

# Mapping a Segregated City: The Growth of Racially/Ethnically Concentrated Poverty & Affluence in Lexington, 1970-2014

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On behalf of the Lexington Fair Housing Council



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## Executive Summary

- Racially/ethnically concentrated poverty is growing in Lexington by practically any indicator. Our measurement, which takes into account both the poverty rate and median household income, shows that the total number of Census tracts identified as areas of concentrated poverty has doubled since 1970.
- Racially/ethnically concentrated affluence is also on the rise, and actually represents a more widespread problem than concentrated poverty within Lexington. While there are a total of eight Census tracts of racially/ethnically concentrated poverty in Lexington in 2014, there are simultaneously a total of 19 tracts classified as racially/ethnically concentrated areas of affluence.
- The presence and growth of both concentrated poverty and affluence indicate that Lexington is becoming an increasingly unequal and bifurcated city. While areas of both concentrated poverty and affluence are problematic, it's important to remember that it isn't these *places* that are the problem, but the underlying *inequalities between* these places that ought to be addressed. In the absence of deliberate actions to decrease segregation and concentrated poverty in Lexington, these inequalities are not only unlikely to improve, they are almost sure to be exacerbated.
- While these indicators are useful for understanding broader trends in inequality, they also fail to capture the diversity of ways that racial and class inequality are manifest in Lexington's housing landscape. Processes such as gentrification aren't sufficiently captured by measurements of concentrated poverty and affluence, especially when drastic demographic shifts are taking place in some neighborhoods. Further study is necessary in order to understand how these processes intersect and shape the housing market in Lexington.

## About the Lexington Fair Housing Council

The Lexington Fair Housing Council is a nonprofit civil rights agency that investigates complaints of housing discrimination throughout Kentucky. The Lexington Fair Housing Council investigates complaints of discrimination in housing and lending practices. The Council assists aggrieved individuals through the process of their complaint, and assists them in finding attorneys to take their cases. The Lexington Fair Housing Council does not charge for its services.

## About the Author

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## I. Why We Care About Concentrated Poverty

Throughout its history, the issue of poverty in the United States has waxed and waned in its importance to broader social and political discourse. At its peak, President Lyndon Johnson's War on Poverty brought the issue to the forefront of the American imagination. Following the 2007-2008 financial crisis, the issue of poverty and inequality has again become central to American politics, with a growing recognition that there is a distinctly racial component to these trends. Legacies and continued practices of racism and discrimination in housing, employment and education have meant that the wealth of the median white household in the United States is more than 15 times larger than that of the median black household and more than 13 times larger than that of the median Latino household (Sullivan et al 2015). While poverty undoubtedly affects all types of people across the country, these processes have a definitive, disproportionate effect on people of color due to the effects of racial segregation.

But poverty, even racialized poverty, doesn't occur in a vacuum. Indeed, a growing body of evidence suggests that while poverty itself presents enormous challenges to individuals and families, the geographic concentration of poverty in particular neighborhoods has compounding negative effects on a variety of indicators of well being. Various studies have shown that individuals living in high-poverty neighborhoods are at greater risk for a variety of diseases, illnesses and negative health conditions, including low birth weights, obesity, poor mental health and cognitive ability, and even shortened life expectancy (Coulton and Pandey 1992; Aneshensel and Sucoff 1996; Williams 1999; Williams and Collins 2001; Williams et al 2003; Diez Roux and Mair 2010; Sharkey and Elwert 2011). Similarly, concentrated poverty has been found to have disproportionate negative impacts on educational outcomes for youth, with neighborhood-level indicators having a predictive power similar to school or family-related indicators that are commonly seen as determinants of educational achievement (South and Crowder 1999; Ainsworth 2002; Harding 2003). Studies have also suggested that while higher poverty neighborhoods do in fact lead to higher crime rates (Krivo and Peterson 1996; Hannon 2005), this effect isn't necessarily to the degree that has long been hypothesized (Hipp and Yates 2011). Together, this body of research suggests that even more so than the problems that poverty presents to individuals and families, spatially concentrated poverty and its resulting 'concentration effects' even further impairs the upward socioeconomic mobility of people living in such places (Wilson 1987).

Beyond the numerous ill effects of concentrated poverty on individuals and families, the mere existence of such areas suggests that substantial inequalities are at play. Importantly for cities like Lexington, the presence of these inequalities demonstrates the role of the housing market in shaping such inequalities and the ways they are experienced. Patterns of racial and class segregation in housing, whether enforced by deliberate action or through the impersonal forces of the market, act to reproduce the conditions of concentrated poverty in some places, while ensuring that others remain insulated from it. In order to identify how these inequalities are manifest in Lexington's residential landscape, this report maps both 'racially/ethnically concentrated areas of poverty' *and* 'racially/ethnically concentrated areas of affluence' over time.

## II. Measuring Concentrated Poverty and Affluence

In this study, racially/ethnically concentrated areas of poverty (RECAPs) are defined as areas where the majority of residents are non-white and where the poverty rate exceeds 40%, or where the median household income is less than half of the citywide median. In addition, this analysis also looks at racially/ethnically concentrated areas of *relative* poverty (RECArPs) in order to capture those places that are relatively disadvantaged as compared with the rest of the city, but which aren't captured by the definition of racially/ethnically concentrated poverty used here.<sup>1</sup> These tracts are also majority non-white, but have either a poverty rate between 20-40% or a median household income between 50-80% of the citywide median.

Mapping areas of racially/ethnically concentrated poverty at the city scale is often used as a way of understanding the geographic manifestations of racial and class segregation. Whether created through deliberate attempts at racial steering or through the impersonal forces of the local housing market, these areas signify those places that poor people of color have been funneled into over time. But identifying the presence and growth of 'racially/ethnically concentrated areas of *affluence*' (RECAAs) can perform a similar function by showing those places that poor and non-white residents have effectively been *excluded from*. Because these areas are also key sites of inequality, they are increasingly seen as just as problematic as areas of concentrated poverty (Massey 1996; Samuels 2015).

