crime or social services in the city, were not a result of the people who remained in the city, but structural issues like the high cost of living and the lack of a diversified economy. Indeed, Ms. Johnson conveyed a high level of care for Detroit and as a Metro Detroit resident for over 25 years, the city was an important part of her analysis of sociopolitical dynamics in the region. She offered

that “I make it my business to go into Detroit, to support Detroit.” Ms. Johnson recognized how deficit narratives and perceptions of Detroit had harmed the city in ways similar to other majority Black, urban cities like Memphis, TN, where Ms. Johnson was raised. She related Detroit to Memphis, asserting:

> I'm not from Detroit. I'm just passionate about Detroit. And Detroit could be any place that I think is not being treated fairly. It just happens to be I'm closest to Detroit (now), and I know a little bit more, I see a little bit more, especially through my line of work (as an insurance professional). So, Detroit can be like Memphis, Tennessee, where I'm from. There are issues there. But I'm here in Michigan, so I've got to do what I can do here while I'm here.

Ms. Johnson recognized how racialized politics and perceptions of place in Detroit and the U.S. at large harmed predominantly Black urban cities. She assessed that “all these false stereotypes are affecting a whole bunch of things.” Moreover, she elaborated that “they deserve a proper livelihood too (individuals and families living in Detroit) …without all this unnecessary burden.”

Ms. Johnson asserted the resiliency and strong values of the people who lived in cities like Memphis and Detroit. She particularly detailed the experiences of her parents, who were factory and sanitation workers. She shared that although her parents had limited formal education, “they were very strict about education” for her and her siblings. More importantly, she reflected that her parents not only encouraged formal education, but instilled values into her and her siblings that she perceived not all formally educated people have. Ms. Johnson explained that it “doesn’t make sense, as they say, to be an educated fool. So, you need all those values and stuff, and it comes from home.” In turn, Ms. Johnson’s grounding in the home her parents created for her in Memphis, TN influenced how she thought about education for her three

children. She stated that you are "trying to build a whole person…we want to evolve to higher and better (referring to educational and career achievements), but those grassroots things, that fundamental stuff, that foundation is most important."

In conclusion, Michelle Nader, a Detroit native and grandmother now living in Redford explained, "we still have Detroit and Detroit is still our *foundation*… just moving to the suburbs isn't our only answer." Ms. Nader further explained that even though she has relocated, she still sees herself as part of Black communities and institutions efforts to live with dignity and opportunity in the city. She shared that an acquaintance had teased her about not living in the city, asserting that she is no longer apart of "the struggle." However, she asserted that "I'm still a part (of Detroit). Detroit is where I grew up. It's my hometown, you know?" Yet, she conceded that "you have to be moving here (the suburbs) for the right reasons, which I think a good reason is education."

In many ways, Detroit oriented families' perceptions of place and for some parents, their identities. Detroit was integral to families' lifescapes, or the ways in which people and social dynamics interact with physical landscapes of place (Convery, Corsane, & Davis, 2012). This reflects legacies of Black placemaking and community life, where in the face of structural neglect or mainstream perceptions of place, Black people have created "sites of endurance, belonging, and resistance" that reflect Black spatial imaginaries and collective agency (Hunter et al., 2016, p. 32; Lipsitz, 2007). Families', particularly parents', connection and care for Detroit contentiously stand alongside their decision-making to relocate from the city, as families still aimed to secure different forms of opportunity and advantage for their children. In the next section, I particularly discuss how some families made decisions about where to live to maintain connections with Detroit.

Still Anchored to Detroit

As families relocated from Detroit or made decisions about where to live, four out of seven families expressed that they made decisions to relocate to Redford or West Bloomfield based on the suburbs proximity to the city. Again, most families conveyed that they were not seeking to escape *people* who lived in Detroit, but sought schools and communties they deemed would provide their children with what they perceived as necessary for access to opportunity. Families still maintained connections with Detroit and for some, reimagined Metro Detroit's borders and boundaries to foster a sense of belonging that was not necessarily provided in Redford or West Bloomfield alone. This supports literature that finds that Black suburbanites often maintain meaningful connections with urban cities (Nicolaides & Wiese, 2016).

Families residing in Redford particularly explained the role of proximity in their decision-making. As an inner-ring suburb with an 11 mile shared border with Detroit, families perceived the fluidity of the shared border as an attractive feature that enabled them to maintain a community feel similar to Detroit. For instance, Jade Muhammad, a Redford mother of 5 and bus driver in her early 40s explained that while Redford offers amenities common to suburban comunities like spacious lot sizes for homes and quiet neighborhoods, it still has class dynamics and community interactions that remind her of the city. She described:

> You've got a lot of nice areas in Redford where it's like the ranch homes, it's chill, secluded. It looks more suburban, but still a city feel. I think that's why people still like Redford, because it still feels like the city a little bit…I mean, because it's still blue collar, even though it's like more affluent homes, certain neighborhoods, but it's not ... You know, it's not like over the top. It's just still ... It's sprawled out, but it's still nice. And a lot of people

(Detroiters), that's like on certain parts of the neighborhood, that west area anyway, they shop in the same areas (as Redford residents). So, a lot of people still interact.

Likewise, Ms. Muhammad's 13 year old son Curtis, explained Redford as "it's like a mixture of a city and a mixture of a suburb put together…because it's still in the area of Detroit and part of the city." Curtis recognized the permeable border between Detroit and Redford, as he attended a public charter school very close to Redford's shared border with Detroit. Additionally, many of Curtis' classmates still lived in the city. The permeable border between Redford and Detroit that families perceived reflected their continued and daily ties to the city, and the frequency of Detroiters that accessed stores, restaurants, and other services in the suburb.

Nita Robinson, who grew up in a Detroit neighborhood not far from Redford, described that her and husband considered moving to other Metro Detroit suburbs. However, due to family needs in the city they decided to move to Redford. Ms. Robinson explained that Redford was "not really far from my grandma who still lived in my old neighborhood, who I was taking care of…my family was going back and forth helping her, (and) now we need to stay as close as possible." Ms. Robinson's husband initially did not want to relocate to Redford as he worried that schools in Redford weren't "going to be any different than Detroit (schools)," however, once they noticed the small and "close-knit" nature of the school district, they felt that Redford was an ideal place to relocate given Ms. Robinson's caretaker role for her grandmother. Overall, Ms. Robinson assessed that "people stay (in Redford) because they're close to whoever, or close to the hustle and bustle of city life."

While most families indicated the importance of family ties to Detroit, Tasha Nelson also shared her families' decision to move to Redford due to the suburb's proximity to her husband's business in Detroit. Her husband, a Detroit native, ran a family restaurant in downtown Detroit

that his grandparents started over 55 years ago. Ms. Nelson explained that her husband needed to be able to get back and forth from the restaurant quickly. They felt that Redford was an ideal location because of its proximity to the restaurant and it offered the community amenities and quality of service delivery they expected. Ms. Nelson explained that her and her husband were particularly frustrated by the inconsistent nature of city services in Detroit that they had experienced as business owners. Hence, Redford offered a central location to their family business that allowed her husband to easily access work, in addition to their daughter's school, a public charter school about 15 minutes away from their home in Livonia, MI, a bordering suburb of Redford. Importantly, as Ms. Nelson discussed that Redford's central location was ideal for her family's livelihood, she recognized that family resources in the form of transportation and stable finances are integral in their ability to span municipalities to meet their varied needs.

Overall, Redford's proximity to Detroit, and overall central location in the region, allowed Redford families to access the resources they needed, while maintaining relationships, employment, and the "feel" of the city. In their everyday navigations of Redford, families engaged in border crossing and boundary spanning as they often navigated both Detroit and Redford, which amid there similarities still have different sociocultural and political dynamics. This stands counter to historical formations and contemporary dynamics, where civic leaders and some white residents sought to harden boundaries and borders with Detroit to avoid racial integration in schools and communities. For instance, Nita Robinson, who moved to the suburb in 2006, recounted that as a new resident, a white neighbor told her to "go back to Detroit, or wherever you came from." She explained that some long-time white residents have blamed Black residents for increased crime in the suburb or unkept homes or yards in neighborhoods. Black families' navigation of these dynamics required increased labor and agency. Yet, families

recast man-made geographic borders to access resources in Redford and maintain connection and belonging within the city given its close access and proximity.

To a lesser extent, families in West Bloomfield also explained that their decision-making to move to West Bloomfield was shaped by their perceptions of proximity to Detroit. West Bloomfield is approximately 40 minutes driving distance from Detroit. There is significant physical distance between West Bloomfield and Detroit, where unlike Redford, distance serves to reinforce boundaries and borders with the city. However, The Fosters and The Okafors, who both have strong family ties in Detroit, explained that this distance was manageable. Carl Okafor, a married father of 3, explained:

> People I know who've moved into the area from Southfield or Detroit have said they go back to Detroit all the time. Multiple times a day. So we're not talking moving to Ann Arbor versus Detroit, which would be more of a hike.

Mr. Okafor perceived the distance from West Bloomfield to Detroit to allow for frequent trips from his home to the city. Indeed, the Okafors, who had not resided in Detroit as a family unit, maintained robust ties to the city due to his wife's family, many of whom still reside in the city. The Okafors also made frequent trips to the city due to a concerted effort to expose their children to extracurricular and cultural enrichment in Black spaces and organizations. For instance, their children participated in weekly piano lessons in Detroit and had engaged in various mentorship programs including Midnight Golf, a highly regarded mentorship and professional development program that predominantly serves Detroit youth. Carl Okafor's daughter, Amanda, explained that between family and extracurriculars, they were in Detroit several times a week. Mr. Okafor's perceptions of the manageablity of the distance between West Bloomfield and Detroit were motivated by his desire to maintain ties and affilitations in the city. Again, families'

recognized sociocultural resources and strengths within the city that were integral to how they raised their children and maintained family life.

Similary, Rhonda Foster, altogether reimagined the municipal divisions between West Bloomfield and Detroit given the ways she navigated her daily life and her familiarity with the city. She asserted:

> I know I live in West Bloomfield, but I still consider this Detroit. I know there are purists who if you live north of Eight Mile, you're not in Detroit, but I just consider this all Detroit…because this job that I have now, I go to senior citizen places, nursing homes and things like that to see to their dental care. I travel about an hour to the different places. If I'm going to St. Clair or Richmond (exurbs North of Detroit), it just seems like it's so far away. I can be traveling to a place in Detroit and still have to travel an hour, but it doesn't seem like I've been traveling that far. I think it's because anywhere I am in Detroit, I know ... Well, if my car breaks down here, I can get off. I can catch the bus that runs here. I know how to get to someplace from some place, it's just home.

Ms. Foster's perceptions of proximity to Detroit were shaped by her familiarity with the city and the fact that it was her home. Morevover, she desired to maintain ties with the city, which shaped her perceptions of distance and time to and from Detroit. While Ms. Foster had moved to access quality public schools for her children, she reimagined municipal borders and boundaries to fit her families' needs and lifescapes, which were rooted in Detroit. This involved her own placemaking within Metro Detroit to access the resources she needed and to maintain connections to a home that was integral to her identity and well-being.

Addressing research question one, actual and perceived proximity to Detroit shaped most families decision-making on where to relocate. Families made decisions about where to move in

search of community amenities which included housing and quality schools. Yet, proximity to Detroit proved central to how they perceived these amenities, given their desire to maintain ties with people and a city they loved. Additionally, proximity to Detroit allowed some families to maintain employment and their livelihood. This also addresses research question two, as families' perceptions of place and where they lived were shaped by their previous experiences or affiliation to Detroit. Again, families recognized the challenges of living in Detroit, which were part and parcel of their movement out of the city. However, they did not perceive Detroit as a unidimensional place, inaccurately defined by its worst failures or shortcomings. Indeed, through their movement, they transgressed social and legal constructions of metropolitan borders that were built upon exclusion and contributed to disinvestment and decline in the city (Baugh, 2011; Cresswell, 1996; Sugrue, 2014b). Families aimed to create a metropolitan landscape that was sustaining and affirming to not only their children's educational needs, but to their social and cultural needs as well. This is a form of "taking place" as families recast inequitable place-based dynamics in attempts to create a metropolitan landscape that met their holistic needs.

In the final section, I discuss the challenges families faced or perceived in Detroit schools, and more broadly Metro Detroit's educational landscape that ultimately caused their movement to the suburbs in search of opportunity.

Opportunity Stuctures as a Tool of Dispossession

Angela Morrill and Eve Tuck (2016) explain dispossession as once referring "only to land theft, but now attends to how human lives and bodies matter and don't matter" (p. 5). As demonstrated in the prior section, for most families, Detroit was either a homeland or a place that mattered socially, politically, or economically to their families. However, families also perceived and experienced a lack of mattering towards Black children and communities given the drastic

disinvestment and decline of social institution and services, particularly in Detroit public school system. Hence, for families that moved from the city, they were often responding to state policies and practices that they believed dispossessed many families and children from educational access and opportunity. Overall, families largely did not perceive Detroit's neighborhood schools to be adequate or quality schooling options for their children. Families explained that there were some quality schools in Detroit's public school system, particularly selective enrollment magnet high schools, Cass Technical, Renaissance High School, and Martin Luther King Jr. High School. However, families felt that there was far too much inconsistency in school quality across the system, and for most families in this study this included the city's charter schools too. Importantly, like parents' recognition of Detroit's strengths, most families affirmed the significant efforts of some past and present Detroit teachers, administrators, and families to maintain the school system. Indeed, these were individuals who were often within their social and family networks. Yet, most families asserted the varied ways in which the structural and policy contexts in the State of Michigan and Metro Detroit created the poor state of Detroit public schools.

Jade Muhammad, a Redford mother of 5 who relocated from Detroit in 2009, explained the widespread distrust of Detroit's public school system in her social circles. She assessed:

> [I] barely know anybody who goes to like (traditional neighborhood) Detroit Public Schools. Everybody has their children in charter schools, suburban schools, and this new wave of online K-12 education…so people make their education choices separate a lot of times in Detroit from your residential.

This reflects Ms. Muhammad's own school choices for her children, where she now utilizes charter schools to educate her two school age children. Her son, Curtis, attends a public charter

school in Redford that another parent recommended, and her 17-year-old daughter, Denise, attends an online public charter school. Ms. Muhammad asserted that the prevalence of families' movement out of Detroit schools was warranted given the lack of basic infrastructure in some Detroit schools. She perceived that "the average neighborhood one (DPS school), it's kind of like I'm looking at it more like is the heat going to be working? Are they (her children) going to be hot? Too cold?" As a working-class single-mother with an Islamic religious background, Ms. Muhammad was mindful about securing quality schools that she perceived met her children's holistic needs and interests, in addition to their academic development. Ms. Muhammad had even homeschooled her daughter briefly and remains a part of a sustainable-living collective of Black families in Metro Detroit, many of whom actively homeschool their children; teaching them traditional academic subjects in addition to carpentry, gardening, and yoga. While Ms. Muhammad still navigated public school choice options for her two eldest children, she believed that homeschooling would become more prevalent in Detroit because there were just too many examples of "people being just disenfranchised or they're getting beat by the system and people are tired of it. Like you know, (so) I'm pulling my child out (of the school system).'" Jade Muhammad's overall perceptions of Detroit's public school system aligned families' exits from the district with efforts to protect their children from a system that she perceived denied basic educational rights and privileges (Mazama & Lundy, 2012; Moultrie, 2016).

Other families also cited large class sizes, a high rate of teacher turnover, school closures, a shortage of guidance and academic counselors, and a lack of rigor in curricula as motivating their movement out of Detroit schools. Imani Robinson, Nita Robinson's daughter reflected on her brief experiences in Detroit schools. Imani recounted:

> I remember not liking it there…I just feel like they (teachers) had the degree, but on a personal level you have to understand where each is kid is coming from, what their background is, what their home life is like and just how to approach that before we even get into the teaching aspect. You just got to know how to deal with kids… before you even try to teach, before you even do anything involving children or teenagers. That's more important to me, understanding where everyone's coming from instead of just putting them in the classroom.

As a student, Imani felt that teachers she encountered in Detroit schools did not have enough training to deal with the varied social, emotional, and cultural needs of the children and communities they served. Like Imani, families focused on different challenges within Detroit's school system, however, there was an overwhelming consensus that these challenges were formidable. As opposed to simply seeking a new curriculum or a highly rated school district, which also influenced some family's decision-making, the state of Detroit's public schools were viewed as gross neglect, a form of disenfranchisement and dispossession for Detroiters who remained in the system.

Importantly, some families' perceptions of the lack of consistency in Detroit's school district was driven by their recognition of the exclusivity of Detroit's selective enrollment magnet schools. Several families referenced Renaissance, Cass, and King magnet schools as quality offerings in Detroit's public-school system. However, families recognized that these schools were not representative of the average Detroit public school or accessible to all student given families and students' identities. For example, Carl Okafor, a West Bloomfield father, particularly touted the quality of Detroit's magnet schools, describing them as "great schools" with "brand new facilities." However, after a follow up question asking about how he perceived

Detroit's overall school system, Mr. Okafor conceded that as an outsider to the region, "I really don't know any other high schools." He explained that "everybody I know who's a professional who grew up in Detroit who were my age or within ten years of me and who went to Detroit public schools, they either went to Renaissance or Cass Tech." Additionally, Mr. Okafor's niece attended Renaissance. Carl Okafor and his wife were upper-middle class professionals who had attended University of Michigan for their undergraduate and graduate studies. Mr. Okafor's wife had also attended Renaissance for high school. Mr. Okafor and his wife were very active in middle-class, professional Detroit social networks as they were both affiliated with African American fraternities and sororities. Given The Okafor's social status, class positionality, and residence in West Bloomfield, Detroit's elite magnet schools were largely how he perceived and knew Detroit's public school system. This reflects the class and social capital that can determine access and enrollment in Detroit's magnet schools. Moreover, addressing research question two, this emphasizes that families' class status shaped their perceptions and knowledge of quality schools. Upper middle-class families in Metro Detroit, like the Okafors and other West Bloomfield families, were largely not considering nor navigating the majority of DPS schools.

