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## **Before the Bell Rings: The Effects of Negative Neighborhood Characteristics on Educational Achievement in Ohio Public Schools**

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# **Before the Bell Rings: The Effects of Negative Neighborhood Characteristics on Educational Achievement in Ohio Public Schools**

A Capstone Project Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the  
Requirements of the Renee Crown University Honors  
Program at Syracuse University

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Renee Crown University Honors

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Honors Capstone Project in African-American Studies

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## **Abstract**

Educational inequality is a salient issue plaguing the youth of America and is also jeopardizing the future of this nation. Before the Bell Rings is a two-part examination of the impact of discriminatory housing practices against blacks and subsequently the impact of negative neighborhood characteristics on educational achievement within Ohio public schools.

As blacks migrated from the South to northern cities they were met with discrimination in the form of restrictive covenants, redlining and other societal practices that clustered them together in inner-city locations. The historical analysis component of this study examines the effects of these discriminatory housing practices for blacks within Cleveland, Ohio and how the adverse effects of inner-city ghettos are seen today within the educational system.

The adverse effects are seen in negative neighborhood characteristics and this study examines the effects of poverty, rate of renter ship, and the rate of unemployment on math and reading scores for tenth grade students in Ohio Public Schools. Using data from the U.S. Census Bureau's Small Area Income and Poverty Estimates, the U.S. Census' School District Tabulation and test results from the Ohio Department of Education, this study finds that poverty is the only significant indicator of educational achievement and has a greater effect on math than reading scores. Educational inequality is a multifaceted issue and mediating negative neighborhood characteristics is only one of the many steps that must be taken toward a solution.

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Educational inequality is a salient issue plaguing the youth of America and is also jeopardizing the future of this nation. Inherent differences still exist within the educational system throughout this country, especially for inner-city youth, and this paper seeks to identify leading reasons why.

In this two-part study racial and economic segregation are highlighted as canons behind many of the societal issues that plague inner-city communities today. In this paper, I raise the question of whether or not poverty, rate of renter ship and rate of unemployment are significant indicators of potential educational achievement for Ohio public school youth. This study focuses on those issues as negative neighborhood characteristics that arise out of racial and subsequently economic segregation.

The first component of this study is a historical analysis of inner cities, of Cleveland, Ohio were created out of discriminatory societal practices and legislation against African Americans during the Great Migration and beyond. The historical component of this study offers insight into how geographic location has the potential to be a significant factor in the educational, economic and overall social opportunities one is privy to. This section also highlights how the issues that we face today are just further consequences of the historical occurrences of the past.

The second component of this study seeks to answer the question of whether or not negative neighborhood characteristics are significant factors in educational achievement for Ohio high school public school students by using linear regression testing. This section highlights the correlation between the

historical occurrences, as discussed in the first chapter, with the contemporary educational issues that youth are facing throughout the nation.

This research is one of great importance because the future of our nation is deeply rooted in the future of our youth, and if our school systems are failing them the future of this nation will subsequently fail. This study adds to current literature regarding the correlation between neighborhood characteristics and educational achievement by laying a historical foundation for greater insight as well as speaking from an insider's perspective. As an Ohio native, and the product of the public school system in one of the poor inner cities I know first hand how negative neighborhood characteristics impact educational opportunities. This paper argues that there is a direct correlation between negative neighborhood characteristics and educational attainment; however negative neighborhood characteristics is not the only answer. Educational inequality is a complex issue that has a great deal of variance, because there are students from the worst neighborhoods who have been able to rise above adversity and achieve, while students in affluent neighborhoods have not been able to reach their fullest potential. This study does not seek to assert solving negative neighborhood characteristics as the solution to the problems of the nation's educational system, but instead to highlight an integral piece to the puzzle.

**Chapter One**  
**Historical Analysis: The Emergence**  
**of the Inner City**

Here I Come!  
 Been saving all my life  
 To get a nice home  
 For me and my wife.