Mirroring our definition of racially/ethnically concentrated areas of poverty above, this analysis defines racially/ethnically concentrated areas affluence as any census tract where the non-Hispanic white population exceeds the citywide average and where the median household income is greater than twice the citywide median.<sup>2</sup> Just as in the case of concentrated poverty, this report also introduces an intermediate category of racially/ethnically concentrated areas of *relative* affluence (RECArAs), which also share a racial threshold, but which have median household incomes between 150-200% of the citywide median, or have poverty rates less than 5%. This additional indicator helps to identify areas where even if the median

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<sup>1</sup> There remains considerable disagreement throughout the literature on what the appropriate quantitative indicator concentrated poverty ought to be. While most studies use the 40% threshold, a number of prominent analyses, such as Cortright and Mahmoudi (2014), instead use a 20% or 30% threshold. Our inclusion of an additional metric of relative poverty allows for an inclusion of these tracts, while also differentiating between the more common definition of concentrated poverty and the expanded understanding. It is also important to recognize that relying only on the federally-defined poverty rate fails to account for the position of a given household or neighborhood relative to the broader urban or metropolitan context in which it is located. In order to address this shortcoming, Swanstrom et al (2008) propose that an additional indicator based on a comparison of tract-level median household income with median household incomes at the broader city, county or metropolitan scale be added, as we do here.

<sup>2</sup> There is also some disagreement about the appropriate thresholds at which to measure concentrated affluence. For example, St. John (2002) defines affluence as household incomes greater than four times the poverty line. Unlike the discussions of racially/ethnically concentrated poverty, there is also a greater degree of uncertainty around the racial/ethnic thresholds used. While Goetz et al (2015) define racially/ethnically concentrated areas of affluence as being greater than 90% white, we have similarly adjusted this figure due to the fact that Lexington is already, and has long been, an overwhelmingly white city.

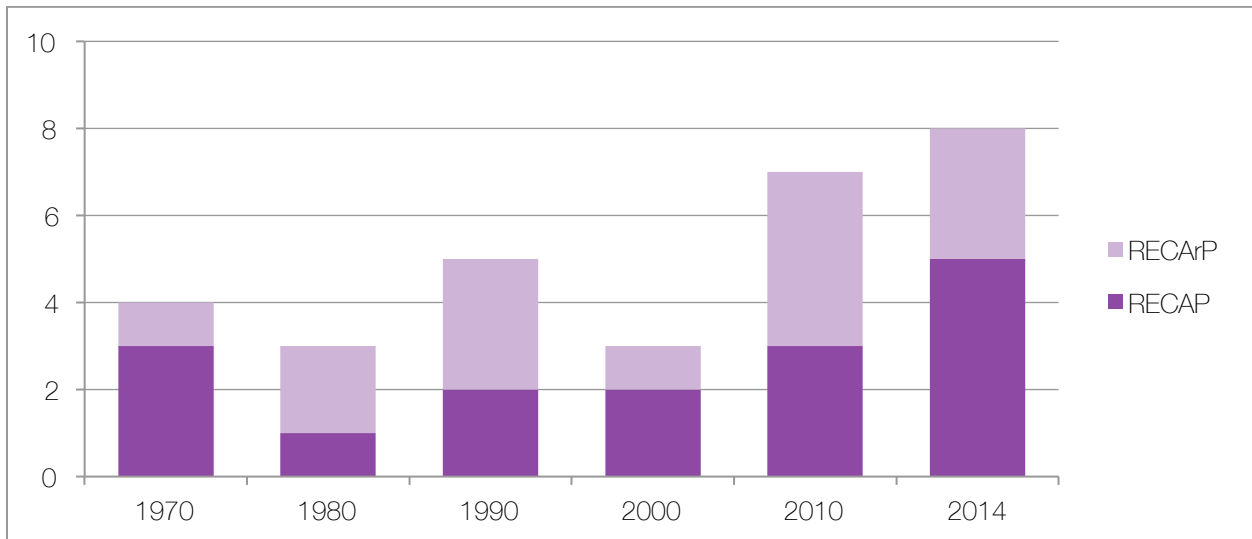
household income doesn't meet the threshold of conventional affluence, the almost total *absence* of poverty from a neighborhood signifies a particular level of exclusion at work.

Data used in this analysis is derived from the US Census Bureau. Decennial Census data for 1970-2010 is taken from Brown University's Longitudinal Tract Database (LTDB) project, which provides estimates for census indicators harmonized to 2010 Census tract boundaries. 2014 data is taken from the Census Bureau's American Community Survey five-year estimates.

### III. Visualizing Concentrated Poverty and Affluence in Lexington

Looking at the longer-term trends of segregation in Lexington, some indicators would suggest that segregation has been on a steady decline. For example, the standard black-white dissimilarity index, which provides a city-wide measurement of what percentage of one group would have to move elsewhere in order to create a racially balanced city, has fallen a full 35 points from 1970 to 2014. But this kind of measurement does little to help us understand the connections between segregation and poverty, as well as the intra-urban spatial patterns of where these conditions are most acutely concentrated.

*Figure 1: Growth in the Number of Racially/Ethnically Concentrated Areas of Poverty*



Using our measurements of racially/ethnically concentrated poverty, Figure 1 shows the steady growth in the number of these areas in Lexington since 1970. While there were a total of just four such tracts displaying any degree of racially/ethnically concentrated poverty in 1970, this figure has since doubled. Similarly, our more context-sensitive definition of racially/ethnically concentrated poverty identifies twice as many areas as would more rigid, conventional definitions. Put simply, far from segregation and poverty being a thing of the past, the problem of racially/ethnically concentrated poverty is at an all-time high in Lexington. Indeed, if anything, this problem has actually been *underestimated* up to this point.