Additionally, some families noted that their children's academic ability also impacted their access to Detroit's selective-enrollment magnet schools. Jade Muhammad explained that her two eldest children were very different students, and this influenced how she made decisions about their schooling. She explained that her daughter, Denise, needed to be pushed to stay academically motivated. Hence, she had placed her daughter in different charter schools around the region in hopes of finding a school that would pique her interests given the varied curricular or extracurricular offerings that Ms. Muhammad perceived as a positive attribute of many charter schools. Before enrolling her daughter at the online K-12 public charter school she attends,

Denise attended a public charter school in Ferndale, an inner-ring suburb north of the city. Ms. Muhammad removed her daughter from the school due to ongoing conflicts with peers. Ms. Muhammad was sensitive to her daughter's needs simply explaining that all students won't be academically motivated, but they may have interests in the arts, entrepreneurship, or a technical field. She explained that completing high school online was ideal for her daughter, because she was now able to work and learn how to manage her time. Ms. Muhammad viewed this as an important life skill for her daughter to develop as an 11th grader. On the other hand, Jade's son, Curtis, was a high-achieving student. As an 8th grader, Curtis explained that he wanted to "attend Cass Tech or Renaissance…because they're good schools to go to and they're the best ones for math and science." Given Curtis' record of academic achievement, Ms. Muhammad supported her son's desire to attend Cass or Renaissance, and she felt confident that he would qualify to attend one of the schools. At Cass or Renaissance, Ms. Muhammad, like her son, was confident that Curtis would access curricula and support to continue pursuing his interests in math and science, and ultimately enroll at a university. Curtis aspired to become an orthodontist.

Importantly, Ms. Muhammad and Curtis' assessment of the level of educational opportunity offered in Detroit Public Schools were attached to her son's academic ability, not an overall confidence in the school system to support the needs or ability level of the majority of students, including her daughter. Ms. Muhammad and other families' perceptions reflect the ways in which systems of school choice can maintain and replicate race, class, and ability social hierarchies when there is no explicit measure to ensure equitable access (Aggarwal, 2015; Wells, 2014; Wilson, 2015). Therefore, while most parents identified the educational opportunity offered at Detroit's magnet schools or even select neighborhood schools, explaining that there were "pockets of opportunity" in the system, they questioned the likelihood of consistently

accessing these spaces considering the limited number of quality options in the district and the varied needs of their children.

Admittedly, three parents across both suburbs expressed deficit narratives of Detroit parents and families who remained in public schools, sharing that parents were "too young," "unengaged," or valued "materialism" over education. However, these parents also acknowledged and connected the formidable challenges within the district to structural neglect. For example, Michelle Nader, the Redford grandmother, utilized discourses of personal responsibility and structural critiques of the state of Detroit's public school system to explain why she did not school her children in the system. She stated "I understand that the city of Detroit…you know, it's a lot of struggle, we have to struggle for a lot of things, but we can't keep blaming it on that. We can't keep blaming it on the struggle."

Ms. Nader simultaneously explained that she was part of the struggle to improve conditions in Detroit, yet she still asserted that some parents could do more to counteract policies and practices that had harmed Black communities in the city. Ms. Nader grew up in the 1960s and was the child of parents who she explained taught her self-discipline and emphasized the importance of education. She was also the matriarch of her family, a community leader, and business owner. Her personal responsibility approach ultimately led her to take in her nine-year-old grandson, Dathan, due to her daughter's work schedule. Ms. Nader perceived that "the teachers here (in Redford), you know, they just seem to be excited about teaching, you know, and a lot of them in the city, they, they, they have just lost the excitement of teaching, I think." Ms. Nader's best friend was a recently retired Detroit public school teacher, and Ms. Nader explained that she frequently faced "so much red tape," referring to the bureaucracy of a large

public school system. She also explained that her friend had to buy "her own school supplies and I think that's a big problem too. The kids not having enough supplies and resources."

Hence, Ms. Nader's perceptions of the level of educational opportunity in DPS schools were two-fold. First, she acknowledged the ways in which teachers and administrators were strained by systemic conditions in their efforts to teach and improve schools. However, she also believed parents were able to do more to counteract negative conditions in schools, which demonstrates the complicated ways in ways in which individuals can perceive opportunity structures. This shows that while families were oriented by rich, place-based subjectivities rooted in their connection to Detroit, they at times drew on racialized stereotypes of Black individuals and families that have been part and parcel of the inequality and policy maltreatment that they have also experienced in the city (powell, 2005; Khalifa et al., 2015).

As mentioned, all families recognized that there were larger systemic issues shaping Detroit's public school system. Particularly, Rhonda Foster, a West Bloomfield mother, was a former DPS middle school science teacher for 10 years. Her frustration with Detroit schools was palpable as she discussed the district. She explained that the combination of large class sizes, a lack of support staff, and the social conditions that went unaddressed by other institutions, caused many of Detroit's public schools to become a "social service agency." Ms. Foster gave several examples of how teachers and administrators worked to meet the needs of poverty-impacted families and students, including providing food for families, washing clothes, and counseling students. Yet, she experienced that it was difficult to address these needs and teach all students well. Ms. Foster shared:

> I know that kids that go to Detroit schools can come out very well and learn a lot. But it's almost like those are the lucky ones. Because there was too much going on in the schools

> that were left up to the teacher to handle. Just kids coming to school hungry…I knew that that was part of it…I'm a little pissed about the way they run the schools in Detroit… Nobody wants to put the money into the schools the way it needs to be put in, because they're in Detroit.

The conditions Ms. Foster faced as a teacher in part led her to leave the profession and pursue her dental degree. She reflected that "I found myself coming home, yelling at Terry (her son)…because I'm under so much stress from school." As a teacher, Ms. Foster was constrained by the different needs that she tried to address among students. Furthermore, she connected these challenges to a lack of school funding given a state policy context that has intentionally neglected Detroit's public school system. This supports scholars who assert that a politics of disposability has shaped social policy and practice in urban cities and school systems (Giroux, 2006; Wilson, 2015).

Similarly, Nita Robinson, a Redford mother and highly engaged parent leader in schools, explained that she didn't believe that the quality of educational instruction or the efforts of teachers and administrators were that different between Redford and Detroit's public school systems. Instead, she assessed that varying levels of school resources and supports for families created the different levels of educational access and opportunity in the two municipalities. Ms. Robinson explained:

> I won't say that there is more opportunity (in Redford as compared to Detroit). I would (say) that it's a different approach to it. You know what I mean? I think the same opportunity is there. But because the income rate is higher (in Redford), right? Because you don't have nearly as many issues, which I come to find out you do, but nearly as many issues as they think you would have in an inner city setting, that the opportunity is better.

> If your kid comes to school well fed, having a good morning, no worries in the world, then you are very quick to learn. And that's true! If you haven't eaten, you can't focus. You're having a bad morning, you can't focus. If you're worried about a bill and you're a child that's a problem. I think people think that because you're in the suburb that they don't have the same issues, but I find that you do have the same issues, but it's not as frequent. You know what I mean? Or you have more opportunity to improve that. There may be a social worker, or clinician that could do a little more for that kid than somebody in an urban setting.

Redford schools also serve families impacted by poverty. In 2018, approximately 17% of Redford residents experienced conditions of poverty. However, as assessed by Ms. Robinson, the fact that this demographic was less prevalent as compared to Detroit, where the poverty rate is approximately 35% (U.S. Department of Commerce, 2019), made a consequential difference. Additionally, the increased resources and personnel available to address family and student needs, facilitated what Ms. Robinson perceived as the varied levels of educational access and opportunity between Redford and Detroit's public school systems. Nita Robinson recognized that it wasn't as simple as saying Detroit schools were "bad," but that Detroit's under-resourced opportunity structure limited the school system's ability to adequately serve all students (powell, 2005).

Importantly, Rhonda Foster did not perceive the weakening of opportunity structures in Detroit to be by chance, but an intentional mechanism of social reproduction in Metro Detroit's economic landscape. She explained how her experiences as a DPS teacher illuminated the linkages between educational opportunity and what she called "a class struggle," or working class communities' fight to experience social and economic mobility against capitalistic

structures need for low-wage workers. Ms. Foster explained how the poor state of schools in Detroit were instrumental in reproducing social inequality in the region. Her desire for her children to not get "caught in that lower group," ultimately encouraged her decision-making to move to West Bloomfield. She stated:

> Things are kind of a class struggle always. Part of me moving out here (to West Bloomfield) was because I feel like there's going to be a time, and lord knows your President (Trump) is trying to make it happen now, where they cut off the ability of people to move up. And so I was trying to get my kids in a position, whether they take advantage of it or not, of being where they're not caught in that lower group and can't get out. To me it all has to do with your education. Back to what they're doing in Detroit, they're keeping people in lower classes because that's where you get your cheap labor. That's where you, you know, can look and say, 'I'm better than they.' So you know truthfully part of me moving out here was to get my kids in a position so that they can move up.

Noticeably, Ms. Foster used the verb *move* to capture not only her families' physical relocation to West Bloomfield, but also Detroiters ability to experience social and economic mobility. Given Ms. Foster's perceptions of the intentionality of the state to not educate Detroit children well, Ms. Foster decided to physically move to another municipality, or opportunity structure, that she perceived would support her children's access to opportunity and economic mobility. Like Ms. Foster, most families' movement was about providing their children with access to opportunity structures they perceived would enable them to experience upward social mobility, or at the very least stability.

Data overall show that families movement from Detroit is a form of advantage seeking for their children. This aligns with studies examining suburban schooling that show that white families also sought increased advantages for their children (Holme, 2002; Lewis & Diamond, 2015; Lewis-McCoy, 2014). Yet, particularly for the five families who relocated from Detroit, their movement was not only about gaining advantage for their children, but also an act of agency to disrupt structures of social reproduction and dispossession that limited their Black children's access to opportunity and future livelihoods.

Conclusion

Families' decision-making was influenced by their place-based subjectivities and familial legacies of movement as a tool to access opportunity. Families were oriented and anchored by their past experiences in ways that shaped their perceptions of suburban municipalities and school systems. Moreover, in order to meet their diverse needs, families recast municipal borders and boundaries that have functioned historically, socially, and politically to exclude Black people from educational resources and opportunity in Metro Detroit (e.g. *Milliken*, white Flight, state disinvestment from Detroit's public schools, and other exclusionary practices of suburban formations). By recast, I refer to the ways in which Black families perceived and navigated Metro Detroit in ways that reimagined and altered formalized municipal politics, boundaries, and borders. Indeed, through families' perceptions and decision-making they worked to construct and access opportunity in ways that structural dynamics in both Detroit and its surrounding suburbs precluded alone. This of course required families' resources and labor in ways that illuminate the affordances of middle-class Black families and the continued inequity and marginalization of Black families overall in Metro Detroit's educational landscape. Families stood within a larger tradition as they moved, seeking to provide for their children within their given means.

In the next chapter, I focus on families' socioeconomic status and Metro Detroit's political economy over time. I discuss how both families' finances and larger economic change in the region influenced families' increased access to suburbs and their educational aspirations for their children.

Chapter V
Seeking Educational Opportunity in a Rust Belt Region

Since the 2000s, Metro Detroit's economic and political landscape has undergone pressing challenges that have impacted students, families, and school districts. Namely, the state of Michigan experienced a decade of economic recession from 2000 to 2010, which hit an apex with the 2008 U.S. recession—one of the most significant economic recessions in the U.S. since the Great Depression of the 1930s (Temin, 2010). As a U.S. Rust Belt region already suffering from the pangs of deindustrialization, the 2008 recession further affected the automobile industry and housing market in Metro Detroit (Kneebone & Garr, 2009). Most notably, in 2013, Detroit became the largest city by population to file for bankruptcy in the U.S. This had a significant impact on educational processes and school systems that struggled under increasing poverty due to job loss and cutbacks. The metropolitan region also experienced population loss, which led to declining municipal tax bases that affected school funding. As detailed in chapter 2, Detroit sat at the center of this economic devastation, however, other municipalities across Metro Detroit, including Redford and West Bloomfield felt the impacts of economic decline and challenge too (Brooks, 2009). At its core, the social, economic, and political challenges in Metro Detroit have been structural in nature. However, these challenges are also integral to sociocultural processes, where families must live, navigate, and make difficult decisions in these conditions.

In this chapter, I detail families' perceptions and experiences of socioeconomic and labor dynamics that shaped their geographic moves and school choices in Metro Detroit. As identified by families, I discuss the importance of affordability of living in relationship to families' desired

community amenities, like quality schools and spacious housing. I also discuss the affordability of suburban municipalities after the 2008 recession which proved salient in families' movement and access to suburbs. I particularly explain the importance of affordability to Redford families given their socioeconomic status. Indeed, data suggests that while schooling influenced Redford families' movement, at times economic and housing priorities took precedence in their decision-making. Lastly, I highlight the impacts of deindustrialization in Metro Detroit on parent's educational aspirations and school choices for their children. Together, these themes address the importance of Metro Detroit's political economy in influencing Black families' meaning making and pursuit of educational access and opportunity over time.

"Things Aren't Free": Suburban Affordability & Movement Decision-Making

Families' perceptions and decision-making about where to live and school their children were informed by their material needs and the affordability of municipalities. Homestead property taxes, insurance rates, and housing costs proved salient at varying levels for families. Most families sought to maximize their financial resources and were conscious of fixed costs as they searched for schools and communities with features such as ethnically and racially diverse student bodies, in addition to adequate housing space. Importantly, families weighed their desired features alongside their own socioeconomic affordances and resources. As discussed in Chapter 2, this aligns with the salience of class or socioeconomic status in shaping families' school and community choices in suburban contexts (Lewis-McCoy, 2014; Posey-Maddox, 2017; Rhodes & Warkentien, 2017).

Redford

In Redford, all parent/guardian participants emphasized affordability as shaping their decision to move to the suburb. Families explained that as they considered options on where to

move, they found that housing and homestead taxes were reasonable when compared to other municipalities and counties in Metro Detroit. Additionally, Redford families liked that the suburb offered desirable housing stock, community safety, and for some families an attractive public school system. For example, Michelle Nader, the Redford grandmother, moved to Redford in 2011, after living in Detroit, Canton, Livonia, and Westland. Canton, Livonia, and Westland are all suburbs west of the city. Ms. Nader first rented a home in Redford and then purchased a foreclosed home that she and her husband renovated. Ms. Nader explained that coupled with attractive amenities like large yards, safe and walkable neighborhood conditions, and a focus on families in the suburb, "Redford is more affordable, more so, the taxes are reasonable, not so much like, you know, West Bloomfield, Birmingham, Canton, even Westland."

Nita Robinson, a Redford mother, explained that she initially did not want to move to the suburb due to the lack of racial diversity. In 2006, when The Robinsons moved to Redford, the Black population was significantly smaller. Ms. Robinson estimated the racial demographic was about "70/30 (white/Black) the other way when we first got here." Indeed in 2010, approximately four years after The Robinsons relocated to the suburb, Redford's Black population was approximately 29 percent, as compared to 42 percent in 2019 (U.S. Department of Commerce, 2019). Ms. Robinson and her husband initially preferred moving to Southfield or West Bloomfield, as they believed the schools there would be more racially diverse and of better quality. However, she explained that she found "a great price on a house in Redford" and property taxes were more affordable in Wayne County versus Oakland County, where Southfield and West Bloomfield are located. Affordability was key for The Robinsons as she explained that the Detroit neighborhood where they previously lived "was okay. It was just our house was huge. Couldn't afford it, so money was an issue." Therefore, while Redford was initially not the most

desirable location to The Robinsons, affordability of homes and taxes were an integral factor in their decision-making. Ms. Robinson further shared that the small, intimate nature of the school district convinced her and her husband that Redford was an ideal place to relocate. Ms. Robinson stated that "I needed a close-knit feel…it was only one high school, one middle school, and four elementary schools (in South Redford School District). Everybody seemed close knit like a family." Hence, affordability and assurance that schools would meet their desired standards by providing a navigable school system where her children would not be "lost in the shuffle of stuff" were central to The Robinson's decision-making on where to live.

Importantly, Tasha Nelson who moved to Redford in 2010, illuminated that in many ways Redford was more affordable than Detroit. Ms. Nelson particularly described the high costs of home and vehicle insurance in the city. She elaborated:

> When you live in the city, maybe you buy cheaper on the front end, maybe you got a house for a great deal or whatever, but then where you pay more is like your insurance. You really, really, really pay a lot more for living in the city. Or living, even you're not living in the city, in the zip code. You are definitely paying higher. Your vehicle insurance. I don't know about property taxes, but the state of Michigan pays more than almost any other state, but when you're in the city, because there's more crime in the vicinity, they're basing it off of that, not necessarily just off of your personal claim history. But you live in this zip code… it's a higher cost of living in a different way than how you think about cost of living. I think you pay more in the city.

Hence, for The Nelsons, and four other families across both suburbs, the high rate of fixed costs in Detroit and Metro Detroit at large, greatly influenced their movement and decision-making on where to live. Although The Johnsons, a West Bloomfield family, never resided in Detroit, as an

insurance claims professional, Debra Johnson questioned "why are those rates so high over there (Detroit)…as opposed to, let's just say, West Bloomfield or Novi (a middle-ring suburb, northwest of the city)?...Why not everybody?...So that's driving people away from Detroit too." Parents concern and vigilance of fixed costs were founded given that Michigan has the highest car insurance rates in the country, and Detroit's rates were most expensive across the state (Neavling, 2020, January 15). In an expansive metropolitan region with inadequate infrastructure for public transportation, owning a car is often vital to sustaining individuals and families' livelihoods. Suburban residents and powerholders have in part driven the lack of adequate public transit in Metro Detroit, as they have lobbied to harden physical barriers between the city and suburbs given their perceptions of Detroit as crime-ridden (Farley et al., 2000). Additionally, Michigan has one of the highest property tax rates in the country, and this too is exacerbated in Detroit which has the highest property tax rate in the state (Strachan, 2019, Jan 24). Below, Table 5.1 shows the average rates of select fixed costs including home costs, housing rental rates, property tax rates, and car insurance rates for Detroit, Redford, West Bloomfield, and Michigan overall in 2019. I also include school district per pupil allotments and crime rates for each municipality. Safety also proved relevant for some families in influencing their perceptions of place.

2019 Average Cost of Living Rates						
	Average Home Cost	Average Rental Cost	Average Homestead Tax Millage Rate [3]	Per Pupil Funding	Average Car Insurance Cost Per Year	Crime Rate (per 1,000 residents)
Detroit	$41,500	$796	69.62	$13,013	$5,706	63.23
Redford	$113,000	$1,100	60.54	$14,045	$4,014	28.96
West Bloomfield	$323,000	$1,913	39.27	$14,912	$2, 852	6.66
Michigan Average	$174,000	$1,200	41.98	$14,824	$2,920	21.03

Table 5.1: Table of average cost of living rates in Detroit, Redford, West Bloomfield, and Michigan at large in 2019

Overall, Redford families weighed their search for quality schooling alongside the affordability of living in the suburb. For instance, when asked about the potential of relocating from Redford in the future, Tasha Nelson contemplated that she may move again as her 9-year-old daughter approaches high school. Ms. Nelson desired for her daughter to attend a performing arts high school given her interests in dance and oratorical competitions. Redford's high schools did not offer this targeted curriculum, nor the public charter school network where her daughter is currently enrolled. However, Ms. Nelson explained that given her "house and the size of our yard…. It would have to be better than where we are [to move]. You know what I mean? And probably more money than what we really want to spend." Families' decision-making to move to Redford and remain there was guided by the cost of living in other municipalities, and ultimately what amenities like housing and yard size their resources would afford in these places.

[3] Each mill equates to $1 of tax per $1,000 dollars of home value

In summary, data shows that Redford families recognized other suburban municipalities with desirable community and school features, yet Redford offered the most ideal municipality given the affordability of living and families' socioeconomic statuses, which ranged from working to middle-class. Concerning my second research question, which asks how class shapes perceptions of place and quality school choice options, seeking quality schools was a central priority for all Redford families. Yet, only one family, The Robinsons, offered perceptions of Redford's public schools as integral to their movement decision-making. Other families noted an awareness and satisfaction with the suburbs' public schools. This, however, was not the central factor shaping their decision about where to live. Only children from two of the four Redford families attended the public schools to which they were zoned. The other two families met their children's educational needs through public charter schools that they perceived provided more rigorous and expansive curricular and extracurricular offerings. Pairing housing and school choices proved more difficult for families living in Redford, meaning that they were not fully satisfied with their neighborhood schools after they relocated or never intended to pair their housing and school choices. This aligns with Rhodes and Warkentien's (2017) study which found that Black families who moved to the suburbs experienced more difficulties in pairing their housing and school choices as compared to white families. Black families' socioeconomic status—in addition to their overall lack of generational wealth—made it difficult for them to access suburbs where they were satisfied with public school offerings. As I discuss in the next section, this was not true for family participants residing in West Bloomfield.

West Bloomfield

Only one out of three families in West Bloomfield were also concerned about fixed costs as they considered their relocation. Debra Johnson, who moved to West Bloomfield from

Southfield in 1995, explained that the cost of taxes in Southfield were the primary reason they relocated to West Bloomfield. She repeatedly expressed that she was satisfied with schools and homes in Southfield, but taxes were too high. Ms. Johnson reasoned that "for my money, I want my kids to feel safer. I want them in a quality school, and if I can save on taxes, the better." Ms. Johnson was not willing to sacrifice what she perceived as a safe community or quality school, which she believed were sufficient in Southfield. However, she weighed these perceptions alongside the perceived high cost of taxes in Southfield. Ms. Johnson recognized her class privileges and the social and educational opportunities it had afforded her family. Yet, she was adamant about the importance of making money go as far as it could. Ms. Johnson's attentiveness to money and resources seemingly grew from a deep sensitivity to working class communities and families that reflects her own upbringing as the child of parents who had limited formal education and worked blue-collar jobs in Memphis, Tennessee. Unlike the other West Bloomfield parents who grew up in middle-class households, Ms. Johnson had experienced significant class mobility from her own childhood experiences.

Other families in West Bloomfield did not pinpoint affordability of municipalities as encouraging their movement, thus they were less concerned about the suburbs higher cost of living. They justified the cost of living in West Bloomfield given the highly rated public school system and the comfort and safety they felt in communities. For instance, Rhonda Foster recognized that her overall cost of living was higher in West Bloomfield as compared to when she lived in Detroit. However, she perceived her increased costs as worth the benefits her family experienced by residing in the suburb. She assessed that "the cost of living is higher here, but it's what I expected. You're trading some things, you're trading a little more security as far as your environment for paying higher taxes. You're trading better schools for higher taxes." Ms. Foster

saw higher taxes as a worthy tradeoff for accessing the amenities she searched for in Metro Detroit, which included smaller class sizes. She reflected that "I don't think Terry (her son) had a class with more than 20 people in it." Additionally, like other parents, she appreciated the wide range of curricular and extracurricular offerings in West Bloomfield schools. She assessed that "they offer everything from not only theater and sports, but also jewelry making, 10 different languages—just a wide variety of things that were available for you to take. I liked that."

Prior to moving to West Bloomfield, Ms. Foster was paying for her son to attend a parochial middle school in the city. She also shared that they experienced a couple break-ins to their home in Detroit. She reflected that this was especially concerning given that she and her teenage son lived alone in the home. Ms. Foster asserted that "things aren't free," therefore, she expected that she would pay more for the school and community qualities she desired. Given her increased socioeconomic status after receiving her dental degree and socioeconomic affordances among her extended family, where Ms. Foster bought her home in West Bloomfield from a cousin, her decision-making on where to move was less guided by affordability of homes and taxes. She possessed the financial resources and familial support to move to a suburb where she could comfortably pair her housing and school choices.

Carl Okafor, a West Bloomfield father, expressed similar decision-making to Ms. Foster, where housing size and school quality were most influential in their decision to move to West Bloomfield. He shared:

> (We) briefly looked at homes in Detroit too, but we knew we'd have to send our kids to private schools (if they lived in the city)…We wanted the option of the public school or private school. We didn't want to be forced into a decision based on the area where we were living.

While the Okafors had the resources to afford private schools if they had chosen to live in Detroit, they desired a public school system where they were comfortable their children would access a rigorous college-preparatory curriculum, therefore they were willing to pay the increased costs of residing in West Bloomfield. This was especially important to Mr. Okafor due to his own K-12 educational experiences in a public school system outside of St. Louis, Missouri where he explained that "it was a good public school system, and so I didn't see any reason to send my kids to private school…the school district, the house, the community, all that kind of checked all the boxes." Even Debra Johnson, the West Bloomfield mother who expressed the importance of affordable taxes to her family's decision-making explained that "as long as they're not wasting your money, then it's okay to pay some more. You earn more."

Addressing research question two, West Bloomfield families' socioeconomic status as professional, upper middle-class families, mediated their perceptions of place and decision-making on where to live and school their children. Families' socioeconomic status focused their movement decision-making more explicitly on seeking quality public schools, among other community amenities, that they perceived provided the resources and opportunities they desired. While the Okafors considered private school for their children, families were generally able to pair their housing and school choices together in the suburb. This supports literature that finds that upper middle-class families engage in suburban school choice markets though their ability to purchase homes in high quality public school systems (Dougherty et al., 2009; Holme, 2002). However, this does not mean that West Bloomfield families were always satisfied, as discussed in Chapter 6, race and racism were still highly salient in students and families' experiences in schools and communities.

In the next section, I discuss the affordability of Redford and West Bloomfield in relationship to the 2008 recession. Particularly for Redford families, their ability to move and access homes in the suburb was spurred by the recession which provoked widespread home foreclosures and substantial depreciation of home equity throughout Metro Detroit. As I highlight, economic recession was difficult for all families, yet it also presented opportunities for some families in this study.

Recession as Setback for All and Opportunity for Some

The 2008 recession hit Metro Detroit especially hard. As experienced by families, "it was horrible" and "heartbreaking." Carl Okafor observed:

> Just in my subdivision, we had maybe four or five homes that were foreclosed on because people lost their jobs and couldn't afford to make their home payments. (People) just had to move out. A lot of people moved out of the area to find opportunities elsewhere.

Large scale, devastating layoffs occurred across the region. Additionally, like across the U.S., the housing market crashed. Property foreclosures significantly impacted Metro Detroit, and many homeowners in the region lost home equity (Wilkinson, 2017, March 20). Across different socioeconomic statuses, families felt the impacts of economic recession. Moreover, the economic instability created by the recession impacted municipalities and neighborhoods, destabilizing opportunity structures in varied ways. As journalist Mike Wilkinson (2018, December 19) reported, conditions "fueled by the Great Recession sparked a mini exodus," where significant numbers of individuals and families left the state of Michigan altogether. When families left the state, and particularly the Metro Detroit region, houses sat vacant and school seats were empty. These conditions created a climate of economic precarity for all, while for some it offered opportunities to move to communities and schools that prior to the recession were financially

inaccessible. For Redford family participants, this proved to be especially true, as three out of the four participant families purchased foreclosed homes in the municipality after the recession. West Bloomfield family participants all purchased their homes prior to the recession, yet they explained the recession as promoting demographic change in the suburb and facilitating opportunities for more racially diverse schools. This is not to downplay the negative impacts of the recession, which certainly impacted family participants. However, families recognized select opportunities and demonstrated agency in inequitable opportunity structures that had long penalized Black families and required their increased labor. As explained by Jade Muhammad, a Redford mother, after the 2008 recession hit, "it was just kind of like pick up the pieces and move forward." Hence, families were negatively impacted by the recession, but also moved forward to pursue and access opportunity in ways that they could throughout region.

As discussed in the previous section, Redford families' decision-making on where to live was significantly shaped by the affordability of living in the municipality. Property values, which fell by more than half between 2008 and 2016 after the recession, were a significant driver of the affordability of homes in the suburb (Wilkinson, 2017, March 20). Additionally, there was a high rate of foreclosure in the suburb. In 2010, Redford was one of the top municipalities experiencing foreclosure in the state (The Charter Township of Redford, 2016). The recession also caused cutbacks on amenities and services like the parks department (Wilkinson, 2017, March 20), which The Redford Township Website (2020) touts as "one of its most valuable resources."

Most central to this study, the population of renters also increased and racial demographics began to change. As recounted by Nita Robinson, as "Black people moved in, the white people moved out. There are a few (white people) that stay, and their excuse was they had

to stay because they couldn't sell their house, but there was a big, big racial shift." Redford participant families' moves to the suburb were part and parcel of this shift, as most families purchased foreclosed homes. For example, Jade Muhammad had previously been a homeowner and had her own experiences with foreclosure prior to purchasing her home in Redford. This made Ms. Muhammad very wary to purchase a home again. Yet, given the continued low cost of homes after the recession, particularly in Redford where she first rented a home, she decided in 2010, that "I guess I'll buy." The cost of the home Ms. Muhammad purchased was so low, she believed that it did not make good fiscal sense for her to continue renting. Ever since purchasing her home, Ms. Muhammad's family has remained in Redford. In Table 5.2, I include the average home values and rental rates in Detroit, Redford, West Bloomfield, and Michigan overall in 2012. After the 2008 recession, Michigan's housing market hit a low in 2012.

Average Home Costs in 2012	
Detroit	$13,700
Redford	$42,900
West Bloomfield	$203,000
Michigan Average	$95,000

Table 5.2 Average home costs in Detroit, Redford, West Bloomfield, and Michigan at large in 2012

Similarly, Michelle Nader also purchased a foreclosed home in Redford after first renting in the suburb. Ms. Nader used her past experiences working for a real estate company that purchased and resold foreclosed homes throughout Detroit to buy a foreclosed home from auction. Ms. Nader recounted:

> I would watch the auction and I would get a list of homes. And so when I found the home in Redford that we're in now, it was one of the ones that was in foreclosure. And so I went out and looked at it and I got a really, really good deal on it….we got a really good deal on a land contract. And so we moved in there and had a lot of repairs to do.

Land contracts were commonly used in the wake of the recession to sell foreclosed homes. Land contracts involve a trial period of ownership where buyers are treated like renters until the total purchase price of the home is paid in full. Homes bought on land contract are generally low cost, but in need of substantial renovation which buyers must finance in addition to their monthly payments (Michigan Legal Help, 2020). This presented an opportunity for Ms. Nader and her husband, as they eventually paid for the home outright. Ms. Nader took great pride in her home. She particularly relished her large backyard where her and her husband tended a garden and frequently hosted barbeques for their extended family in the summer. Ms. Nader's knowledge of the process of buying a foreclosed home via land contract enabled her to navigate purchasing their home to the benefit of her and her husband, and now her 9-year-old grandson, Dathan. Dathan explained that he did not like the school he previously attended in Ecorse, a working-class suburb southwest of the city, where his mother resides. Dathan shared that "they (teachers and students in Ecorse) say bad words and they're not like the school I'm in right now (in Redford). They're mean." Hence, Ms. Nader's purchase of a tax foreclosed home via land contract was an opportunity for her to own a home after years of renting in the region. Moreover, while not intended when she purchased the home, it eventually provided her grandson with a neighborhood schooling experience he enjoyed in comparison to his prior school.

Overall, Ms. Nader perceived foreclosure and land contracts to be an opportunity for herself and other working and middle-class families to own homes in Metro Detroit. She

perceived that foreclosure and land contracts provided an opportunity for increased stability and community amenities that some families' resources and life circumstances may have typically denied. From her experiences working with a real estate company in Metro Detroit, she shared:

> A lot of people I was able to put in homes. A lot of single parents, you know, single mothers who would never have an opportunity to umm, get a house financed. You know, that's the one good thing that came out of the whole foreclosure for me. Cause I know that a lot of women would never have that opportunity (to own a home). 'So, hey listen, you can get into this home on a land contract, you gotta do the repairs, but at least at the end of eight years, it's your house. So, it was kind of a win-win situation, although they (private sellers of land contracts) are getting, you know, they're getting rich. My (former) boss is a millionaire now.

The instability in Metro Detroit's housing market acted to create an opportunity for some low-income and working-class families who were previously unable to purchase homes in suburbs. The precarity of the housing market disrupted norms of home ownership in the region that required significant down payments and sound credit to access loans. Importantly, these norms did not apply to many white families who were historically supported by the federal government through low-interest loans in purchasing suburban homes—many of which have exponentially appreciated in value (Rothstein, 2017). However, the recession's disruption of norms and pathways towards homeownership were still predatory for many Black and low-income families in the region. Land contracts proved risky for many families, given that in many contracts if the buyer simply misses one monthly payment, they can lose all the equity that has been placed into the home via their previous payments and home renovations. As noted by Ms. Nader, similar to the sub-prime mortgage crisis that spurred the 2008 recession, many sellers of Metro Detroit land

contracts profited handsomely from preying on predominantly Black and low-income families' desires to own homes and access different community amenities (Kurth, 2016, February 29). Purchasing a home on land contract proved to be an opportunity for Ms. Nader and her family, however, this method toward home ownership devastated many other Black families across the region. Such data indicates the varied ways in which opportunity has been privatized, not only in education through the growth of neoliberal education reforms (Pedroni, 2010, Wilson, 2015), but also in housing markets that allow private sellers to forward largely unregulated and predatory paths to homeownership often targeted towards low-income individuals and families of color.

West Bloomfield too was impacted by the 2008 recession and the crash of the housing market**.** Particularly, home values in West Bloomfield dropped and stagnated, although not to the extent experienced in Redford. This affected West Bloomfield family participants who all purchased their homes prior to the recession and experienced loss in home equity. However, as upper middle-class professional families, they had greater socioeconomic affordances to facilitate and maintain home ownership. Notably, given families' residence in the suburb prior to economic downturn, participant families primarily tied the recession to racial demographic change in West Bloomfield. Carl Okafor, a West Bloomfield father, pointedly explained that one of the biggest drivers of Black movement and demographic change in Metro Detroit suburbs was the recession. He stated:

> Home prices kind of stagnated after the 2008 recession. And so, over time, it's become much more affordable to move into West Bloomfield, or Rochester Hills. You can find reasonably priced homes there for sure. As a homeowner for almost 20 years, I would like for my house to have appreciated much more than it has. But that also means that it's more affordable for other folks to move in, which is good.

While the Okafor's socioeconomic status allowed their family to relocate to West Bloomfield in 2002, Mr. Okafor still recognized that the cost of homes prior to recession made home ownership in the suburb inaccessible to many Black families in the region. Mr. Okafor deemed it positive that more Black families lived in his neighborhood, which has made him and his family more comfortable given their desire for their children to have Black peers. I particularly discuss dynamics of race, racism, and racial demographic change in both suburbs in Chapter 6.

Families' ability to navigate the impacts of the recession grow from their familiarity with economic hardship. Deindustrialization and diminished access to organized labor burdened Metro Detroit long prior to the 2000s (Sugrue, 2014b). In the next section, I examine changes in Metro Detroit's labor market. I explain how ongoing precarity caused by deindustrialization influenced families' school choice and educational aspirations for their children.

De-Industrialization and Changing Educational Aspirations

Many Black families in Metro Detroit long felt the effects of economic precarity prior to the 2008 recession. Indeed, deindustrialization which started as early as the late 1940s, has involved the gradual outsourcing and automation of automotive and other allied industrial jobs—the primary driver of Metro Detroit's economy (Sugrue, 2014b). No sector of U.S. industry suffered a decline of jobs to the extent of the automotive industry (Cowie & Heathcott, 2003). Hence, families were familiar with the whims of economic and labor change.

Some parent participants had witnessed how industrial jobs with the Big 3 automotive companies and adjacent industries enabled Black families to afford solidly middle-class lifestyles that in turn allowed their children to access greater educational opportunity than available to previous generations. Moreover, it provided a pathway to the middle-class without a post-secondary degree. Racial discrimination certainly pervaded these industries, yet, industrial jobs

and careers also provided substantive labor opportunities not always available to Black workers in other parts of the country (Boyd, 2017; Meir & Rudwick, 2007). As jobs have disappeared, families have necessarily reoriented their educational aspirations and ultimately, how they pursue K-12 education in Metro Detroit. Below, I detail families' perceptions of schools and educational attainment in relationship to deindustrialization. I illuminate how families sought to prepare their children for a society and labor market that has been subject to fast and consequential change through their school choices and conceptions of educational opportunity.

Most notably, Jade Muhammad, a Redford mother in her early 40s, talked at length about the impacts of the automotive industry on her family life as a child. Ms. Muhammad's mother was a former factory worker and member of the United Automobile Workers (UAW), a powerful and politically influential union headquartered in Detroit. The UAW historically secured high wages and pensions for automotive workers in the region (Meir & Rudwick, 2007). Ms. Muhammad spoke with nostalgia and familiarity as she recounted that Black UAW workers in Metro Detroit were able to garner a "nice salary." "They've been able to convert from blue collar to putting their kids through college." She asserted that unionized automotive jobs could "switch the game," where blue-collar families with parents that typically lacked post-secondary degrees and, in some cases high school degrees, were able to provide their children with educational opportunities that exceeded prior generations. Ms. Muhammad explained:

> You had automotive workers—they're able to buy nice cars, have nice homes in and out of the city. They can choose to move closer to the plant that's an hour and a half away from the city, or they can choose to live in Detroit. They had those choices. Put their kids through college. But it was nice because it was like the ones who did live in the

> neighborhood (referring to the Detroit neighborhood where she grew up), like I said they have nice cars, comfortable lifestyle, like just a nice comfortable lifestyle.

Jade's rearing in a blue-collar, unionized automotive family and social networks demonstrated to her that many of these families had choice and agency. She saw that material needs and wants, physical movement, social mobility, and educational access and opportunity were made more accessible to families who were able to gain these jobs. Ms. Muhammad asserted, "If you get in the plant, you're good."