Figure 2: Percent of Population Living in Racially/Ethnically Concentrated Areas of Poverty

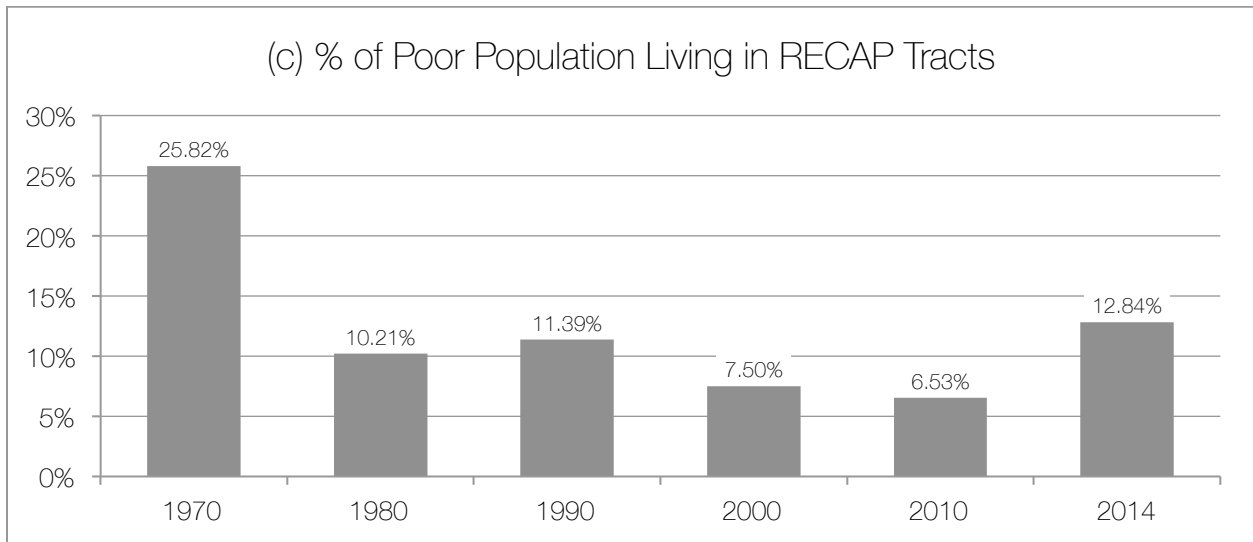
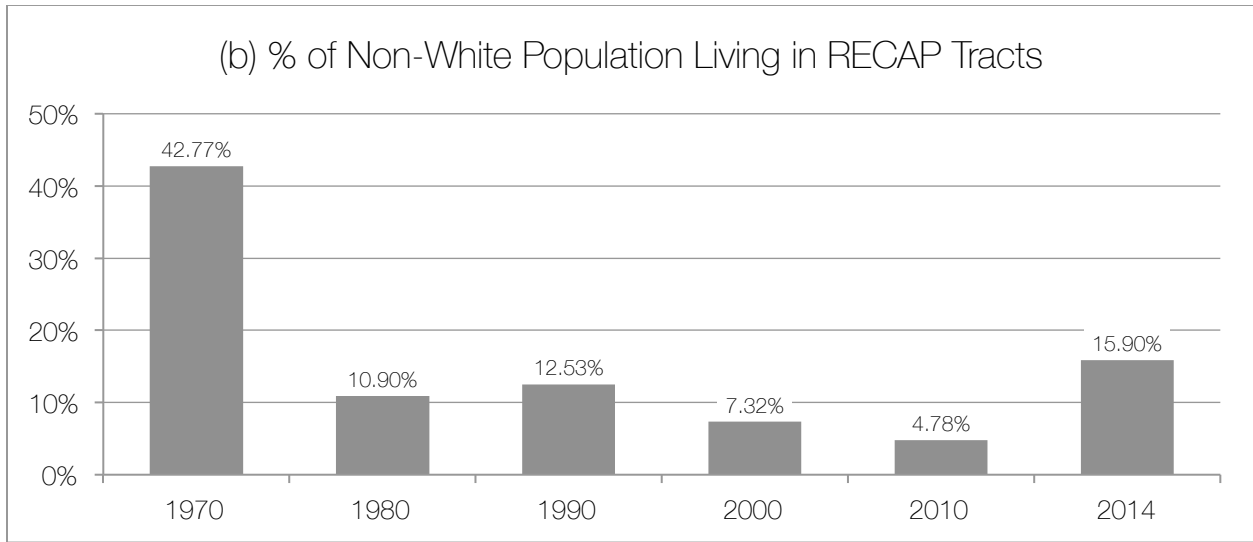
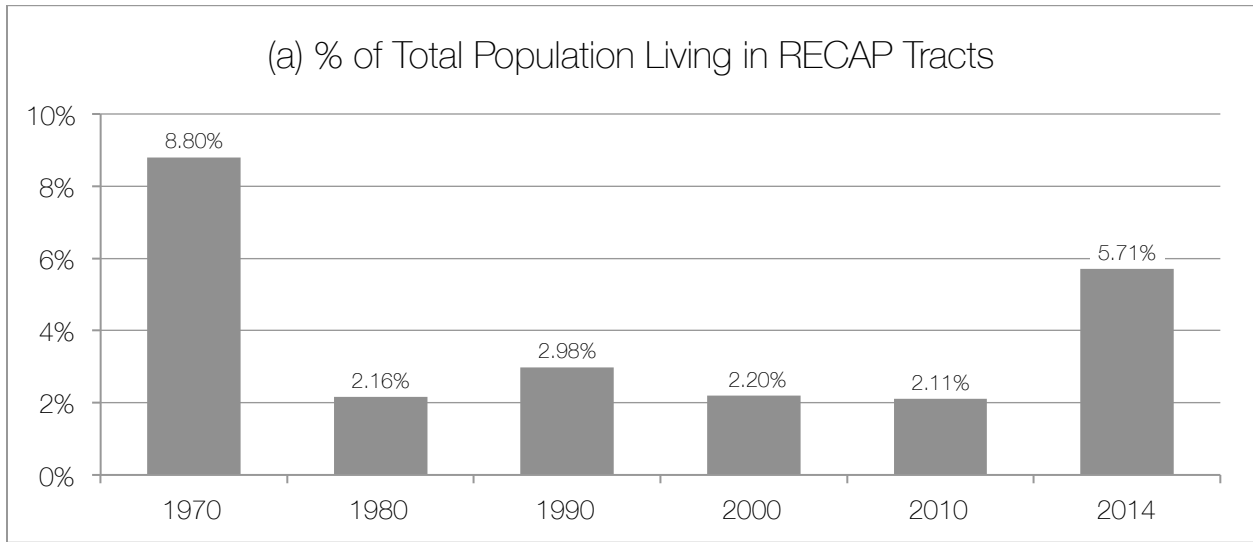