Importantly, Ms. Muhammad pointed out that parents' employment with automotive industries during the latter half of the 20th century provided robust opportunities for their children to also be hired. She recounted:

> You worked there so many decades, and it's like now your son is of age and he's 18, they get the son right into the plant. Because I know there's some memes and different things that say you can't pass a job onto the next generation or whatever, like you want to pass on knowledge or education, whatever, but that's what we really did. It was like oh my dad or my mom is in the plant, I'm getting up in there too.

Ms. Muhammad emphasized that in the past, the promise of obtaining a job that afforded economic agency shaped how some blue-collar families thought about formal education. Individuals with a high school degree and social capital in automotive plants were provided with possibilities and opportunities to afford and construct their desired livelihoods.

After Ms. Muhammad gained her GED in the 1990s, she was hired by a contractor with Chrysler and she worked in an automotive plant. She reflected on her experiences and relationships in the plant with nostalgia explaining that "I don't care if these people just have a high school degree, they are so brilliant and smart because they get involved." By involved, Ms.

Muhammad referred to a culture where workers formed meaningful and supportive relationships. Ms. Muhammad explained it as a "subculture." "They had their own culture of everything, everything. Anything you wanted to do or buy or say." While Ms. Muhammad did not have a unionized job, she upheld that prior to the 2000s "if you graduated high school and you got in the plant, it was like that was your golden ticket. You didn't have to go to college because you made the same salary, if not better than a college-educated person."

For parents who did not directly descend from automotive or blue-collar families, they too recognized the meaningful opportunities provided through employment in the automotive industry. Rhonda Foster, a West Bloomfield mother whose uncle had worked in the automotive industry with a 9th grade education, explained that some of his children went on to also work in the plant, while the others were college-educated. She offered that historically "it put those families in the position where their kids could do more than just get out and struggle. So, the car companies were advantageous to people in Detroit."

As industrial jobs have been automated or outsourced, this option is now largely unobtainable for families. Automation in automotive and allied industries has continuously progressed since the late 1940s, steadily removing well-paid jobs from the region. Furthermore, automation and outsourcing has primarily benefitted manufacturers by significantly reducing labor costs and removing workers' power over production (Sugrue, 2014b). This has been at the expense of U.S Rustbelt regions like Metro Detroit, that still struggle to diversify their economy and attract new industries and jobs.

Families across both suburbs were highly aware of the impacts of automotive deindustrialization on access to economic and labor opportunities in Metro Detroit. For example,

Debra Johnson of West Bloomfield, who moved to Metro Detroit for her husband's job in the automotive industry, analyzed:

> The problem with the Big Three—I learned this when I got here—if General Motors catches a cold, sneeze, Michigan catches a cold. It took me forever to understand that. Well now that you are closing plants and laying off and shutting down shifts and stuff, they have a whole huge effect on the economy here. So, I think it needs to be a little bit more diversified here. And it is some, but they have way too much input here. Thank you for being here. We're grateful for what you do. But we got to look out for more people other than automotive. It' a lot of people, a lot of different things.

The Johnsons had benefitted from her husband's employment as an engineer in the automotive industry. However, over time, Ms. Johnson learned that the dominance of automotive companies did not bode well for many Metro Detroit residents like her adult children who sought different jobs and careers that would sustain their families and livelihoods.

College-Going Goals and Maintenance of Socioeconomic Status

Families recognized that changing labor markets in Metro Detroit, and more broadly the U.S., now require a college degree or in-demand technical skill. All families sought K-12 schools that they perceived would provide their children with the ability to attend and succeed in college or with skillsets to construct livelihoods that would support their financial independence and desired lifestyles. Particularly, all West Bloomfield families explained that the college-going culture of West Bloomfield's K-12 schools shaped their decision to move to the suburb. Families perceived that the suburban school system would provide their children with curriculum, academic and extracurricular support, and a school climate that would promote their continued education and social mobility after high school. For instance, Carl Okafor recounted that he and

his wife were initially considering sending their children to private schools because they believed that this would provide a better "inroad" to elite colleges and universities for their children. However, they recognized that West Bloomfield proved to also have a very good reputation in college-going among graduates. Mr. Okafor stated:

> Paramount for me is what percentage of the children graduate from high school and go off to college, and then what type of institutions are they going to? And so, one of the great things about the West Bloomfield School District, at least West Bloomfield High School, kids who are graduating from there are going to Michigan State. They're going to the University of Michigan, and various other schools, but they're all top academic institutions. And that was a big factor for us. And even we compared it to the some of the private schools, it was, well, yeah, the children who graduate from those schools, they go on to the same institutions, but sending your child to West Bloomfield and not having to pay the tuition for a private school to get them into the same post secondary educational institution, it didn't make sense to us that you would do that.

Mr. Okafor and his wife assessed that they could save money on private school tuition by moving to West Bloomfield and likely still have their children enroll in colleges that they deemed top academic institutions. Indeed, Mr. Okafor's two daughters were enrolled at University of Wisconsin and University of Michigan. Mr. Okafor credited West Bloomfield High School's advanced placement and gifted courses for preparing his daughters to enroll and excel at selective colleges.

Importantly, Mr. Okafor connected his children's academic achievement and college-going to their ability to maintain the social status they were reared in, and notably, their ability to maintain access to upper-middle class place-based amenities. He shared:

> Yeah, I tell my kids all the time, look, if you want to live in a West Bloomfield—because it doesn't have to be the West Bloomfield, but any West Bloomfield—live in a home like you grew up in, go to a school district like you grew up in, have a car you can drive as a teenager that's your car, things like that, that all requires you to have a good education, a good job. And that means you have to really have academic excellence to get there. That's what you aspire to. That's what it takes to get there.

Carl Okafor especially perceived college as a necessity for gainful employment and careers due to his profession, as a human resource professional for Chrysler. He explained that "the people we're hiring are more educated now than they've ever been…the number of people who we're hiring for hourly positions that have an associate degree or even a bachelor's degree, there's a lot of them."

All three West Bloomfield families tied their high regard for the school district's emphasis on college going to socioeconomic maintenance or mobility for their children. Debra Johnson explained that West Bloomfield Schools work "to get these kids into college." This aligned with what her and her husband desired for their children, where her kids had "three choices (upon graduating high school): college, college, college." Yet, now with adult children, Ms. Johnson questioned the merits of their college-only approach. Her 22-year-old son did not do well at a four-year college and was now back home working multiple jobs while taking courses at a community college. Ms. Johnson offered that she now realized "everybody don't need a degree. It's okay to have certificates and trades and things that society needs. We all need these people." However, like the two other families, the school district's emphasis on college-going was part and parcel of why she initially deemed the school district as quality. Given parent's own educational backgrounds, where all West Bloomfield parents were college educated

and most held graduate degrees, they strived to replicate those same experiences for their children. In families' initial perceptions, they were confident that West Bloomfield schools would prepare their children to attend and obtain a college degree, providing a pathway for their children to maintain their families' socioeconomic status.

Vocational and Technical Skills as Viable Pathway

Redford families also aimed to provide a quality education that would support their children's educational and economic futures. These families sought schools that would encourage college-going, but given parent's varied educational experiences, coupled with their familial and socioeconomic backgrounds, families were seemingly more open and accepting of a range of different pathways for their children. Notably, Tasha Nelson, a mother of two currently pursuing her master's degree, she talked with pride as she described that both of her children were readers, critical consumers of media, and generally curious about the world. However, she explained that her two children had very different orientations towards schooling and over time she had learned to respect their differences. For instance, she explained that her oldest child, Marion, was less academically inclined than her daughter, Erin. Ms. Nelson had paid for her son to predominantly attend private school prior to high school. She then supported her son through two years of community college. Yet, like Deborah Johnson, she asserted that "college is not for everyone." Her 22-year-old son was now pursuing a trade through an apprenticeship program. While this was not Ms. Nelsons' initial hopes for her son, she explained that trades were a part of her family legacy and would allow her son to make a good living. Ms. Nelson's father was an electrician and her brother is a master electrician. She asserted:

> I know plumbers that make more than doctors. They work their own schedule and do whatever they want. I know carpenters that make a living carved out of an eight-month

certification. Stuff like that. So, it's plenty of opportunity out here outside of a four-year institution.

While Redford families sought secondary schools that they perceived would prepare their children for college, they also recognized that college was not the only route to lives and labor that would support their children in launching their own productive livelihoods. Ms. Nelson recommended that secondary schools need "more options…trades are a definite way of still having a great career, earning good money. And if you could figure that out early on, you're not 25, but you're 17 figuring it out."

Similarly, Jade Muhammad emphasized the importance of her children developing tangible skills that would allow them to support themselves throughout their lives. Ms. Muhammad acknowledged that obtaining a college degree was a worthwhile pursuit, yet she clarified that the college degree should have some type of "core skill incorporated," or that her children should pursue this skill in addition to their degree. As discussed in the prior section, Ms. Muhammad's emphasis on skills grew from her admiration for the ingenuity and societal contributions of the skilled worker class. Furthermore, Ms. Muhammad also perceived mastery of a core skill as instrumental to sustaining one's livelihood given the overall precarity of employment despite educational attainment. She shared:

> From education, (I'd like my children to develop) definitely skills where they feel like it's a benefit and it's solving a problem in society... Just being in the skilled worker class that we used to have, previous generations, you know, not wanting to lose that because it's like what I tell my son, he's 13... even if you're going to be an engineer, a doctor, dentist, whatever you're going to be, if you know how to do, just say for instance, plumbing or you know how to do electrical work, that's cool. You know, you know how to do drywall

> or whatever…because that way you can always have money in your pocket. You can do something with that. Even if, later on, they graduate college and they want to start their own business, you know, then that's fine. But I just feel like it is really good to be college educated, but you just never know, like that's the ideal thing. You want to go through college and finish, but you just never know what can happen, need something to fall back on.

Like Ms. Nelson, Ms. Muhammad recognized how a post-secondary degree did not always guarantee economic stability. In making decisions about where to school her children, Ms. Muhammad particularly sought schools with robust extracurricular programs. She chose the K-8 public charter school her son currently attended because of their academic and extracurricular offerings, which included cooking, sewing, gardening, and martial arts, among others. Ms. Muhammad also asserted the merits of her daughters online K-12 charter school in teaching her entrepreneurial skills, despite her daughter's own personal dislike for the online curriculum. She shared that she tells her daughter, Denise, "what you're doing now, that's an entrepreneurial skill and you trying to figure out how to do school on your own and you're saying you hate it, but I'm like that's something, that's an entrepreneurial thing."

Overall, three out of four Redford families explained the importance of vocational and technical skills, both inside K-12 schools and as post-secondary options. As a suburb described as "blue-collar," households supported by skilled trade and industrial jobs were commonplace. Hence, as opposed to West Bloomfield, Redford families' conceptions of educational opportunity were more inclusive, reflecting their families' own socioeconomic, educational, and employment backgrounds over multiple generations. Furthermore, families in Redford had more intimately experienced the precarious nature of employment and deindustrialization. Therefore,

they sought to equip their children with multiple labor pathways and opportunities. Families recognized the stability, dignity, and money in these professions.

Conclusion

The 2008 recession and deindustrialization shifted opportunity structures in ways that required families to pursue social mobility differently than prior generations. Families emphasized the importance of affordability of living in relationship to school and community amenities they perceived as desirable and necessary for their children. Particularly, a school culture of college going, in addition to vocational and technical skills were educational features that families sought given the precarity of economic and labor markets. Importantly, some families made these decisions with mindfulness for their own children's needs and inclinations. Movement and school choices were part and parcel of their efforts to place their children in an opportunity structure that they believed would support their children's long-term stability and access to opportunity in Metro Detroit's economy, and more broadly the U.S. Amid change and setback, families still recognized and pursued opportunity,

In the final data chapter, I address dynamics of research question two related to families' racial subjectivities. I examine how families' perceptions and experiences of race and racism in Metro Detroit influenced their geographic moves, school choices, and educational experiences. These findings illuminate how families' decisions aimed to meet not only their children's educational needs, but also sociocultural needs which involved protection from racism and bias in school and community settings.

Chapter VI
Perceptions of Race and Racism in Place

Families' perceptions of race and racism were fundamental to whether they deemed schools to be quality or not for their children. While families' decisions were influenced by the importance of curricula, extracurricular programs, and other vital educational resources, most families across both suburbs did not take for granted that their Black children would be provided with equal access to school resources, nor treated as equally as their non-Black peers in the school setting. Parents approached racism and bias as a given in schools and communities. Indeed, several scholars support this finding through their study of Black families' school choice decision-making or engagement with schools (Bailey-Fakhoury, 2014; Lacy, 2007; Lareau & Horvat, 1999, Mazama & Lundy, 2012; Moultrie, 2016; Posey-Maddox, 2016, 2017). In this study, parents importantly perceived different forms of racism and discrimination, where despite their experiences of the status-quo nature of racism, some suburbs and school districts were viewed as more racially inclusive than others. Specifically, in their school and community choices, families considered histories of race and racism tied to suburban municipalities, the presence of ethnic and racial diversity among students, and most prevalent across the data, the presence and influence of Black teachers and administrators in schools. Demonstrating the relationships between race, class, and the economy, suburban demographic change in the wake of the 2008 recession also influenced families' perceptions of race and racism in place, and therefore, their school choices and experiences in schools. Overall, data show that families did

not put their children in suburban schools where they did not believe they had the potential to succeed.

Histories of Racism and Exclusion in the Suburbs

Michelle Nader, the Redford grandmother, had the most exposure to different schools and communities across Metro Detroit from her children's educational experiences in various Metro Detroit suburbs west of the city. Ms. Nader's past experiences of anti-Black racism significantly shaped and limited the municipalities where she was willing to relocate and purchase a home. Namely, Ms. Nader recounted that her eldest twin sons attended a public high school in Livonia, MI in the mid-2000s, where they were involved in a selective enrollment creative arts program. She explained that her sons excelled in this program and were able to receive a curriculum that developed them both academically and creatively. However, Ms. Nader recounted that they encountered racism and bias where even as high-achieving students and leaders among their peers, she believed that her sons did not receive the recognition they deserved from teachers and administrators. Ms. Nader reflected that as a single mother and working two jobs at that time, it required tremendous "sacrifice" to check in on her sons and to hold teachers accountable for fair treatment. Yet, Ms. Nader asserted that she kept them in the school because "I needed them to get a good education." Later, her daughter also attended Livonia public schools in the late 2000s, where she encountered raced and gendered bullying from her peers. Ms. Nader eventually removed her daughter from Livonia schools due to the extent of maltreatment and placed her in Wayne-Westland Community Schools District. This school district is comprised of schools in Wayne, Westland, Canton, Dearborn Heights, Inkster and Romulus—all suburbs west of the city. Some of these suburbs border Livonia. Ms. Nader explained that the schools her daughter attended in Wayne-Westland were more inclusive and racially diverse. Most important, her

daughter felt more comfortable in school. However, she explained that there was "still that racism flow coming from Livonia."

From these experiences, Ms. Nader shared that "when I made my decision to buy a home, I knew I wasn't going to buy it in Livonia…because I wasn't going to give my money to them and I couldn't see, you know, I couldn't see me spending the rest of my life there." While Ms. Nader had navigated Livonia's public schools previously in pursuit of educational opportunity for her children, she did not want to support the suburb by purchasing a home there due to the racism her and her children had experienced. She explained that dynamics of race and racism were significantly better in Redford, and it allowed her grandson to attend a racially diverse school. Comparing Redford to Livonia, Ms. Nader shared:

> It's the older (people), look like Livonia is just all racism and you know, they just grew up and Blacks weren't allowed…and Redford there's a lot of older, older people there. But the difference (with Redford) is that their kids are coming home with Black friends, so they're learning to adapt a little bit more.

Livonia, which borders Redford to the west, has an extensive history of racism and exclusionary politics as a former sundown town where Black people were required to exit the municipality before night or fear white mob violence (Loewen, 2005). Today, Livonia is still overwhelmingly white, with an approximate 90% white resident population, as compared to Redford's Black population which was approximately 42 percent in 2019 and continues to grow each year. Additionally, in 2016, Livonia was rated the third least racially and ethnically diverse city in the U.S. (Daily Detroit Staff, 2016, May 12). Suburbs west of Detroit like Redford and Livonia were historically populated by white working and middle class residents. However, Redford and Livonia now present drastically different racial demographics. Due to the substantial

demographic change in Redford—especially Redford schools—Ms. Nader perceived that this has encouraged white residents to adapt and learn how to interact across racial difference.

Other Redford families also asserted the prevalence of racism in Livonia. Jade Muhammad explained that police in Livonia are known to target Black people while shopping or driving in the municipality. She explained that while Black folks have moved to several different suburbs throughout Metro Detroit, she rarely hears of individuals or families moving to Livonia. Additionally, Nita Robinson explained that both of Redford's public school systems have lost a significant number of students to Livonia's interdistrict school choice program. However, she nited that Black students typically come back to Redford after a year or two given the "serious racial divide" in Livonia. Ms. Robinson asserted that while Livonia has good schools and extracurricular offerings, she would never school her children there and that "I don't go there unless I absolutely have to." Hence, some families' perceptions of Livonia emphasized the continued importance of racial formations and exclusions to suburban living and schooling for Black families in select suburbs of Metro Detroit. Black families perceived and made decisions with an awareness of the politics of particular places and the racialized nature of institutional structures. In this way, patterns of historic segregation still shaped families' decision-making and daily navigations in the region (Krysan & Bader, 2007; Rhodes & Warkentien, 2017).

Importantly, Redford also had its own challenges with race and racism in schools and communities. Nita Robinson shared that when she first moved to her neighborhood in 2006, the majority of Black families did not send their children to Redford's public schools. She explained that "they were under the impression that it was racist, because there wasn't that many black kids there. They thought there would be a problem off the bat because of that." Therefore, as discussed in Chapter 5, while Black families were relocating to Redford, they were not always

attending public schools in the district. Ms. Robinson explained that she too had the same concerns when her family first relocated to the suburb which motivated her high level of engagement in schools. She wanted to ensure that not only her children were being educated and treated properly by teachers and administrators, but to also support other Black students and families by sharing information and intervening when necessary. As a former daycare owner, Ms. Robinson asserted the importance of families living in community and supporting one another "because everybody is going through the same thing."

Upon their initial relocation, Ms. Robinson explained that there were only "five or six" other Black kids in her children's classrooms and most of the teachers and administrators were still white. Ms. Robinson particularly recounted challenges with older white teachers in Redford that were not prepared to teach Black students. She explained that when they first moved to the school district, there were no "blatant racial things going on, but you could tell that they (white teachers and residents) hadn't been around Black people a lot. You know what I mean? The interaction was a little different and stiff at first." Although an inner-ring suburb bordering a majority Black city, long-time white residents of Redford were not accustomed to interacting across racial difference which made for tense or uncomfortable social dynamics. Also, this illuminates the ways in which municipal borders and boundaries can operate differently for racial groups given their perceptions of place and place-based subjectivities (Cresswell, 1996; Khalifa et al., 2015). However, some Redford families felt that this dynamic was shifting over time given the changing racial demographics in the suburb. I further discuss the role suburban demographic change played in Black families experiences in schools and communities in the next section.

Families' perceptions of which municipalities and school districts were actually supportive to their desired lifestyles and access to educational opportunity required a heightened

level of awareness of schools and communities given the racist formations and practices still shaping suburban and metropolitan municipalities (Bailey-Fakhoury, 2014; Lacy, 2007; Lewis-McCoy, 2014, 2018; Posey-Maddox, 2017). For three out of four Redford families, they remained particularly mindful of how race and racism functioned in schools and their daily navigations in the suburb and surrounding municipalities.

Importance of Racial and Ethnic Diversity

West Bloomfield families also discussed worries and experiences of racial discrimination in schools, and how it promoted their increased engagement with teachers and administrators. However, West Bloomfield families reported that they particularly chose the suburb because of the significant racial and ethnic diversity already existing in the municipality. As opposed to predominantly Black and white racial groups that comprise the majority of Redford residents, families appreciated the ethnic and religious diversity of West Bloomfield. The substantial number of Jewish, Japanese, and Chaldean families, along with what families perceived as a significant Black population in schools and select neighborhoods were attractive features of the suburb. For example, Carl Okafor, a West Bloomfield father, explained that his family sought a municipality and school district where their children would have a decent number of Black peers. The importance of Black peers for his children grew from his own experiences attending predominantly white schools in the 1980s, which he characterized as “fairly difficult.” He and his wife also appreciated that their children were exposed to other racial and ethnic groups as his wife had schooled in Detroit where her K-12 peers were predominantly Black. Mr. Okafor explained:

> We wanted an area that was going to be diverse. Diverse meant that you could see Black people every day. It wasn't where it was maybe once a week, you might see a Black

> person come by. We (also) wanted definitely some ethnic diversity there. That was very important to us, especially from where I grew up, because like I said, my high school was maybe five to ten percent African American. And while I had a great education, I had good friends, it was also a fairly difficult experience, to some extent. And my wife had the opposite (growing up in Detroit). And she had a good experience too. But she would have liked to have had more friends of different ethnicities. So we wanted to provide our children that opportunity. For example, my son went to a bar mitzvah a few months ago. That's a Jewish tradition, and it got him exposed to another faith and another way of how people celebrate spirituality. And that was really cool. So, I don't know if he would have had that opportunity elsewhere.

Their daughter Amanda also appreciated this diversity. She explained that growing up in West Bloomfield, she had friends of different racial and ethnic groups. Amanda also appreciated that she was able to form close friendships with other Black students in the district and that her family lived in a racially diverse neighborhood in the suburb. She shared:

> It was good, (because) I live on the edge of West Bloomfield, right next to Farmington Hills. I would say the people who live on the other side of West Bloomfield next to Pontiac probably had a different experience, because even though it was West Bloomfield and West Bloomfield schools, it was mostly white over there. And more people in the Farmington Hills/ West Bloomfield area were not, it was more diverse than that side of West Bloomfield.

Hence, The Okafors were very attuned to the importance of racial and ethnic diversity in supporting the lifestyle they desired and their children's development.

Other West Bloomfield families explained the importance of racial and ethnic diversity as an attractive feature of West Bloomfield schools too. Debra Johnson asserted that "I don't want my children going to an all-Black, or all-Asian, or all-white (school). I need them to be with a diverse group of people. That's what the real world is like." Ms. Johnson perceived racial and ethnic diversity as integral to her children's career preparation and in becoming individuals who were able to respect and appreciate others across identity difference. Ms. Johnson particulary celebrated the role of West Bloomfield's school of choice program in increasing the Black student population in schools. She liked that her youngest son had more Black peers as compared to her two oldest children, and that more Black students in Metro Detroit were able to access educational resources and opportunity in West Bloomfield. I further discuss this dynamic later in this section. Overall, West Bloomfield families' perceptions and decision-making aligned with a prevalent school and community discourse in the suburb that celebrates diversity as holding "the potential to nurture coexistence, respect, and acceptance of all residents" (The West Bloomfield Diversity Committee, 2015). In 2019, West Bloomfield was approximately 75 percent white, 12.5 percent Black, 9 percent Asian, and 1.5 percent Latinx.

Redford families also valued racial diversity in schools and this shaped their decision-making and perceptions of quality schooling. Tasha Nelson, who grew up in Albion, Michigan, where she explained that there was significant racial and ethnic diversity throughout her K-12 school and community experiences, found her daughter's public charter school more attractive than their neighborhood school because of the ethnic diversity among students and families. She explained:

> [The Redford neighborhood school her daughter formerly attended] was diverse, from like African Americans and Caucasians, but her current school has a lot of Indian,

> Muslim, African Americans, and then the Caucasians are actually the minority in her school. So, I really like the fact that the culture is not dominated by the American culture, because we've got that down pat.

Like West Bloomfield parents, Ms. Nelson valued that her daughter was regularly exposed to international cultures and faith traditions that she perceived would prepare her to interact in an increasingly global world. Ms. Nelson desired for her nine year old daughter, Erin, to know how to "code-switch," where she was comfortable in all-Black spaces and with other racial and ethnic groups. Code switch is a linguistic term used to capture individual's ability to alternate between different languages. For Black/ African American people, code switching typically refers to their mastered use of both Standard English and African American Vernacular English (Delpit, 2006). Ms. Nelson also used the term to refer to her desire for her daughter to develop a social ability and ease with interacting across racial and ethnic difference. Ms. Nelson assessed that given the diverseity of students and families in her daughter's current school, Erin would be comfortable and prepared to interact with anyone.

Families believed that a diverse student population promoted greater inclusivity, cultural awareness, and access to educational opportunity, which would benefit their children in their current school setting and in the future. Therefore, most families' movement and school choices were driven by a desire to school in settings with diverse racial representation—a key preference of Black families' residential choices (Dent, 1992; Krysan & Farley, 2002; Krysan & Bader, 2007; Lacy, 2006). As discussed in the previous chapter, the 2008 recession facilitated the home ownership of most Redford families and was a key driver of racial demographic change in both suburbs. Given families' preference for their children to live and school in diverse settings, the

2002 recession also shifted their perceptions of racial dynamics in the suburbs. This change proved instrumental in creating the type of interpersonal dynamics families desired.

Suburban Demographic Change

For instance, The Johnsons and Fosters, two West Bloomfield families, asserted their appreciation of the growing number of Black families who live in the suburb, as it provided networks of support in navigating schools and their children's' needs. Debra Johnson explained that her family has been able to "work together" with a few other Black families in West Bloomfield by sharing information about curricular and extracurricular programs at schools, or helpful teachers, counselors, and administrators. She described that "we (Black families) are our support in this predominantly white neighborhood…I think there's so few of us still here that you want to stay connected. So, we tried our best to do that, especially in dealing with our kids." Ms. Johnson's efforts to stay connected to other Black families were especially important as all West Bloomfield families pinpointed the "private" nature of community life. Paula Foster described that families in West Bloomfield "get up and go to work and then come home and go to bed." West Bloomfield families explained that these dynamics made connecting with neighbors and residents especially difficult. This aligns with Krysan and Bader's (2007) study that demonstrates that Black individuals and families in Metro Detroit often desired to live in racially integrated communities. Moreover, families' appreciation of the increase in Black residents confirms the importance of same-race peers and environments that nurture children's racial socialization in suburban contexts (Bailey-Fakhoury, 2014; Dent, 1992; Lacy, 2007).

Similarly, all West Bloomfield families appreciated the district's school choice program which substantially increased the number of Black students attending public schools in the suburb. Families described the school choice program which heavily draws students from

Pontiac, MI—a predominantly Black suburb bordering West Bloomfield—as not only a form of educational opportunity for these students and families, but also as integral in making the school district more racially and economically diverse. While I predominantly focus on Redford, West Bloomfield, and Detroit in this study, Pontiac also proved important in understanding the ways in which race, class, and geography shape West Bloomfield families' perceptions of quality schools.

For instance, Amanda Okafor, a West Bloomfield High School (WBHS) graduate and college freshman explained that Black students who reside in the suburb and Black students from Pontiac all socialized together, participating in the African American Awareness Club or track and field. She stated that "everybody was pretty much together…there was never any hostility or anything like that." Amanda particularly shared that through the African American Awareness Club, Black students created a space where they could talk honestly about race and connect with other students about how it felt to be a Black student at WBHS. Amanda estimated that "I think a good half of them were from Pontiac," referring to the number of Black students at WBHS. Hence, Pontiac students constituted an important part of her social experiences and support in high school.

While Amanda asserted that Black students got along across socioeconomic and residential differences, she also explained that some teachers and non-Black peers would attempt to delineate Pontiac students from their West Bloomfield peers. She recounted:

> There was tension at one time, because they grouped the Pontiac people just all together. 'You guys are all from Pontiac.' And a lot of the Pontiac boys were on sports teams, like basketball and football programs, which obviously leads to them not feeling like they should be in the environment of West Bloomfield and stuff.

While all West Bloomfield family participants appreciated the increased racial diversity achieved through the inter-district choice program, this view was not held by all residents or school personnel. Families explained that some West Bloomfield residents perceived the increase in students from other municipalities—particularly Black students—as a drain on their tax dollars, or a threat to the continued quality of the school system. Carl Okafor, Amanda's father, admitted that among other racial and ethnic groups, and even among some Black families, there is "a strong thought that an influx of more African American students—while it might be good in some instances (i.e. athletics)—that it will impact the academic standing of the school." This perception aligns with data on school of choice programs across Metro Detroit which show that school choice options (i.e. charter schools, inter-district transfer programs) can support or exacerbate racial segregation in educational landscapes (Pogodzinski et al., 2017; Wilkinson & Dawsey, 2016, September 13). Indeed, Monet Foster, a former West Bloomfield student, reflected that as "African American students started coming in (to schools), white students started going to private schools." This reflects the racism and bias that can shape white parents school choices in suburban contexts (Erickson, 2011; Dougherty et al., 2009; Holmes, 2002; Wells, 2015). Additionally, it captures socioeconomic divisions among Black families in metropolitan educational landscapes. Black parents can also seek to secure advantage for their children, in some cases with disregard or to the detriment of other Black students and families (Lewis-McCoy, 2014).

Lastly, Debra Johnson, the West Bloomfield mother who expressed deep sensitivity towards negative stereotypes of Detroit, likewise countered deficit perceptions of Pontiac students. She explained:

> I know of people saying that a lot of Pontiac students are coming into the West Bloomfield School system, and a lot of people talking about, 'Well, that's bringing the school down.' That may not be bringing the school down, (they) may be bringing the school up...So that's giving these students over here, who through no fault of their own, sometimes may not be getting the best education, sometimes maybe their classes are better, and this teacher's doing an outstanding job in Pontiac, maybe so. Maybe you want to bring that person over there to teach here, so you can teach some other people to do something outstanding. So just because you're from Pontiac and come to West Bloomfield doesn't mean you're bringing anything down. Maybe you're bringing it up… I know that there's just more resources here than it is in Pontiac. And I believe it goes back to resources, it's money—poverty. Poverty is a huge problem, not just in Pontiac, but I'm talking about even the USA.

Ms. Johnson offered a counter-narrative to perceptions that cast students who reside in Pontiac as the only beneficiaries of choice; asserting that West Bloomfield students and schools can also benefit from the experiences Pontiac students bring with them to the district. In this way, Pontiac students' relationship to the place where they live was perceived as a strength, as opposed to an obstacle or challenge, which is commonly ascribed to students of color who travel from Detroit, or other low-income municipalities to attend schools in neighborhoods different from where they reside. Importantly, Ms. Johnson attributed any difference between West Bloomfield and Pontiac to resources and poverty, not the values or efforts of the people who lived there. Ms. Johnson countered the status-quo nature in which opportunity structures can distribute racialized meanings and negative perceptions of Black people who reside in under-resourced and poverty-impacted municipalities.

Indeed, as considered by Ms. Johnson, school choice students from Pontiac have played a significant and tangible role in financially sustaining West Bloomfield's school district given population loss in the suburb. For example, during the 2012-13 school year, approximately 1,642 non-residents enrolled in West Bloomfield schools, with 746 students coming from Pontiac. During this academic year, West Bloomfield School District added approximately 11 million dollars to its budget from per-pupil funding school choice students brought with them from their home districts. Education writer, Nancy Derringer (2013, June 18) reported in *Bridge Magazine* that "some districts made out like bandits" due to inter-district choice programs. The influx of funds brought through West Bloomfield's school choice program cannot be disconnected from the fiscal troubles experienced by Pontiac's public school district. The School District of the City of Pontiac has struggled under substantial debt overall because of population loss and the per pupil funding that departs when students leave the district. Like Detroit's public school district, this has also led to state oversight of the district and school closures.

Considering my third research question, which examines structural impacts on Black families' educational access and opportunity, West Bloomfield's relationship to Pontiac emphasizes that school choice options often weaken educational access and opportunity for families that do not or cannot engage in choice systems. In Metro Detroit, this has unduly impacted school systems predominantly serving Black families. Therefore, while West Bloomfield families welcomed the increased presence of Black students in schools, it still belied a metropolitan region where disinvestment and economic recession most harmed predominantly Black municipalities and school districts, reflecting the colorblind and inequitable nature of school choice policies in the region (Wells, 2014).

Redford families who utilized public schools in the suburb also appreciated the influx of Black students in schools after the recession. Imani Robinson, Nita Robinson's daughter explained that as the number of Black students has grown in Redford, teachers and administrators have necessarily become more responsive to their needs. She recounted that when her family first moved to Redford "teachers got away with a lot of stuff," referring to remarks and actions that were racially insensitive or dismissive of Black students. However, she explained that Black students "call out teachers often now…kids are getting more open minded and actually speaking up about things that are bothering them."

Nita Robinson has also assisted the district in becoming more responsive to the needs of Black students and families through her parent leadership and engagement in South Redford schools. She explained that South Redford School District has hired more Black teachers and administrators, and that there are now diversity coaches in schools from Wayne RESA, the regional service agency for school districts in Wayne County. Diversity coaches have particularly worked with teachers and administrators to become more culturally relevant in their teaching practices and sensitive to racial discipline disparities. Ms. Robinson explained that "we had three diversity coaches in the school. Every day watching, like 'Oh no, you can't do this, say this,' or telling them (teachers) what to do." Regarding how teachers responded to these efforts, Ms. Robinson elaborated, "some of them will admit, 'we're not used to teaching minority voices and we would love to teach.' And some are like, 'I'm not doing it.'" Ms. Robinson conceded that it was an ongoing struggle with some teachers to encourage them to adapt and improve their practices. However, she also admitted that she was personally waiting for some of the older unionized white teachers to simply retire. Overall, she asserted that "it's up to the teachers to be

engaged in it (making schools more racially and culturally safe), because now I'm telling you, 70% Black now (in schools). It was not that three years ago. It's like a big flight."

The majority Black student population in Redford schools has generated greater attention to the educational needs of Black students. Black families in Redford detailed challenges including academic ability tracking, teacher and administrative bias in curricula and discipline, and over policing in schools and communities. Yet, families also shared that white municipal and school leadership unaccustomed to serving Black students and families prior to racial demographic change were now pressured to adapt their practices to become more inclusive and equitable for all students. The swift and substantial growth of Black students and families in Redford has provoked increased representation and Black political power in schools and the community. For example, in 2016 the municipality elected its first Black town trustee, and in 2015, Redford Union school district hired its first Black superintendent. Nita Robinson assessed that "I think the migration of Black people has definitely changed the trajectory of Redford." Hence, data indicates that Black students, parents, and community members engaged in efforts to "take place" by voicing their needs and working as partners with the district to ensure fair access and treatment for Black students in schools.

Ethno-racial diversity and increasing Black suburbanization across Metro Detroit were instrumental in families' perceptions and experiences of schools and communities. Families sought schools where their children would be exposed to students with different racial and ethnic identities. Importantly, families literally gained strength in numbers from the increase in Black students and families in Redford and West Bloomfield. Diversity among families' neighbors and peers were integral to how families perceived schools and communities. As I explain in the next

section, Black teachers and administrators were vital too in families' perceptions and experiences of schools.

Black Teachers and Administrators as Vital in Suburban Schools

Lastly, the presence of Black teachers and administrators in schools also greatly influenced families' school choice decision-making and perceptions of quality and culturally safe schooling. Families across both Redford and West Bloomfield personally named supportive and effective Black teachers and administrators, explaining how their presence in schools provided confidence that their children would have strong mentorship and guidance, and be reasonably protected from racism and bias. This led some parents to choose certain schools in the suburb and feel more assured that issues related to race and racism would be addressed.

In Redford, Michelle Nader, the grandmother recognized that many teachers and administrators were not accustomed to teaching Black students. However, she repeatedly asserted her satisfaction and trust in her grandson's principal, who was a Black woman with extensive experience as an educational leader in Southfield, a predominantly Black suburb. This principal had built solid relationships with families and demonstrated that she was sensitive and responsive to the needs of Black students and families. Ms. Nader explained:

> I think that it helps that there's a Black principal who understands our needs and not only does she understand them, but she's standing up for and making sure that they're (Black children) given the right education and a lot of programs.

Ms. Nader shared that the principal is always available and willing to listen to families and that she has hired more Black teachers in her two years at the school. For example, Ms. Nader explained that her trust in the principal buffered some of her initial skepticism about her grandson's teacher given what she perceived as unprofessional dress and comportment.

However, she explained that because she "knew the principal and… she's interviewing her staff, you know, so I know that she's (the teacher) [is] going to be about learning and she's going to be about teaching, you know, so it was easier for me."