Figure 2 above shows the percentage of the city's total population, non-white population and poor population living in racially/ethnically concentrated areas of poverty since 1970. In general, each of these three figures has been on the decline since 1970, though this trend has begun to reverse itself in the last few years. Rather than a continued trend towards the deconcentration of poverty, each of these three indicators actually show a degree of *reconcentration* occurring.

These contradictory trends – the relative declines in the percentage of the city's population living in areas of concentrated poverty at the same time as the number of these areas is growing – suggest that efforts at poverty deconcentration, such as the demolition of Lexington's major public housing complexes in the late 1990s and early 2000s as part of the federal HOPE VI program, have done little to solve the larger problem of concentrated poverty. While HOPE VI projects at the former sites of Bluegrass-Aspendale and Charlotte Court may have provided some benefits to these particular locations, the lack of a comprehensive policy approach aimed at replacing over 1,000 demolished housing units has meant that the problem of concentrated poverty hasn't been eliminated in Lexington, it has simply moved elsewhere in the city (cf. DeFilippis 2013).

Beyond the overall growth in racially/ethnically concentrated poverty, it is important to understand *where* these processes are taking place and how these areas have evolved over time. Figure 3 below visualizes the spatial distribution of tracts classified as either racially/ethnically concentrated areas of poverty or affluence from 1970 to 2014. A number of key patterns emerge from these maps. First, it is important to recognize that Lexington has long had areas of racialized poverty, and these areas are remarkably stable in their classification as such. While the more conventional definition of racially/ethnically concentrated poverty would have identified just one such area in Lexington in 1970, our definition helps to demonstrate how and where racial segregation and poverty have been intertwined historically.

While the maps in Figure 3 highlight the near-constant changes in Lexington's housing landscape – with many tracts only being classified as an area of concentrated poverty or affluence for only a brief time – one can see that in spite of these changes, three tracts remain classified as areas of racially/ethnically concentrated poverty or relative poverty in each of the six time periods analyzed here. Tracts 3 and 4, corresponding roughly to the city's historically black communities in the East End and Northside, are classified as areas of concentrated poverty consistently over the past half-century, with Tract 3 only being classified as an area of relative poverty in 1980. The other, tract 11, which includes the historically black neighborhood along Georgetown Street, is classified as an area of relative poverty from 1970-2010 before shifting into being classified as an area of concentrated poverty in 2014. Even as these neighborhoods are largely in the same position they were in 45 years ago, these areas have also undergone significant change. In this time period, these tracts have seen anywhere from 40-80% decreases in the total number of black residents, and declines in the proportion of black residents between 4-29%. These three tracts are all also in the top 10 citywide in the percentage of total population lost from 1970-2014, ranging between a loss of 31% of the tract population in the case of tract 11 to nearly 70% of the population in tract 4.



Figure 3: Mapping Racially/Ethnically Concentrated Areas of Poverty and Affluence