Likewise, Nita Robinson explained that when they first moved to the suburb, there were a few white teachers who were resistant to adapting their curricula and classroom spaces to support and affirm the growing Black student and family population. Both her and her daughter recounted experiences with a white social studies teacher who refused to take down a confederate flag displayed in her classroom, even though parents and students had expressed their discomfort with the flag. Ms. Robinson and her daughter, Imani, explained:

> **Ms. Robinson:** They (some white teachers) don't understand why certain things have to happen and will delay things because of it. We had a big issue about the confederate flag coming out of the room. I'm like, you don't have white students by themselves anymore. And it wasn't great then, you shouldn't have did it then. Why something now? You have these (Black) children, and they're looking at that and feel just deduced. These people don't care about how students feel. That's what they (Black students) feel. They can't verbalize that, but they do it other ways through behavior, through not doing their work, getting an attitude with the teacher. When all you should do is take down the flag.
>
> **Imani**: She had that flag up since we were there.
>
> **Ms. Robinson:** I made it a point, to point that out to (white) administrators. All (administrators), (explained that) 'she's going to teach the curriculum.'
>
> **Imani:** She never did.
>
> **Ms. Robinson:** For three years I brought it up. Then we got black administrators…They was like, "What problems do you have with the school?" They have a whole new regimen

> on how to do things. They're not passive, but they're fair. But I was like, 'I have a problem with that flag. If y'all don't take it down, I'm going to.' That's was my next move. I'm just going to go get a step ladder. But they said, 'okay, give me a day.' And they went in there, one of them grabbed that step ladder and pulled it down. Didn't say nothing to that teacher at all. They just pulled it out. But she knew why. You know what I mean? Because those children has stopped performing for her academically. They had no respect for her.

The Robinson's family data suggest that Black teachers and administrators were intergral in making Redford schools more safe and equitable for Black students. Where white administrators made excuses, the Black administrator recognized how a confederate flag impacted students learning and behavior as an artifact of racial hate and white supremacy. Overall, the responsiveness and growing number of Black teachers and administrators who Ms. Robinson believed best understood and supported the needs of Black students and families made her confident that while there were challenges with racism and discrimination within Redford schools, they were moving in "the right direction." Ms. Robinson had experienced how caring Black teachers and administrators worked to ensure that curricula and treatment of students was responsive and humane to the predominantly Black student population.

In West Bloomfield too, the presence of Black teachers and administrators shaped families' experiences of educational access and opportunity. Monet Foster, Rhonda Foster's daughter, felt that during her time at West Bloomfield High School most teachers and counselors were unwilling to provide her with the support she needed as she "struggled a little bit in school." Monet, a student with a learning disability, explained that she perceived that most teachers and counselors were not invested in her succeeding in high school because it was

difficult to meet with her guidance counselor, and some teachers did not take the time to ensure that she properly understood the material. However, Monet explained the importance of Black teachers to her persistence through high school as they took the time to support her through her challenges. Monet elaborated:

> "[With] African American teachers and African American counselors you have somebody that understands you and can relate to you and knows like, 'Okay, you're struggling. I'm going to work with you' and it's not, 'Oh, you're off on your own'.

Where other teachers had failed to show interest or spend time providing Monet with additional supports, she explained that most Black teachers did. Although her mother perceived that West Bloomfield provided Monet with adequate accomodations and services, she also agreed that Black teachers were instrumental to Monet's educational experiences. Ms. Foster explained that Monet "found the Black teachers [to be] more helpful to her." Sehe went on to compare this to white teachers who she assessed can perceive Black students with disabilities as "Oh, poor Black child, I know you need help." As opposed to Black teachers, "who are like, 'Girl, if you don't get down and get your work done,'" reflecting a belief in Monet's ability to succeed and effectively complete her work. While Ms. Foster had relocated to West Bloomfield in search of quality schools for her children, they still encountered challenges. Hence, the school as an opportunity structure, was not equally accessible for all children, in this case Monet's race and ability status shaped her access to educational support.

Where existing educational structures in Redford or West Bloomfield failed to meet the needs of Black families and students, the presence and actions of Black teachers and administrators shaped families' perceptions of educational quality and their access to educational opportunity (Foster, 1997; Ladson-Billings, 2009; McKinney de Royston, Madkins, Givens, &

Nasir, 2020; Milner, 2006). As Black families relocated to suburban school districts where many of the teachers and administrators had not previously educated Black children they encountered racial discrimination and bias. Or, in the case of Redford teachers and administrators in the example of the confederate flag, teachers and administrators that were blatantly racist and unwilling to adapt to serve all students equitably. Families perceived that Black teachers and administrators in these schools operated as boundary spanners by working to rectify school policies and practices that made educational opportunity structures less accessible for Black students and families (Cooper, 2009b; Miller, 2008). Importantly, some families' appreciation and recognition of the importance of Black teachers may also grow from their experiences of educational care in Detroit, where Black teachers and administrators are more common. This may have fostered an awareness of the distinct labor and cultural work Black teachers exert to support Black students and families.

Conclusion

Redford and West Bloomfield families' movement and school choices were considerably shaped by their racial subjectivities. Families' perceptions and experiences of race and racism in suburban municipalities influenced their decision-making on where to live and school their children. Moreover, families were mindful of providing their children with racially and ethnically diverse peers and school settings. Black peers and neighbors were especially welcomed by most families as it provided increased social support and collective agency in the suburbs. Lastly, the presence and advocacy of Black teachers were also instrumental in families' decisions on where to school their children, in addition to their ability to remain in schools they selected. As families made decisions about where to live and school their children, they weighed multiple factors of place, class and the economy, and as this chapter demonstrates, race as well.

This chapter conveys the importance of racial identity to families' choices and the racialized nature of Black families' educational access and opportunity in Metro Detroit.

In the final chapter, I draw from all three data chapters to offer analysis and conclusions of families' perceptions and experiences. I also offer a theory of Black movement and placemaking in relationship to educational access and opportunity.

Chapter VII
Analysis and Conclusions

> "They did what human beings looking for freedom, throughout history, have often done. They left."
>
> -Isabel Wilkerson (2011), *The Warmth of Other Suns: The Epic Story of America's Great Migration*

This study aimed to better understand the lived experiences of seven diverse Black families who have relocated to Redford or West Bloomfield, two demographically changing Metro Detroit suburbs. I particularly studied how families' perceptions of place shaped their geographic movement and school choices. Moreover, using a critical phenomenological approach, I examined how Black families' perceptions, as mediated by their race, class, and place-based identities, sheds light on social structures that affect educational access and opportunity for Black children and families in Metro Detroit.

I draw from john powell's (2005, 2013) work on opportunity structures and George Lipsitz's (2007) theorizing on the racialization of space—specifically, his assertion that Black people "take place," captures how the efforts of Black people and communities for racial justice and equity are often intertwined with struggles over place-based resources. Together, powell and Lipsitz provide a lens to understand the intertwined nature of structural and sociocultural processes in Black people's access to resources and opportunity in the places and spaces where we live, school, and make community. In this study, I have predominantly focused on educational access and opportunity, but I have also aimed to present data in ways that show the

importance of other forms of opportunity (e.g. housing, employment, etc.) to avoid over-simplifying the dynamics that provoke families' movement and choices.

Education policymakers, researchers, and practitioners still grapple with race and class disparities across metropolitan education landscapes, in the long shadow of The U.S. Supreme Court Case *Milliken v. Bradley* (1974). Milliken barred an inter-district school desegregation busing plan between Detroit and its surrounding suburbs. However, this stands in the face of Black individuals and families' continued movement in search of opportunity—both prior to and after the *Milliken* ruling. Findings show that through movement, the seven families in this study sought increased access to social resources and opportunity. For most West Bloomfield and Redford families this included quality schools that would prepare their children for fulfilling livelihoods and socioeconomic mobility, in addition to spacious, affordable homes. Importantly, sociocultural dynamics like families' life histories and relationships also oriented their school and community choices. While families moved to the suburbs in search of resources, they still maintained meaningful ties with the city of Detroit and other Black families in ways that demonstrate their desire and need to create their own opportunity structures given the governmental dispossession and disinvestment of Black spaces and communities in the region. I argue that while families moved to the suburbs they were still allied with Detroit, and other predominantly Black spaces in ways that complicate simply viewing their movement as flight or advantage seeking. Indeed, Black suburbanization stands within a long tradition of movement as a means for Black people to seek opportunity and freedom.

In the next section, I discuss key findings between Redford and West Bloomfield families. I then offer implications for education practitioners, school districts, and policymakers as we work towards equity in U.S. metropolitan education landscapes. In conclusion, I offer the

concept of *epistemologies of Black opportunity seeking* to illuminate how structural, sociocultural, and intergenerational dynamics shape Black families' perceptions and decision-making in pursuit of opportunity.

Key Findings

Redford: Constrained by Class, Emboldened by Experience

My first research question asks: how do Black families' perceptions of place shape their movement to suburban places and their school choice decision-making? Addressing the importance of suburban amenities, housing size and space were key to all families' perceptions and decision-making to relocate to both Redford and West Bloomfield. Redford families particularly described the suburb as offering affordable homes with large yards and increased space and safety for their families, so much so that the price point and quality of housing at times took priority over families' school choices. Only two out of four families perceived Redford as offering quality public schools—or schools that parent's felt their children could consistently attend. The two families that did attend Redford public schools described schools as "close-knit," offering a "family feel," and for a 3rd grade student, a space that makes him "happy and excited." These families liked the small size of the school district which provided greater connection among families and students—benefits of neighborhood schooling. Yet, overall, data shows that families did not primarily move to Redford to access its public schools given the abundance of school choice options in Metro Detroit. The affordability and size of homes, in addition to easy access to Detroit were most salient in shaping families' perceptions of Redford and their decision to relocate to the suburb.

It is difficult to discuss families' perceptions of Redford without shared attention to research question two which asks how families' race, class, and where they lived influenced their

perceptions of place and quality school choice options. Indeed, all three dynamics proved consequential to Redford families' movement and school choices. Firstly, families' socioeconomic status and the affordability of homes in Redford after the 2008 recession were integral factors that shaped their accessibility to the suburb. Indeed, the 2008 recession was key to not only Detroit's municipal struggles, but it also devastated Redford's housing market, where ranch style homes were often available for as low as half of their appraised value. Three out of four families used the low-cost of homes as an opportunity to move to the suburb and access amenities they were previously unable to afford. Hence, families' move to Redford was significantly mediated by their socioeconomic status and economic conditions that suspended typical norms of home ownership. Prior to the Great Recession, these norms penalized many working and middle-class Black families given racial wealth gaps and discriminatory lending practices including sub-prime mortgage loans, which Black individuals were far more likely to be given than other racial groups (Rothstein, 2017; Sugrue, 2014b). Indeed, the devastation of the housing market in Metro Detroit and the U.S. at large, was predicated on forms of racial capitalism, or "the process of deriving social and economic value from the racial identity of another person" (Leong, 2013, p. 2152). Yet, in its aftermath, some Black families were able to purchase homes in suburbs, representing a type of relief for these families given the long history of racial discrimination in U.S. housing markets. However, this relief came with advantages and drawbacks given that the recession also contributed to increasing economic precarity in the region.

Importantly, Redford families were still constrained in their community choices by their socioeconomic status. Families discussed other suburbs where they considered relocating, yet families recognized that they would not be able to access the same level of housing amenities at

Redford's price point. The financial constraints experienced by Redford families as compared to West Bloomfield families particularly emphasizes the importance of socioeconomic status to the opportunity structures individuals and families are able to access, even as economic conditions shift and change (powell, 2008). This follows patterns of Black suburbanization across the U.S., as most Black suburbanites live in inner-ring suburbs given their increased affordability in comparison to middle-ring or more newly developed suburbs like West Bloomfield (Nicolaides & Wiese, 2016). However, inner-ring suburbs can also struggle with the same lack of structural investment as areas or neighborhoods of urban cities (Orfield, 2015). This trend sheds light on Redford families' split use of their zoned neighborhood public schools. Redford families who opted out of their neighborhood schools believed that the public charter schools their children attended offered increased curricular rigor, extracurricular programs, and racial and ethnic diversity. Among Redford families, their socioeconomic status impacted their ability to pair their housing and school choices in the suburb.

These findings support Rhodes and Warkentien's (2017) study that found that Black families were less able to obtain the "package deal," or pair their housing and school choices in Greater Cleveland, another U.S. Rustbelt metropolitan region that has suffered from deindustrialization and population loss. Their study importantly observes that Black families' socioeconomic status impacted their ability to access more affluent, well-resourced suburbs in the region. However, by using a phenomenological approach, this study shows that while Redford families were certainly constrained by their socioeconomic status, they also recognized how racial demographics and continued proximity to Detroit provided interpersonal advantages for their families in school and community settings. Literature often asserts that parents will necessarily work to pair their housing and school choices, yet this assumption can miss important

social, cultural, and racial subjectivities that also influence families' community and school choices. Redford families' experiences pinpoint that we must think deeper about how families constitute educational opportunity when they are not bound to pair their housing and school choices. Indeed, data suggests that educational and housing landscapes that routinely marginalize Black families and students were navigated by families with foresight; to a certain extent shaping if they paired or unpaired their housing and school choices.

Redford's shared border and proximity to Detroit were also key to families' perceptions of the suburb's social and cultural habitability. All Redford families had previously lived in Detroit, and for three out of four families they moved to Redford directly from the city. More so than West Bloomfield families, Redford residents were Detroiters. As discussed in Chapter 4, Detroit was some families' home—a place of comfort and familiarity. Families liked that Redford's shared border with Detroit facilitated their maintenance of relationships and jobs that were integral to their daily lives. Moreover, families explained that Redford had a similar feel or culture to Detroit due to its "blue-collar" residents and everyday interactions with Detroiters who frequented the suburb. Hence, Redford families departed the city, but still sought the people and feel of a place central to their life histories and experiences. This emphasizes the importance of families' place-based subjectivities in influencing the community choices they made in Metro Detroit. Redford allowed for a spanning of Detroit's social and relational borders which also demonstrates families' placemaking and boundary-spanning activities to meet their needs and ultimately create the lives they desired.

This finding builds upon the work of Courtney Bell (2009) who shows that "parent's geographic preferences for schools are socially situated and therefore vary as much as the rest of families' social lives" (p. 515). Bell also studied the intersections of geography and school

choice among families in Metro Detroit, particularly families still residing in the city. Yet, through my study's attention to families' life histories and identities, data shows that their racial and place-based subjectivities were integral in shaping how families perceived and pursued quality school choice options. Race and place are deeply intertwined in stratified U.S. metropolitan regions. Therefore, in studying school choice processes, researchers must also consider the racial and place-based identities and experiences of families to fully understand their geographic preferences for schools and communities.

My study's attention to Black families' choice making process prior to their movement finds that families made decisions with awareness of the impacts of race and racism *before* relocating to the suburb. Many studies of Black students and families' experiences in suburban schools document the racial bias and discrimination they encounter in school and community settings (Chapman, 2014; Lewis-McCoy, 2014; Lewis & Diamond, 2015; Posey-Maddox, 2017), however, these studies at times pay limited attention to how families may have anticipated or planned for these dynamics. Indeed, families' experiences of race and racism navigating Metro Detroit shaped both their decision-making on which suburb to relocate to and whether they utilized their neighborhood schools. Families were not blinded by myths of suburban living or access to resources in ways that some scholars might suggest due to a lack of knowledge of suburban municipalities or politics. As asserted by Jade Muhammad, a working-class Redford mother, Detroit families were tired of "getting beat by the system." Their refusal of inequitable public school systems demonstrates agency and knowledge of unfair and stratified opportunity structures. Therefore, while Redford families may have lacked the fiscal ability to access suburbs where they could consistently pair their housing and school choices, most Redford families

recognized the ways that race, racism, and systemic inequality structured educational access and opportunity for Black families and children in not only Detroit, but across the region.

More study is needed of working class and lower middle-class Black families' school and community choices in majority or substantially Black suburban contexts. Data indicates that parents' decision-making was influenced by families' racial and place-based subjectivities which made them highly aware of the potential for racial mistreatment in schools and the community. This led families to seek racially diverse suburban school and community settings. Hence, race and class intersect in meaningful ways to affect educational access and Redford families' perceptions of educational opportunity.

These findings may be particularly characteristic of Metro Detroit's educational landscape given the high level of school choice options and persistent racial segregation in the region. As explained by some Redford families, Metro Detroit's educational landscape has normalized the uncoupling of housing and school choices, which leads to municipal border and boundary crossing in ways that expose students and families to educational and racial disparities in both suburban and urban contexts. Importantly, border-crossing and boundary spanning can increase students and families' awareness of sociopolitical dynamics and inequality (Shedd, 2015; Wilson et al., 2014). While only two Redford families paired their housing and school choices in the suburb, all four families had unpaired their housing and school choices at some point during their children's K-12 educational journeys. Altogether, Redford families attended schools in approximately eight municipalities in Metro Detroit. Additionally, one of the families enrolled in an online public charter school option. Families' navigation of multiple Metro Detroit municipalities is highly indicative of their lack of quality school choices and state disinvestment from schools in the region at large. However, coupled with parents own K-12 educational

experiences, it also provided families with increased insight of what they did and did not seek in schools for their children. Redford families were not passive consumers of the schools their children attended. This also applied to their suburban moves.

West Bloomfield: Supported by Class, Yet Still Vigilant

West Bloomfield families were able to purchase their desired community and school choices in the suburb. Families liked the large homes with customizable features and ample green space. Most important, West Bloomfield's highly rated school district, reputation for college-going, and racially and ethnically diverse student population made the suburb very attractive to families. Families especially perceived West Bloomfield school district's emphasis on college-going as a school feature that would support their children's socioeconomic maintenance and mobility.

Families' ability to access West Bloomfield was most predicated on their socioeconomic status. Indeed, for two out of the three families living in West Bloomfield, parents were raised in solidly middle-class households, which reflects increased financial support for these families. For instance, The Fosters bought their home in West Bloomfield from a cousin, which signals a high level of financial stability and resources across their extended family. This is similar to some white families in Rhodes and Warkentien's (2017) study who despite their personal finances, they were still able to pair their school and housing choices in affluent suburbs given generational wealth in families. The circumstance under which The Fosters purchased their home is by no means representative of most Black families, even those who are upper middle class given the vastness of racial wealth gaps in the U.S. (Darity & Mullen, 2020), yet it provides a helpful outlier to recognize the socioeconomic diversity and networks of support that can also enable some Black families' access to affluent suburbs and elite public school systems. Upper-

middle class West Bloomfield families possessed financial and relational resources through which they both obtained and maintained access to exclusive housing and educational resources.

Together, across Redford and West Bloomfield, the different socioeconomic affordances of families indicate that although the U.S. is experiencing unprecedented Black demographic growth in suburban schools and communities, class divisions found within cities often replicate across suburban municipalities and schools given the different suburbs families are able to access (Nicolaides & Wiese, 2006; Lacy, 2006; Pattillo-McCoy, 2000). For instance, Lewis-McCoy (2014) found in his study of a middle-class Midwestern suburb that Black families in the district entered schools with different levels of resources. This enabled middle-class Black families' ability to opt out of the district when dissatisfied with schools, while working-class Black families typically remained in the district due to their inability to access other school options. In this study, I inversely find that across Redford and West Bloomfield, class affected families' ability to opt-in to their neighborhood schools, or pair their housing and school choices in Metro Detroit's educational landscape. School choice options are not in short supply across Metro Detroit. The educational landscape is saturated with a range of schooling options all competing and marketing various curricular foci and educational experiences to families with often underwhelming results (Binelli, 2017, September 5; Strauss, 2016, December 8). Hence, West Bloomfield families' ability to consistently pair their housing and school choices signals a level of socioeconomic affordance and quality schooling not accessible to many other Black families in the region. As compared to Redford families wide-spread use of school choice options, no West Bloomfield families had attended charter schools or engaged in inter-district transfer programs during their children's K-12 educational journey. One family had previously attended a parochial school, and another was considering private school for their son. However, the most

profuse choice options in the region—charter schools and inter-district transfer programs—were largely not discussed by these families as feasible or quality options for their children. This reality shows the extent to which traditional public schools have been destabilized for the majority of families not only in Detroit, but across city-suburb divides. Furthermore, it demonstrates the ways in which socioeconomic status still limits many families' access to quality schools despite choice advocates insistence that increased options can promote educational opportunity for families that are unable to purchase quality school choice options through their housing. In a metropolitan region significantly shaped by race and class segregation, these dynamics replicate in educational landscapes without explicit education policy aimed to address and rectify these challenges.

Importantly, proximity to Detroit also mattered for two of the three West Bloomfield families. West Bloomfield families also had meaningful relationships and connection to Detroit that led them to travel back and forth to the city several times a week. Like Redford families, they also spanned formal boundaries and borders to meet their holistic needs where they were not offered in the suburb. This was particularly important to families given the predominantly white population of the suburb and their desire to maintain place-based and racial affiliations. While Redford families did this too, the increased physical distance between West Bloomfield and Detroit required more time and financial resources. Hence, West Bloomfield families had more resources to create or knit together their own opportunity structure in a Metro Detroit educational landscape that sparsely provided both the educational and sociocultural conditions that families desired. Fundamentally, this accentuates the racialized nature of opportunity structures that either harmed Black residents' ability to access educational opportunity—as parents perceived in Detroit—or, required families' border crossing and boundary spanning in

efforts to access resources, relationships, and support not available in one place alone. Families' efforts to meet their needs across the region is a form of placemaking that required families' labor and agency. However, as demonstrated across Redford and West Bloomfield, not all families possess the same financial resources to span formal and legal borders in their pursuit of opportunity.

Addressing research question two, the importance of race and racism were also influential in shaping West Bloomfield families' perceptions of place and schools. Families sought schools with Black teachers and administrators. Moreover, families used the presence of Black teachers as a guide to ensure that their children would receive mentorship and support in ways that were not necessarily expected from white teachers. Families' emphasis on the importance of Black teachers and administrators was especially bolstered by West Bloomfield children who explained Black teachers as instrumental in their access to support and opportunity in school. These findings across both suburbs show the importance of Black teachers and administrators as boundary spanners for marginalized students and families in demographically changing schools and communities. Furthermore, this indicates the necessity of diversifying teaching staff in suburban schools, in addition to professional development that increases teachers and administrators' awareness and preparation to counteract exclusionary politics and practices in schools. More research is needed on the roles Black teachers and administrators play in family engagement and student inclusion in demographically changing K-12 suburban schools. Data suggests that Black teachers and administors provide necessary links to school resources and more importantly, Black students being seen as capable given the persistent trends of racial disparities in suburban schools and communities.

Additionally, like Redford families, West Bloomfield families also welcomed the growth of racial diversity in the suburb. As more Black families moved to West Bloomfield and attended schools in the district this alleviated social and interpersonal burdens for both parents and students who were able to network and build community with other families in school and community settings. Notably, West Bloomfield families also supported the school of choice program which significantly increased the number of Black students in West Bloomfield schools. Despite families' own socioeconomic affordances as residents of the suburb, they recognized how Metro Detroit's educational landscapes was exclusionary or fiscally inaccessible to many Black families in the region. While the three West Bloomfield families are not representative of all Black families in the suburb, this finding points towards the ways in which racial identity still mediates class identities for many Black families across the U.S. Indeed, many middle-class, suburban Black families still align their political and economic interests with those of lower-income Black communities (Dawson, 1995; McGowen, 2017). Moreover, families' life histories in Detroit, or other urban cities that they called home, emphasized the systemic causes of educational inequality and place-based disparities. Therefore, West Bloomfield families demonstrate Lipsitz's (2007) concept of Black spatial imaginaries, which involves resource sharing and the democratic use of public resources and institutions. While West Bloomfield families could have ascribed to exclusionary dynamics that have historically characterized suburban formations and politics, they welcomed Black students—recognizing how this benefitted not only their family, but families engaged in school choice too.

At the risk of misrepresenting families' complex sense making, families across both suburbs were not immune to mainstream narratives that tie perceptions of place to deficit narratives of people. Yet, through families' own experiences of marginality and agency, families

provide needed insight on the consequential relationships between place, race, and educational access and opportunity. In the next section, I outline key implications from findings that can assist school districts, policy makers, and education practitioners in understanding and improving racial inclusion and equity in demographically changing U.S. metropolitan regions.

Unpacking Black Suburbanization in Demographically Changing Metropolitan Education Landscapes

Black Flight is Not white Flight

Families' perceptions complicate narratives of "Black flight" (Frey, 2011; Kellogg, 2010, June 24; Woldoff, 2011) that inevitably and imprecisely liken Black suburbanization to the phenomenon of white flight. With white flight, which occurred from the 1950s through the 1970s, most families exited Detroit and many other U.S. urban cities given their desire to live and school in segregated white communities (Baugh, 2011; Riddle, 2000; Rothstein, 2017). White Flight was driven by deficit notions of Black people and communities, in addition to the federal government's racial discrimination in low cost home loan programs (Khalifa et al., 2016; Rothstein, 2017). White advantages secured by both structural and sociocultural desires to exclude select racial groups supported white families' movement and relocation to suburbs. This is not the case for most Black families who relocate contemporarily. Data shows that Black families' suburban moves—across socioeconomic status—grow from the racialized nature of structural access and inequality. In other words, the inability of structural conditions to adequately address the needs of Black families in urban cities, one of which is consistent and quality public education, has spurred Black families' movement. Additionally, families were mindful and intentional about their ability to connect with other Black families and students

through the school and community decisions they made. Hence, while families relocated, their movement was not driven by all-encompassing deficit notions of people or place. Schools, communities, and people in Detroit and other Black urban cities, still mattered to families in this study.

Although constrained by racial and class segregation—particularly the resources denied by segregation—families recognized and honored the rich traditions of Black placemaking and community support that resist inequitable opportunity structures. Indeed, there is a lineage of scholarship that captures the historic and contemporary efforts of Black schools and communities to provide quality schooling infused with love and care despite any lack of resources or state support (Anderson, 1988; Davis, 2017; Lee, 1992; Morris, 1999, 2004; 2008b; Scheurich, 1998; Siddle-Walker, 2009). Therefore, the underlying impulse of Black families' movement and decision-making was not exclusionary, but a means to resist persistent racial and place-based inequality. For families who particularly moved from Detroit, their reluctant exits offered a way to enact agency and counteract institutional and governmental practices that dispossessed families and communities from vital educational resources like safe school infrastructure, adequate and appropriate school funding, and social and emotional supports.

Research question three explores how families' perceptions of place and quality school choice options shed light on historical and contemporary social structures that have affected educational access and opportunity for Black children. Data shows that families' movement was a form of protection from racialized opportunity structures that limit Black families and children's educational access to opportunity. After decades of policy that has favored the development of Metro Detroit suburbs over the city coupled with extensive deindustrialization, and the 2008 recession, opportunity structures in Detroit and many other predominantly Black

cities have suffered. This is in addition to neoliberal education reforms that have been financially lucrative for corporate, non-profit, and governmental powerholders, while sparsely increasing academic outcomes for students (Pedroni, 2010; Wilson, 2015; Zernike, 2016, June 28). These practices have contributed to what Marxist geographer David Harvey (2005) explains as accumulation by dispossession, or neoliberal restructuring processes that extract wealth and resources from working class and poverty-impacted communities through privatization, state redistribution, and management and manipulation of crises (i.e. the impacts of deindustrialization and economic recession). In Black places, this dispossession is further justified by mainstream narratives and perceptions that attribute the decline of public institutions and social services to cultural deficits and/or malpractice among the people who live there—a form of anti-Blackness that leads to differential and inadequate policy treatment. In Detroit, this has spurred exploitative education policies that simply would not be allowed in wealthier and whiter school districts and communities (Holme, Finnigan, & Diem, 2016; Khalifa et al., 2016).

It is important to acknowledge that Black families' movement to suburbs places increased strain on U.S. Rustbelt cities like Detroit that continue to seek means to restore jobs and opportunity. The most vulnerable families and students are left in schools with inadequate resources and support, further exacerbating a politics of disposability that contributes to the conditions that lead families to relocate (Giroux, 2006; Wilson, 2015). Yet, we must look deeper to assess where this precarity originates. Given the legacy of Black educational access and opportunity in the U.S., where Black children have been historically used to secure labor needs for the U.S. or have been overtly harmed in the space of school, families movement does not neatly equate to a form of opportunity hoarding and/or implicit bias as commonly discussed among middle class or high status white families in suburban contexts (Anderson, 1988; Lewis

& Diamond, 2015; Lewis-McCoy, 2014; Holme, 2002; Rooks, 2017; Wells, 2014). Black families not only sought resources that should have been provided and maintained in urban school systems, but also recognized the importance of other Black student and families to their children accessing educational opportunity in suburban schools.

Suspending Deficit Notions of Family Movement

As opposed to educational leaders viewing families who move school districts through the deficit lens of being a liability or threat to academic and cultural norms of districts, I encourage administrators and school district officials to acknowledge the agency and labor of families that move in search of increased opportunity. This acknowledgment might better position school districts to connect with Black families as educational partners. Through authentic partnerships with families, practitioners and policymakers may then better understand race and class demographic shifts in their schools—breaking out of siloed or provincial understandings of educational resources and efforts needed for substantive inclusion of all students. Families and students who move possess educational agency and knowledge of stratified metropolitan landscapes that can inform school-community relations, family engagement, hiring practices of teachers and administrators, and curricula. For instance, if teachers and administrators better understood the motivations, experiences, and patterns of demographic change in metropolitan regions, they might more readily recognize families' funds of knowledge that can be leveraged towards place-based curricula and culturally sustaining pedagogical practices sensitive to the rich histories of migration, placemaking, and labor across different racial and ethnic groups (Davis, 2017; Gonzales, Moll, & Amanti, 2006; Paris & Alim, 2017; Tucker-Raymond, Rosario-Ramos, and Rosario, 2011). Indeed, these dynamics make Metro Detroit so vibrantly distinct. Parent Teacher Organizations also have the potential to offer

a generative space to support inclusion of families. Nita Robinson, a parent leader in Redford schools, explained how she hosted a "parent party…so parents could get together and collectively talk…we talked about resources, what you would do in certain situations, everybody is going through the same thing." Again, this would require effort and intentionality to work against dynamics of exclusion that can manifest in conceptions of parent engagement and involvement among formal school leaders (Cooper, 2009a; Posey-Maddox, 2013).

Additionally, by partnering with families, education policymakers, school district officials, and researchers may better understand how school districts can collaborate across municipal and district divides. Due to municipal funding of schools and the exclusive or segregationist nature of many suburbs, cross-collaboration is difficult among districts. However, "school hopping," or students frequently switching schools due to the prevalence, yet dissatisfaction with choice options, is a problem identified by both parents and school administrators in Metro Detroit (Einhorn & Pratt, 2018, October 1). In providing options for students, school districts and choice advocates must consider how to support students and families in their transitions, if one claims to support access to quality schooling for low-income and working-class families. Holme & Finnigan (2018) explain in *Striving in Common: A Regional Equity Framework for Urban Schools,* that demographic change has created "ripe conditions for the formation of new political alliances that allow interests to converge" (p. 123). For example, they explain that some inner-ring suburbs face similar fiscal challenges as urban cities. This is true for Redford schools, who like Detroit experiences high rates of student mobility both to and from the district and families impacted by poverty. Additionally, West Bloomfield schools also educate a racially and socioeconomically diverse student body given their inter-district choice program that draws many students from Pontiac, MI. Holme and

Finnigan (2018) encourage that these municipalities and districts should work against identity politics to advocate for the resources and support schools and communities need. For instance, school districts might create coalitions or working groups with students, parents, community members, and education practitioners who work together to maximize services and resources for students and families across divides. Most districts in Metro Detroit have experienced fiscal constraints due to population loss and/or declining tax bases—although to different extents. Authentic partnership among districts could provide a means by which to think through collective issues and to recognize that change is inevitable given the shifting economic and labor landscape in the region. Groups might think through what collective strengths are enabled through schools being a shared space across man-made borders and boundaries. Importantly, this could provide a platform to further consider how districts and municipalities that frequently lose students and per-pupil funding can be properly supported through means such as transportation to and from schools for students or school districts' economic support of communities and businesses where students live through contracts and budgeting. The Coalition for the Future of Detroit Schoolchildren provides an example of different individuals and organizations coming together to propose policy solutions to challenges faced across Detroit's traditional neighborhood and charter schools[4]. Although these individuals and organizations have different interests, they all agreed that persistent educational challenges needed to be addressed and threaten the well-being of students, families, and the municipality (Coalition for The Future of Detroit School Children, 2017). Importantly, meaningful collaboration will require educators and school district officials to question and destabilize status-quo perceptions of place and race that stigmatize students and families who migrate from low-income communities and schools.

[4] The website for The Coalition for the Future of Detroit Schoolchildren is www.detroiteducationcoalition.org.

Epistemologies of Black Opportunity Seeking

I offer the framework of *epistemologies of Black opportunity seeking* to center and humanize the knowledge and experiences of Black students and families as they seek and create various forms of opportunity. This framework illuminates structural, sociocultural, and intergenerational factors that have historically and contemporarily shaped Black individuals and families' movement and access to opportunity—particularly, educational opportunity. I explain that 1) structurally, families' movement and opportunity seeking is oriented by moments of racial exclusion and racial inclusion highly subject to economic change; 2) socioculturally, families are also oriented by rich histories of Black placemaking and community life that shape their perceptions and decisions in search of holistic and fulfilling cultural and social lives; and lastly, 3) multigenerational ways of knowing among Black families creates an expectation of increased labor and collective agency to obtain opportunity, given the persistent raced and classed nature of U.S. opportunity structures. Below, I further detail each point.

Racial Exclusions and Inclusions

Movement as a tool for access to opportunity and resources is not new (Baugh, 2011; Boyd, 2017; Morris & Monroe, 2009; Wiese, 2005; Wilkerson, 2011). These movements have been provoked by structural constraints in Detroit and in cities around the nation. For instance, a blatant example of the structural nature of Black families' movement is the forced diaspora of longstanding Black communities in New Orleans due to gross state neglect and structural violence both prior to and in the wake of Hurricane Katrina in 2005 (Giroux, 2008; McKittrick & Woods, 2007; Morris, 2008a). Black suburbanization in Metro Detroit has also been driven by state neglect and dispossession of Black communities and schools in Detroit, and other predominantly Black municipalities like Pontiac, MI. Inconsistent and inadequate quality among

schools, in addition to the high cost of living and declining social services provides ample push factors that encourage many working and middle-class families to relocate. Their movement has been caused by acts of racial exclusion given the inequitable and persistent policy maltreatment of Black places, which in turn disproportionately affects Black people, families, and communities.

Importantly, racial inclusions shape families' movement too. Data emphasizes the importance of the 2008 recession in families' ability to afford homes in the suburb. This is a moment of racial and economic inclusion, as norms and requirements of homeownership were so altered and depressed, it allowed for working-class and lower middle-class Black families' increased access to suburban municipalities. This is also true with the growth of school choice options, as inter-district transfer programs in particular have become a method to buoy school funding in many suburban school districts due to overall population loss in the region—although at the expense of many urban and/or poverty-impacted suburban districts. Historically, racial inclusion was also key to Black families' movement and migration, where the promise of manufacturing jobs first brought hundreds of thousands of Black people to Detroit. Racial inclusions represent a type of interest convergence (Bell, 1979; Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995). Black people and families are granted greater access, but this often comes with emotional and financial costs.

Overall, racial exclusions and inclusions reflect the structural constraints and determinants that influence Black families' access to opportunity. As powell and Lipsitz's work illuminates, where we live and school our children has significant impacts on social mobility, and moreover, race and racism are key to the structures we find ourselves within. Yet, these

structural dynamics shift, restrict, and/or provide openings under larger economic conditions and trends that have affected Black movement and opportunity seeking over time.

Histories of Black Placemaking & Community Life

Structural racism and disinvestment are very real. However, as guided by Lipsitz (2007) concept of Black spatial imaginaries, it is also important to recognize the relationships and agency that allow people to survive, make do, and live in community with others under inequitable circumstances. Indeed, a legacy and tradition of vibrant community life despite segregation or a lack of resources, orients many Black families, especially those with roots in storied Black cities like Detroit, even as they relocate to suburbs. Detroit, once dubbed as "America's Blackest City," has been especially maligned by mainstream narratives and perceptions of crime and dysfunctionality (Starr, 2019, February 26). These deficit discourses are imbued with anti-Blackness, as they often reflect a perception of cultural pathology among Black people and institutions. Therefore, families' attachment and pride in place becomes a means of asserting one's racial and political identities in the face of state devaluation and dispossession of Black communities (Fullilove, 2016; Hunter et al., 2016; Hunter & Robinson, 2018; Keith & Pile, 1993; Lipsitz, 2007; Morris, 2008a). Again, Black spaces and places mattered to families in this study. Indeed, the people, communities, and schools that form these places were part and parcel of families' life histories, identity, and sense of support, orienting families' perceptions of what actually constitutes quality schooling for their Black children.

Families' decision-making reflects communal and racial epistemologies of both place and opportunity that are not abandoned as they move. Resources are important and instrumental in the community and school decisions families make; however, ways of knowing rooted in places

families formerly lived or called home prove vital too in their search for educational opportunity and the holistic development of their children and family.

Multigenerational Expectations of Labor

Lastly, a resounding finding of this study is the increased labor Black families exerted even as they moved to the suburbs. Their movement was not a panacea to any challenges or amenity they lacked in the places they relocated from, and for the most part, families did not expect this either. Families are simultaneously aware of the importance of place to access to opportunity, yet they also demonstrate a healthy skepticism towards suburban opportunity structures given the status-quo nature in which they perceived race and racism. While the importance of race was derived from their own experiences, some families also drew from cross-generational experiences to assert the importance of their efforts given histories of racism, limited opportunity, and striving for themselves and others. The experiences of elders—parents, grandparents, great-grandparents, and other caregivers—set a precedence for their own opportunity seeking even when it required substantial labor. After all, if family members traveled to Detroit from the Deep South as young adults, and if they made do through Jim Crow and stunted educational and labor access, families perceived that they could also make sacrifices and enact labor to meet their children and families' needs in a contested and stratified educational landscape.