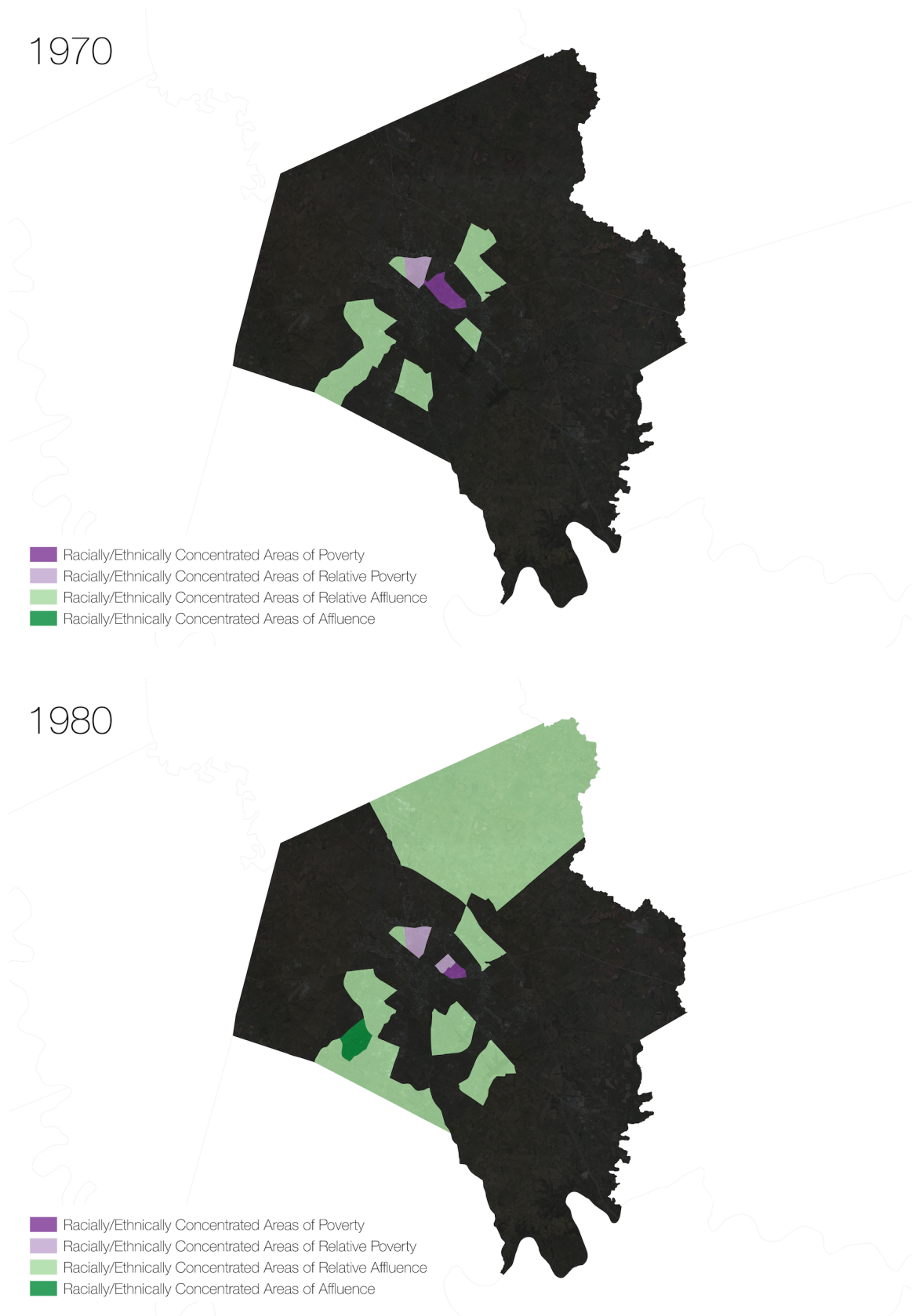
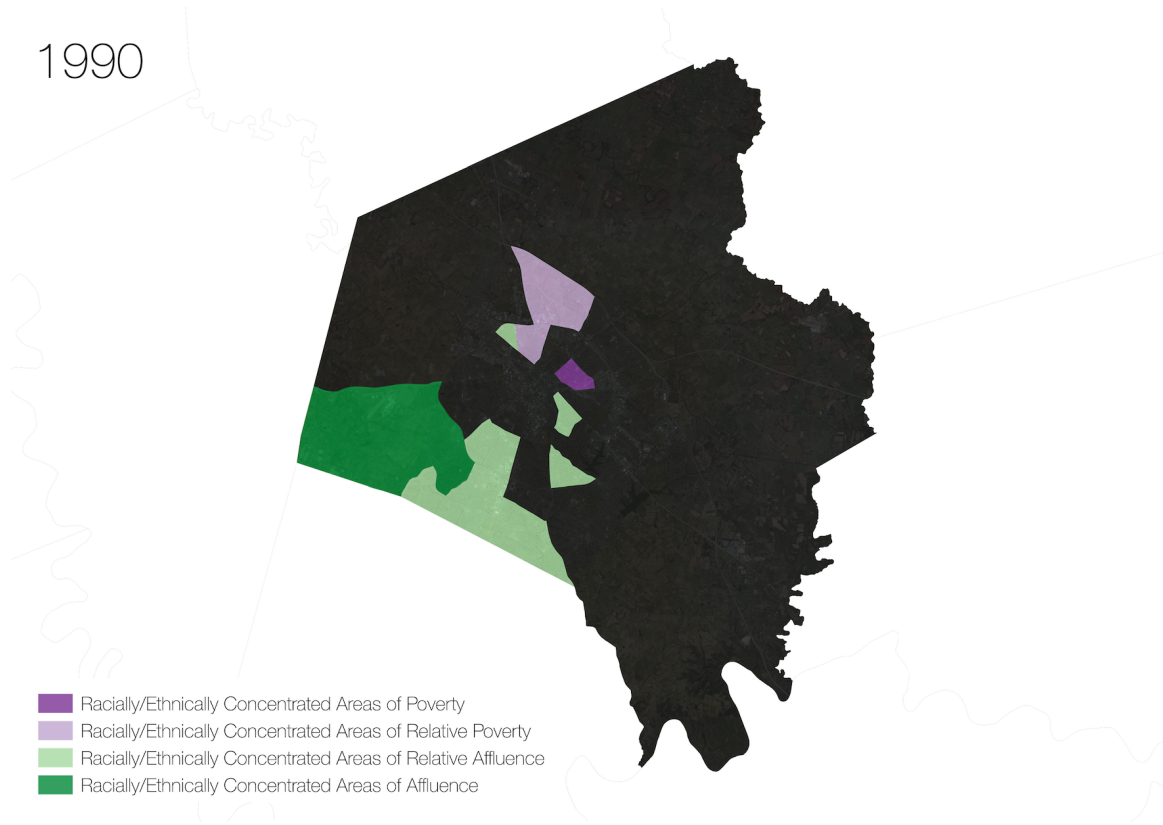


Figure 3, continued: Mapping Racially/Ethnically Concentrated Areas of Poverty and Affluence

1990



2000

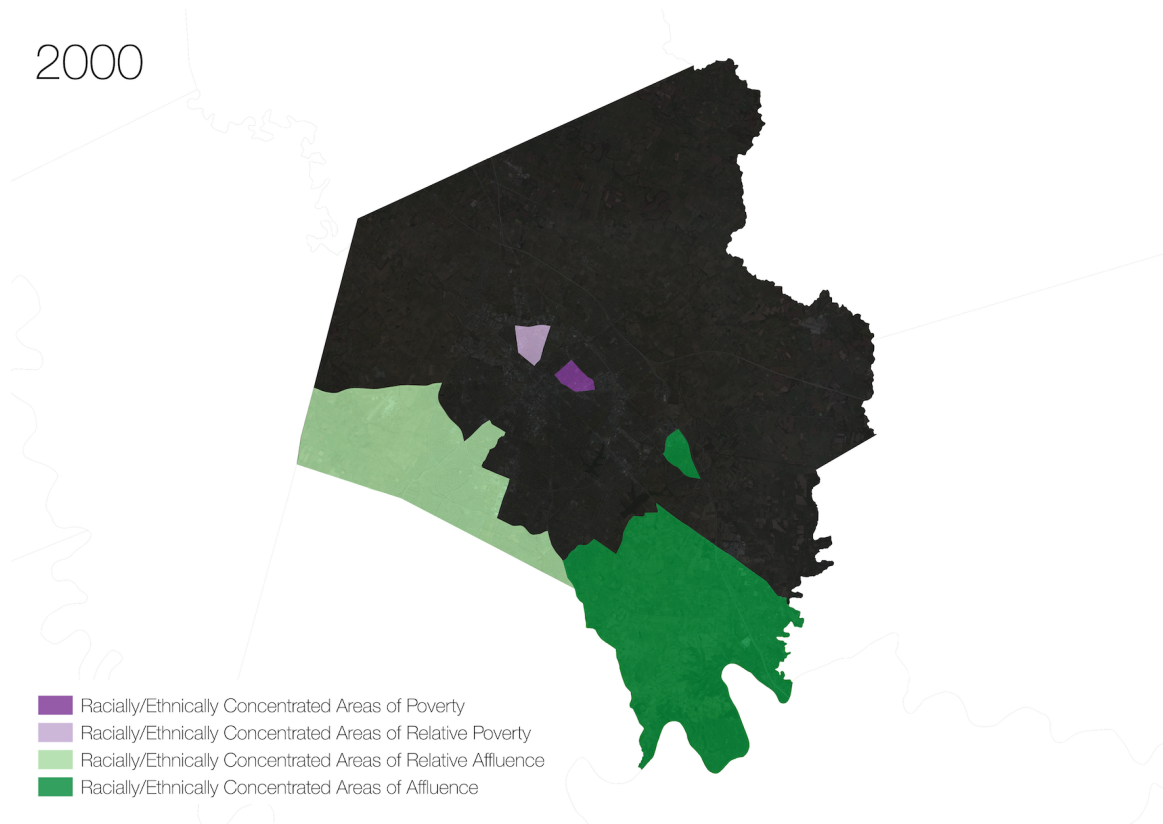
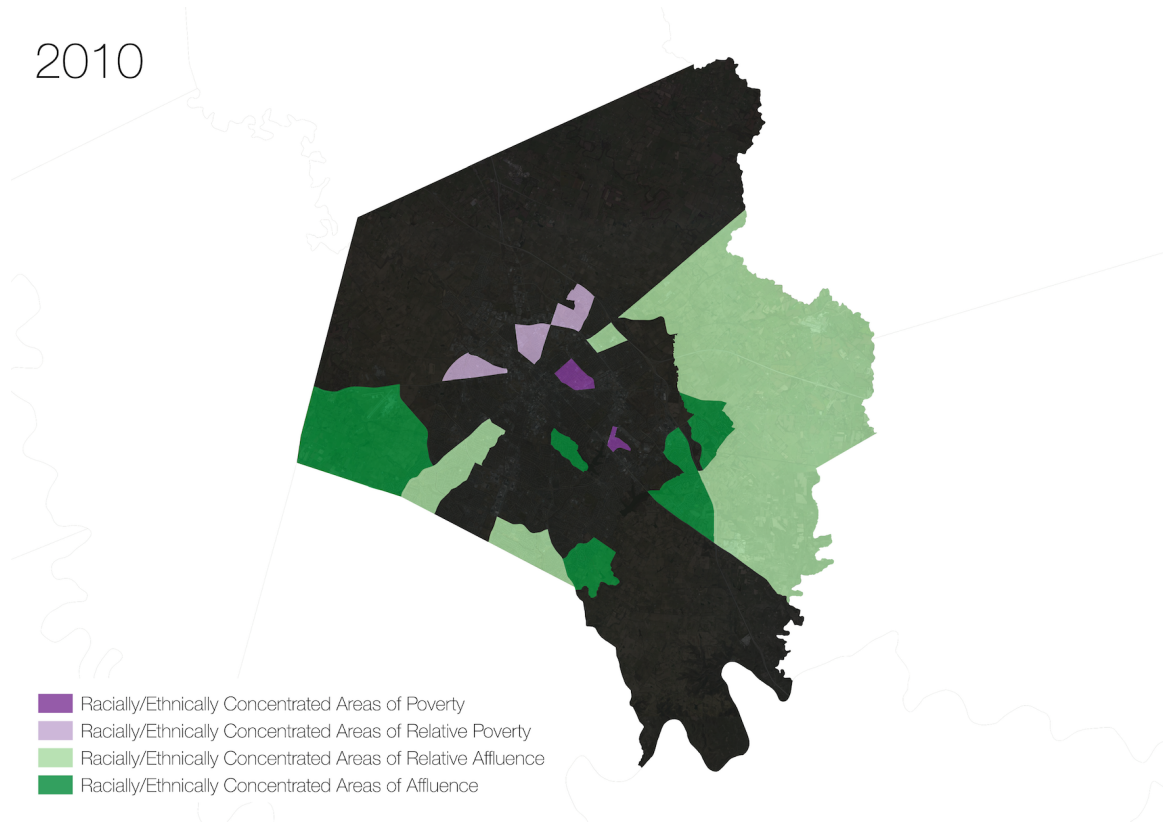
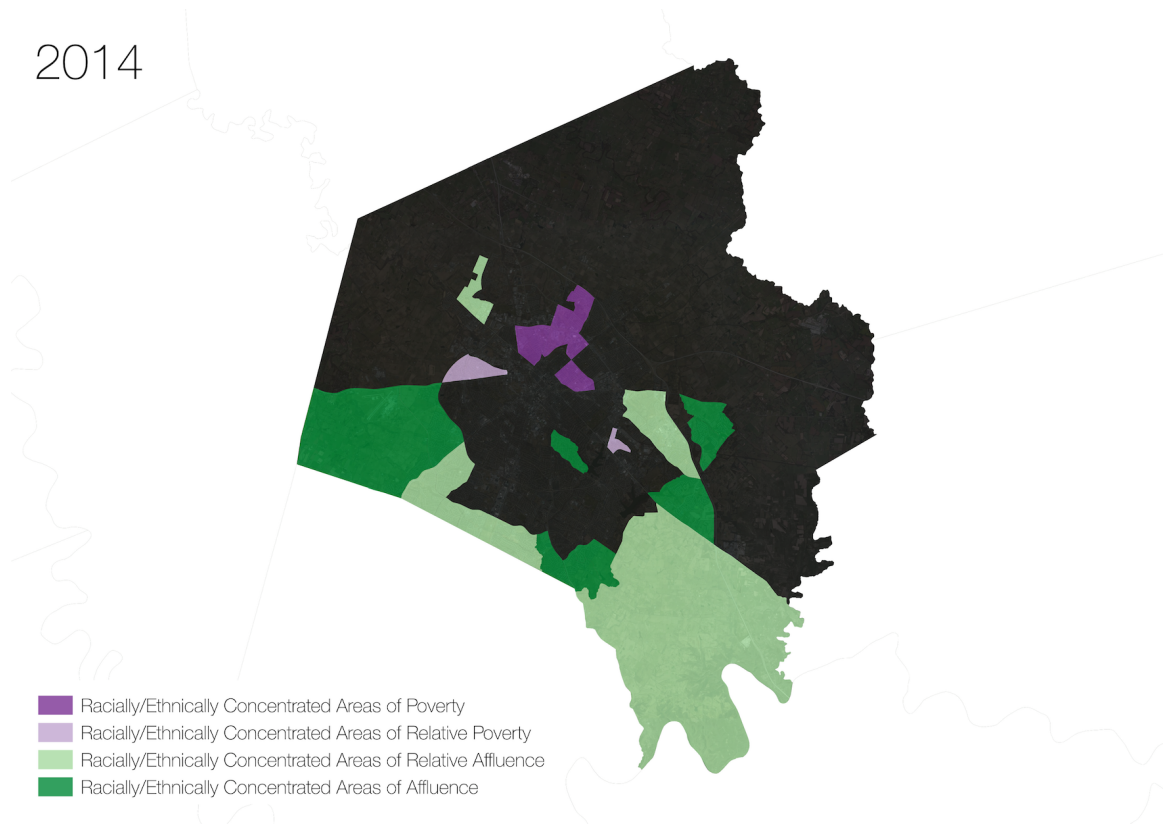