These multigenerational ways of knowing influence families' processes of movement and school choice decision-making. Indeed, their school choice processes paired with their community decisions—both housing and social—involve an expectation of placemaking to construct the opportunity structures families desire for their children. In many cases, families' labor and placemaking, like their elders and ancestors, was a form of transgression in a U.S.

metropolitan landscape still significantly shaped by social structures of segregation and anti-Blackness.

Conclusion: Looking Towards the Future

As explained by Morris and Monroe (2009), Black families and students' have pursued educational opportunity within different contexts of migration. Recognition of this lineage provides a necessary precedent for the ways in which Black individuals and families have sought to access different forms of opportunity where denied. It also helps to frame a sociocultural lens of Black movement and educational opportunity seeking in suburban municipalities not predicated on notions of white flight or simply advantage seeking. Families are nested within larger social, economic, and political dynamics that have marginalized Black students and families in many educational settings. Particularly, racism remains a central factor in families' perceptions and choices. Yet, families are also nested within rich cultural traditions of place, race, family, and community. Through attention to larger structural and sociocultural dynamics, this study has aimed to shed light on both politics of place and epistemologies that undergird Black families' movement and educational opportunity seeking in Metro Detroit.

This critical phenomenological study presents several possibilities to further understand Black families' perceptions of place, school choices, and navigations of demographic change in U.S. metropolitan regions. Firstly, there are few studies examining demographic change in schools and communities that explicitly center the meaning-making of Black families amid meaningful attention to politics of place. In the future, I hope to interview more families in Redford, West Bloomfield and across Metro Detroit, to capture a more diverse sample of families and a broader understanding of the perceptions that motivate their movement, Also, as briefly discussed in Chapter 3, a limitation of my study is the lack of socioeconomic diversity

among West Bloomfield families. For instance, West Bloomfield families explained that some Black residents of the suburb have gained access to the school district by renting apartments. Additionally, West Bloomfield's Black population also grew after the recession, yet all family participants moved to the suburb prior to 2008. This should be explored to better understand how socioeconomic status and family backgrounds influenced families' perceptions of place and quality school choice options in the suburb. Also, in Redford, the suburb will soon become 'majority-minority' which presents interesting dynamics given that the town is still predominantly led by long-time, white residents. Redford offers an interesting site for further study of Black placemaking in suburban schools and communities. Considering patterns of increasing racial diversity in suburbs, yet continued racial segregation, I wonder what Redford's predominantly Black population might mean for schools long-term. Moreover, how might we center Black families' agency and transgressions of space and place in these settings, as opposed to narratives of decline.

Movement is undertheorized in educational research, yet movement, migration, or flight are recurrent themes in Black culture, history, and lived experiences. It represents a form of metaphorical and literal freedom seeking amid intolerable and oppressive conditions. Importantly, movement offers the promise of possibilities where it has been denied for oneself and prior generations. Black movement offers its own epistemologies of a resilient people in search of opportunity—often creating opportunity—where it has been denied or dispossessed. However, these departures also come with costs. People and places are affected. The textures of social life are imbued with hope, but nonetheless they are changed. By listening to the voices and experiences of Black families as they move in search of opportunity, we can more readily see structural harm and the taken-for-granted labor individuals must enact to overcome them.

Appendices

Appendix A: Parent/ Guardian Interview Protocol

Note: This is a semi-structured interview protocol. All questions will not be asked during interviews. I will prioritize questions based on the natural flow of the interview.

Interview Protocol Overview:
Thank you again for agreeing to this interview. The broad aims of the interview are to understand how you think about living in Redford or West Bloomfield, how you and your family made decisions about where your children attend school, and what you think makes a quality school and education. It is my hope that by talking with families and their students I can highlight helpful data from your perspectives and experiences that school districts and teachers can use to improve classrooms and learning among all students.

At any point in time, if you would like to not answer a question, please let me know and we will move to another question. Also, if at any point in time you would like to stop the interview, please let me know and we will stop right away. Do you have any questions before we get started?

Introductory Questions

1) Can you tell me a little bit about yourself and your family?
2) How long has your family lived in Redford or West Bloomfield?
3) What school(s) do your children attend?
4) Where did you grow up?

Perspectives and Experiences about Where Family Lives

5) What factors went into your family's decision to move to [Redford or West Bloomfield]?
6) Did education or schools play a role in your family's decision to move to [Redford or West Bloomfield]?
7) Where there any factors about where you relocated from that influenced your families' decision to move to [Redford or West Bloomfield]?
8) When your family moved to [Redford or West Bloomfield], how did you feel about your family moving here?
9) Are there any racial or class dynamics that shaped why your family moved to [Redford or West Bloomfield]?

10) Did your family consider moving to any other places besides [Redford or West Bloomfield]?
11) Before you all moved to [Redford or West Bloomfield] what do you think about this town? What did you expect living here would be like?
12) How did you find out or know about [Redford or West Bloomfield]?
13) Now that you actually live in [Redford or West Bloomfield], how do you feel about living here? Has anything changed about how you think about this town?
    a. **[If yes]** What experiences or factors have changed how you think about living in [Redford or West Bloomfield]?
14) What do you like most about living in [Redford or West Bloomfield]?
15) What do you like least about living in [Redford or West Bloomfield]?
16) How do you feel about the neighborhood you live in within [Redford or West Bloomfield]?
17) How does [Redford or West Bloomfield] compare to other towns or cities your family has lived?
18) Do you think your family will remain living in [Redford or West Bloomfield]?
    a. [If yes] What may cause you to relocate in the future?
19) What is the typical family like in [Redford or West Bloomfield]?
20) What is the typical black family like in [Redford or West Bloomfield]?
21) Are there any racial or class dynamics that shape your experiences of living in [Redford or West Bloomfield]?
22) Are there any activities or events (i.e. church, community service, etc.) your family engages in within [Redford or West Bloomfield]?
    a. [If yes] What are they and how do they shape your experience of living in [Redford or West Bloomfield]?
22) What typically comes to mind for you when you think of the suburbs in Metro Detroit?
    a. Do you think [Redford or West Bloomfield] aligns with how you typically think of suburbs? Why or why not?

Parents Views about Education & Their Child's Schooling

21) What is your educational background?
22) What were your experiences like in the schools you attended from K-12?
23) What type of student were you considered doing your K-12 educational experiences?
24) Do you think where you grew up or lived shaped your K-12 educational experiences?

a. [If yes] How so?

25) Are there any experiences or moments that you have had in school that shape how you think about your child's education?

25) How have you made decisions about where your child will attend school?

26) How did your child(ren) end up at the current school they attend?

27) Are there any factors or special considerations that play into where you send your child(ren) to school?

28) Did you talk to anyone about where you would send your child(ren) to school?

a. [If yes] Who did you talk to? What types of information did you gain?

29)Did you read or access any documents or resources (i.e. school choice guide, literature on schools) to help you make a decision about where your child(ren) attend school?

a. [If yes] What did you read or use? What types of information did you gain?

30) Did you attend any events or meetings that helped you make a decision about where your child(ren) attend school?

a. a. [If yes] Where did you go? What types of information did you gain?

31) What have your children's experiences been like at the schools they have attended? Benefits? Drawbacks?

32) Are there any other schools that you considered when making a decision about where your child would attend school?

a. [If yes] What are those schools and why did you consider them?

33) Do you think race has shaped your decisions about where you send your child(ren) to school?

a. [If yes] How?

b. [If no] Why not?

34) Do you think socioeconomic status, or your income has shaped your decisions about where you send your child(ren) to school?

a. [If yes] How?

b. [If no] Why not?

35) Did you talk with your child(ren) about the schools they would attend before they started going there?

36) Are there any messages that you work to convey to your child(ren) about education or

getting an education?

37) What messages were you given about education as a child?

37) What would you like your child to get from their education or be able to achieve through their education?

38) Do you believe that your children are getting what they need at their current school to achieve this?

39) Is your current school similar and/or different to other schools your children have attended in the past?

a. [If yes] How so?

b. [If no] How are they different?

40) Are there other activities or things that you do with your child to help them learn (i.e. extracurricular activities, church, reading at home, tutoring, etc.)?

a. [If yes] What are they and how do they help your child(ren) learn?

Thoughts on Educational Opportunity in Metro Detroit

41) How do you think the school your child attend compares to schools in towns surrounding Redford or West Bloomfield?

42) How do you think the school your child attends compares to schools in Detroit?

43) Do you think there are any differences between the school your child attends and other schools in [Redford or West Bloomfield]?

a. **[If yes]** What are these differences?

b. **[If no]** Why not?

44) Do you think there are any differences between suburban schools and city schools in the Metro Detroit area?

a. **[If yes]** What are these differences?

b. **[If no]** Why not?

45) What typically comes to mind for you when you think of suburban schools?

a. Do you think [Redford or West Bloomfield] aligns with how you typically think of suburbs? Why or why not?

46) What do you think makes a "good" or quality school?

47) What do you think students should receive in schools to make sure that they can succeed in life?

48) Are there any social or political dynamics in Metro Detroit that shape your families' ability to access quality schools or educational opportunity?
49) Are there any social or political dynamics in [Redford or West Bloomfield] that shape your families' ability to access quality schools or educational opportunity?
50) Do you see any barriers or problems that get in the way of *all* students receiving a quality education?
51) Do you see any barriers or problems that get in the way of *black* students receiving a quality education?
52) How do you see the role of teachers in whether a school is good or not?
53) Do you think families have a role to play in whether a school is "good" or not?
    a. **[If yes]** How?
    b. **[If no]** Why not?
54) Do you think money plays a role in whether a school is "good" or not?
    a. **[If yes]** How?
    b. **[If no]** Why not?
55) There has been a lot of criticism about Detroit schools and attention to various ideas about how to improve the schools there, how do you feel about what is being said about schools in Detroit?
    a. Do you think challenges in Detroit's school system shape education in Redford or West Bloomfield?
56) Do you think race impacts whether a school is quality or not?
    a. **[If yes]** How?
    b. **[If no]** Why not?
57) Do you think social class or income impacts whether a school is quality or not?
    a. **[If yes]** How?
    b. **[If no]** Why not?
58) **Do you think the history of Metro Detroit impacts whether schools are quality or not?**
    a. **[If yes]** How?
    b. **[If no]** Why not?

59) Do you think your access to educational opportunity is shaped by where you live?
    a. **[If yes]** How?
    b. **[If no]** Why not?
60) Is there anything else that you would like to share related to what we have talked about today?

Wrap Up: Thank you so much for your time today! If you think of anything else or have any questions that come up about this process, you can reach out to me at any time. I will be in touch with you and your family about scheduling a second interview. [Will provide parents with $40 visa gift card if they answered at least half of planed questions

Appendix B: Child Interview Protocol

Note: This is a semi-structured interview protocol. Children will not be asked all questions during one interview. I will prioritize questions based on the natural flow of the interview. **This protocol will also be adapted for age appropriateness as needed.**

Interview Protocol Overview:
Thank you again for agreeing to this interview. The broad aims of the interview are to understand how you think about living in Redford or West Bloomfield, how you think about your experiences in schools, and what you think makes a "good" school. It is my hope that by talking with families and students I can highlight helpful data from your perspectives and experiences that school districts and teachers can use to improve classrooms and learning among all students.

At any point in time, if you would like to not answer a question, please let me know and we will move to another question. If at any point in time you would like to stop the interview, please let me know and we will stop right away. Additionally, if you have agreed to your interview being audio recorded you can tell me to stop audio recording at any time and I will stop right away. Do you have any questions before we get started?

Introductory Questions

23) Can you tell me a little bit about yourself?
24) What are your hobbies?
25) What do you want to be when you grow up?
26) How long have you lived in Redford or West Bloomfield?
27) What school do you attend?

General Views about Where Child Lives

28) How would you explain [Redford or West Bloomfield] to someone who is not familiar with this town?
29) [If the child moved to Redford or West Bloomfield with family] When your family moved to [Redford or West Bloomfield], how did you feel about your family moving here?
30) Do you know why did your family move to [Redford or West Bloomfield]?
    a. [If yes] Why?
31) [If the child moved to Redford or West Bloomfield with family] Before you all moved to

[Redford or West Bloomfield] what did you think about this town? What did you expect living here to be like?

32) How do you feel about living in Redford or West Bloomfield? Has anything changed about how you think about this town?
    a. [If yes] What experiences have changed how you think about living in [Redford or West Bloomfield]?
33) What do you like most about living in [Redford or West Bloomfield]?
34) What do you like least about living in [Redford or West Bloomfield]?
35) How do you feel about the neighborhood you live in within [Redford or West Bloomfield]?
36) How does [Redford or West Bloomfield] compare to other towns or cities your family has lived?
37) What is the typical family like in [Redford or West Bloomfield]?
38) Do you have family that lives in other places (i.e. Detroit, other suburbs)?
    a. [If yes] What do you think about those places?
39) Are there any activities or events (i.e. church, community service, etc.) your family engages in within [Redford or West Bloomfield]?
    a. [If yes] What are they and how do you feel about these activities or events?

Child's Views about Their Schooling

40) Can you walk me through a typical day of school for you?
41) What do you enjoy most about going to school?
42) What do you like most about the school you attend?
43) Is there anything you dislike about the school you attend?
    a. **[If yes]**, what do you dislike about your school?
44) What type of student do you consider yourself to be?
45) Are there any experiences or moments that you have had in school that shape how you think of yourself as a student or learner?
46) At the schools that you've attended, did you feel you were provided with everything you needed to learn?
    a. **[If yes]** What did they provide you with that helped you to learn? Can you provide me an example?
    b. [If no] What was missing that you needed to learn? Can you provide me an example?

c. **[If no]** How have you and your family handled instances where you felt you were not getting what you needed to from your school or teacher?

47) Is your current school similar and/or different to other schools that you have attended?
    a. [If yes], How?

48) Did your parents or other family members tell you anything about the school you attend before you started going there?
    a. **[If yes]** What did they tell you?

49) Do your parents or family members tell you anything about going to school or getting an education?
    a. **[If yes]** What do they tell you?

50) Are there any other schools that you have wanted to attend?
    a. **[If yes]** What are those schools and why?

51) Are there other activities or things you do that help you to learn (i.e. extracurricular activities, church, reading at home, tutoring, etc.)?
    a. [If yes] What are they and how do they help you learn?

52) Do your siblings or family members go to other schools?
    a. **[If yes]** What are their experiences like at the schools they attend?

<u>Thoughts on Educational Opportunity in Metro Detroit</u>

53) How do you think your school compares to schools in towns surrounding Redford or West Bloomfield?

54) How do you think your school compares to schools in Detroit?

55) Do you think there are any differences between the school you attend and other schools in [Redford or West Bloomfield]?
    b. **[If yes]** What are these differences?
    c. **[If no]** Why not?

56) What do you think makes a "good" school?

57) What do you think students should get in schools to make sure that they can succeed in life?

58) Do you think that where you live in the Metro Detroit area impacts whether you go to a good school or not?
    a. [If yes] Why?

b. [If no] Why not?

59) Do you think that most schools are "good" across the Metro Detroit area?

d. **[If yes]** Why?

e. **[If no]** Why not?

60) Do you see any barriers or problems that get in the way of *all* students having "good" schools?

61) Do you see any barriers or problems that get in the way of *black* students having "good" schools?

62) How do you see the role of teachers in whether a school is good or not?

63) Do you think students have a role to play in whether a school is quality or not?

f. **[If yes]** How?

g. **[If no]** Why not?

64) Do you think families have a role to play in whether a school is "good" or not?

h. **[If yes]** How?

i. **[If no]** Why not?

65) Do you think money plays a role in whether a school is "good" or not?

a. **[If yes]** How?

b. **[If no]** Why not?

66) Do you think race impacts whether a school is quality or not?

j. **[If yes]** How?

k. **[If no]** Why not?

67) Do you think social class (income) impacts whether a school is quality or not?

l. **[If yes]** How?

m. **[If no]** Why not?

68) Is there anything else that you would like to share related to what we have talked about today?

Wrap Up: Thank you so much for your time today! If you think of anything else or have any questions that come up about this process, you can reach out to me at any time. I will be in touch with you and your family about coming to an event where you all can learn about what I find in my study and provide me with feedback. [Will provide child with two movie ticket vouchers after interview]

Appendix C: Key Linkages Between Research Questions and Data Sources

Research Question #1: How do Black families' perceptions of place shape their movement to suburban places and their school choice decision-making?	
Intended Purposes of RQ	**Informing Data Sources**
• To understand how families' perceptions of place shape their movement • Understand the place-based push and pull factors that shape families' movement • To understand how families' perceptions of place shape their school choices • To understand the meanings that families are assigning to places in Metro Detroit (particularly Redford, West Bloomfield, Detroit, and other places that families identify) • To understand what may be informing families' perceptions of places (e.g. personal experiences, memories, networks of support, etc.	**Empirical Data:** • In-depth interviews **Contextual Data:** • Document Analysis o Documents families accessed that shaped their perception or school choices o News articles that shed light on events, policies, etc. that families may refer to as shaping their perceptions of place

Research Question #2: How do Black families' and students' race, class, and/or where they live shape their perceptions of place and quality school choice options?	
Intended Purposes of RQ	**Informing Data Sources**
• To understand if dynamics of race, class, and/or where families live impact their perception of place and school choices • To understand raced and classed cultural narratives of place that may influence families' perceptions of place and school choices	**Empirical Data:** • In-depth interviews **Contextual Data:** • Document Analysis o Documents families accessed that shaped their perception or school choices o News articles that shed light on events, policies, etc. that

• To understand the raced and classed nature of push and pull place-based factors that may have led to families' movement	families may refer to as shaping their perceptions of place

Research Question #3: How do families' and students' perceptions of place and quality school choice options shed light on historical and contemporary social structures that have affected educational access and opportunity for Black children in the Metro Detroit region?	
Intended Purposes of RQ	**Informing Data Sources**
• To understand how families perceive Black educational access and opportunity in Metro Detroit over time • To understand how the perceptions and experiences of Black families shed light on Black educational agency over time • To understand how families' perceptions and experiences complicate or extend raced and classed cultural narratives that connect place and access to educational opportunity • To understand how families' perceptions and experiences connect to, complicate, or extend understandings of the historical formations of places and social structures	**Empirical Data:** • In-depth interviews • Archival Research • Historical Literature Review

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