Figure 3, continued: Mapping Racially/Ethnically Concentrated Areas of Poverty and Affluence

2010



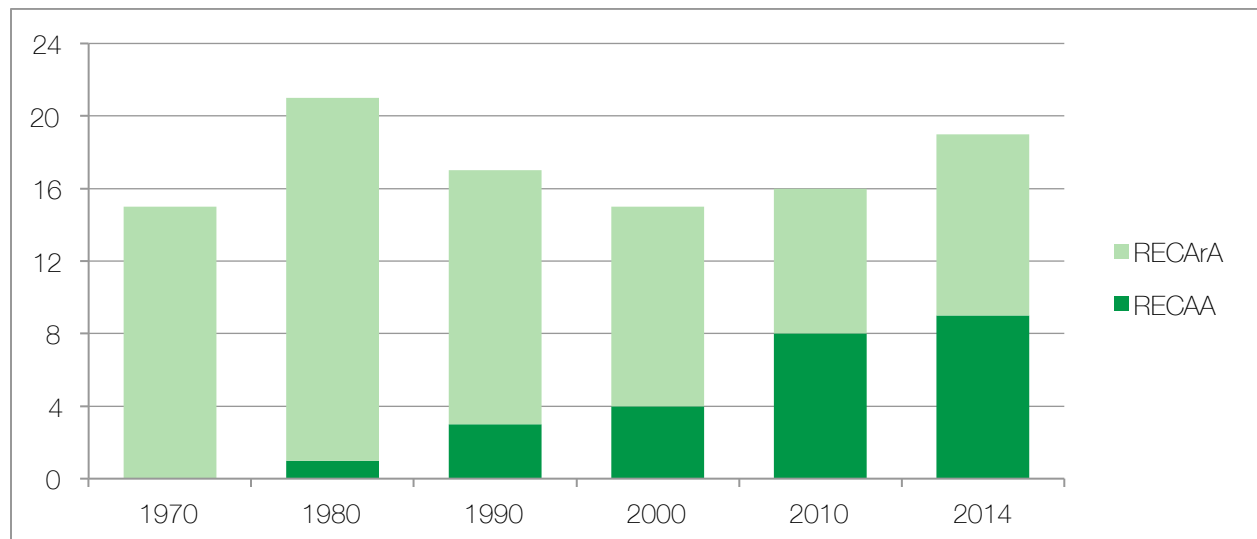
2014



Despite these demographic shifts, these areas of racially concentrated poverty have been remarkably durable, with no tract classified as an area of racially concentrated poverty having shifted to being classified as an area of racially concentrated affluence, or vice versa. This is particularly interesting given the periodic declines in concentrated poverty across Lexington seen in the 1970s and 1990s, which in part follows national trends (cf. Jargowsky 2003; Kingsley and Pettit 2003), as well as related processes of gentrification. But even if no tracts have seen such dramatic shifts, of the other tracts classified as racially/ethnically concentrated areas of poverty or relative poverty in 2014, four of the five have seen the city's largest decreases in the proportion of white residents from 1970-2014, with the percentage of white residents declining between 56-63% in tracts 20.01, 20.02, 38.04 and 39.10. Recognizing these facts requires us to grapple with the intentional decisions made over the past century and a half, whether by policymakers or individual residents, that have created and maintained these neighborhoods as highly segregated and impoverished.

Second, it is worth noting that Lexington's racially/ethnically concentrated areas of poverty are themselves spatially concentrated within the city. Even as the classification of different individual tracts has changed over time, the tracts classified as areas of racially/ethnically concentrated poverty have, with few exceptions, been located in Lexington's northern quadrant. Prior to the emergence of the Cardinal Valley and Woodhill neighborhoods along Versailles and Richmond Roads as enclaves of non-white poverty in 2010, all of Lexington's areas of racially/ethnically concentrated poverty were located in north Lexington in either the East End, Northside, Winburn or Georgetown Street neighborhoods. Looking at these areas in 2014, all five areas of concentrated poverty are located within Council districts 1 and 2, with the additional three relatively poor tracts located in districts 7 and 11. So even as the number of these tracts classified as areas of racially/ethnically concentrated poverty has grown over the past 45 years, the vast majority of the Lexington-Fayette Urban County Council has no such areas in their districts, and thus no direct stake in addressing the inequalities that these areas face.

*Figure 4: Growth in the Number of Racially/Ethnically Concentrated Areas of Affluence*



While the presence and growth of concentrated poverty has been underestimated in Lexington, it's just as important for our analysis to understand the dynamics of concentrated affluence. As Figure 4 above shows, concentrated affluence in Lexington is also growing. Comparing Figure 4 with Figure 1, it's evident that racially/ethnically concentrated affluence is actually far more widespread than racially/ethnically concentrated poverty in Lexington. Furthermore, concentrated affluence has *long* been a bigger problem than concentrated poverty. From 1970 to 2014, there are never more than eight tracts classified as experiencing some degree of racialized concentrated poverty, but never fewer than 15 tracts classified as areas of predominantly white concentrated affluence. Even as the number of areas of relative affluence have dominated over time, especially in 1980 when there were 20 such tracts, the number of tracts classified as racially/ethnically concentrated areas of affluence has grown the fastest of any single classification, going from being entirely absent from Lexington's landscape in 1970 to having nine such areas in 2014.

Unlike Lexington's areas of concentrated poverty, however, the city's areas of concentrated affluence have seen remarkable changes in their spatial distribution throughout the past half-century. Rather than being concentrated in only a few select locations that are relatively stable over time, the concentrations of affluent whites in the city have moved around consistently, tracking very closely with the development of new suburban neighborhoods on the city's fringes in recent decades. While some more centrally-located neighborhoods like Chevy Chase, Ashland, Bell Court and Montclair have largely been bastions of affluent whites over time, the most recent data points to an even further suburbanization of white affluence in Lexington. As of 2014, nearly all of the racially/ethnically concentrated areas of affluence and relative affluence in Lexington are located outside of Man o' War Boulevard, stretching from Versailles Road in the west all the way along the city's southern border with Jessamine County around to Winchester Road in the east. This pattern suggests that as new developments are constructed at the city's fringes, they are supporting and exacerbating trends towards growing racial and class segregation. Whereas the spatial clustering of predominantly poor and minority neighborhoods means that most of these areas are in just a couple of Urban County Council districts, this spatial dispersion of predominantly wealthy and white tracts around the city's fringes means that these tracts are located in parts of seven council districts. That is, while the city's most marginalized residents are represented by only a few on the council, more than half of the council represents the interests of affluent whites, giving even greater weight to these voices in matters of urban planning and policymaking.

#### IV. Discussion and Conclusion

The considerable growth of both concentrated poverty and concentrated affluence seen in our analysis suggests that Lexington is becoming an increasingly unequal and bifurcated city. More and more of the city is characterized by substantial racial and class segregation, with less interaction and intermixing between affluent whites and poor and working class people of color. This trend of growing inequality is supported by research from the Kentucky Center for Economic Policy, which shows that Fayette County has the fourth highest income inequality of

any Kentucky county, with the average income of the top 1% of earners being nearly 20 times greater than the average income of the bottom 99% (Pugel 2016).

But these discrepancies in income, which go beyond just the top 1%, are only further compounded by Lexington's worsening affordability crisis. According to the Urban Institute, Lexington has just 25 affordable and available housing units for every 100 extremely low-income households, a figure that falls to just 7 units for every 100 families when eliminating the possibility of federal housing subsidies (Urban Institute 2015). While Lexington has long been one of the least affordable places to live in Kentucky, these numbers have only worsened in the last ten to fifteen years. Currently, just four counties in the Commonwealth have fewer units available to extremely low-income families, none of which are as large as Lexington-Fayette County, nor do they experience the same levels of income inequality that would exacerbate such a crisis.<sup>3</sup>

Our analysis suggests that what affordable housing does exist in Lexington is spatially concentrated in such a way as to further exacerbate segregation and racially concentrated poverty. Indicators of racially/ethnically concentrated poverty and affluence are, however, only capable of identifying these patterns at a broad scale. While they can uncover those areas that characterized by greater degrees of segregation and inequality, this data doesn't explain all of the mechanisms by which this inequality is produced or experienced. In order to understand the more precise ways these neighborhoods have changed, future research ought to look at the role of interrelated processes of gentrification, mortgage lending, and property ownership, among other things, in order to understand how patterns of racial segregation help to produce areas of concentrated poverty and affluence, and vice versa.

While the problems of racially/ethnically concentrated poverty have no easy, single solution, it's important that any policies adopted to address this issue understand that the problem isn't inherently with these places or people, but rather the persistent inequalities *between* places. Simply forcing the city's poor and non-white residents out of the neighborhoods they had long been segregated in hasn't ameliorated the problems these individuals and families face, only moved them further out of view. Far from achieving the goals of the national policy consensus around the deconcentration of poverty, this report has demonstrated that concentrated poverty is actually at an all-time high in Lexington, and that it has a particular impact on people of color. At the same time, affluent whites have been segregating themselves within the city, further entrenching these inequalities and limiting the possibilities for cross-racial and cross-class interaction and upward socioeconomic mobility for the city's poor and working class. In the absence of proactively providing greater and more equal opportunities to Lexington's most marginalized residents, regardless of what type of neighborhood they live in, such a focus on concentrated poverty will only perpetuate, if not exacerbate, the problems faced by poor and working-class individuals and families. Moving forward, the city should proactively seek to reverse these longstanding patterns, ensuring that all Lexingtonians are able to affordably live in safe and healthy neighborhoods with access to the necessary services.

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<sup>3</sup> These four counties with fewer available housing units for extremely low-income households are Boone (20 units per 100 extremely low-income households), Anderson, Mercer and Woodford (23 units per 100) counties.

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