*White folks, flee—  
 As soon as you see  
 My problems  
 And me!*

Neighborhood's clean,  
 But the house is old.  
 Prices are doubled  
 When I get sold:  
 Still I buy.

*White folks, fly—  
 Soon as you spy  
 My wife  
 And I!*

Next thing you know,  
 All colored our neighbors are.  
 The candy store's  
 Turned into a bar:  
 White folks left  
 The *whole* neighborhood  
 To my black self.

*White folks, flee!  
 Still—here is me!  
 White folks, fly!  
 Here am I!*

-Langston Hughes  
 "A Little Song on Housing To Put in Your Pipe and Smoke"

In search of freedom and the acquisition of the "American Dream" millions of blacks uprooted themselves on an exodus from the Deep South. They left behind the shackles of slavery, the invisible chains of sharecropping, and the stifling pressures of Jim Crow segregation in hopes of creating a new and better life in the Midwest, Northeast and West. Beginning in the 1910s and continuing through the 1940s cities, especially in the Midwest, had monumental growth in their black population. Historian Kenneth Kusmer

(1976) reports that “between 1910 and 1920, Cleveland’s black population increased 308 percent, Detroit’s rose 611 percent and Chicago’s increased 148 percent” (Kusmer, 1976: 157). Much of the population growth in these cities was attributed to the aforementioned causes, but also to the economic promise that many northern cities offered during the industrial boom of wartime. Northern cities with liberal attitudes and an abolitionist history were offering blacks a humanistic existence and many jumped at the opportunity to have a better lifestyle for their families. It is also important to highlight that home ownership was viewed as a basic symbol of status in black communities of the South and a means to measure upward mobility, and Northern cities offered this mobility (Wiese, 2004). However, as the black population grew at a monumental rate the attitudes began to change and blacks were faced with white opposition. Discriminatory housing practices, intimidation, and even violence were tactics that whites employed as a means to keep blacks out of their neighborhoods. In the event that those tactics did not work, whites embarked on their own exodus to the suburbs leaving behind blacks clustered together in the inner city, just as Langston Hughes eloquently alluded to in his poem “A Little Song on Housing.”

With a poor predominately black inner city encircled by an affluent predominately white suburban outskirts, the community structure of Cleveland, Ohio, emerged out of the residential segregation that characterized the early 1900s. Using Census Tract data of 1910 and 1920 Kusmer (1976) highlights that in a ten-year time frame, all areas went from having less than a 25 percent

black population to ten areas having more than 25 percent and two areas having more than 50 percent (Kusmer 1976, 161). These numbers highlight how new black migrants were steered into communities with one another rather than being fully integrated into Cleveland society. As seen in Figure 1 between 1910 and 1920 the areas west of East 55<sup>th</sup> Street between—Euclid Avenue and the Cuyahoga River had the largest influx of blacks (Kusmer, 1976, 162). Kelly Miller, a reporter for the *Pittsburgh Courier*, visited Cleveland in 1917 and published a statement that echoed the immense clustering of blacks during this time period of how someone could “imagine himself in the heart of Hayti or Liberia. The segregated sections are as sharply meted out as if cut by a knife” (Kusmer, 1976: 163). A knife that sliced away at the integrationist history Cleveland once had and carved out a new landscape that gave shape to the ghettos of Cleveland (Kusmer, 1976). Blacks were not the only new ethnic groups in the Cleveland area, during this time Hungarian, Russian, Italian and other European immigrants migrated in hopes of a better life. As European immigrant populations dispersed throughout the city the black population however, became even more concentrated and by the “eve of the Great Depression, at least 90 percent of the city’s Afro-Americans lived within a region bound by Euclid Avenue on the north East 105<sup>th</sup> Street on the east, and Woodland Avenue to the south” (Kusmer, 1976: 165).

The large population shifts and concentration of blacks within the inner city caused a housing shortage despite the overcrowding of most of the housing units. The housing issue also gave landlords the opportunity to take

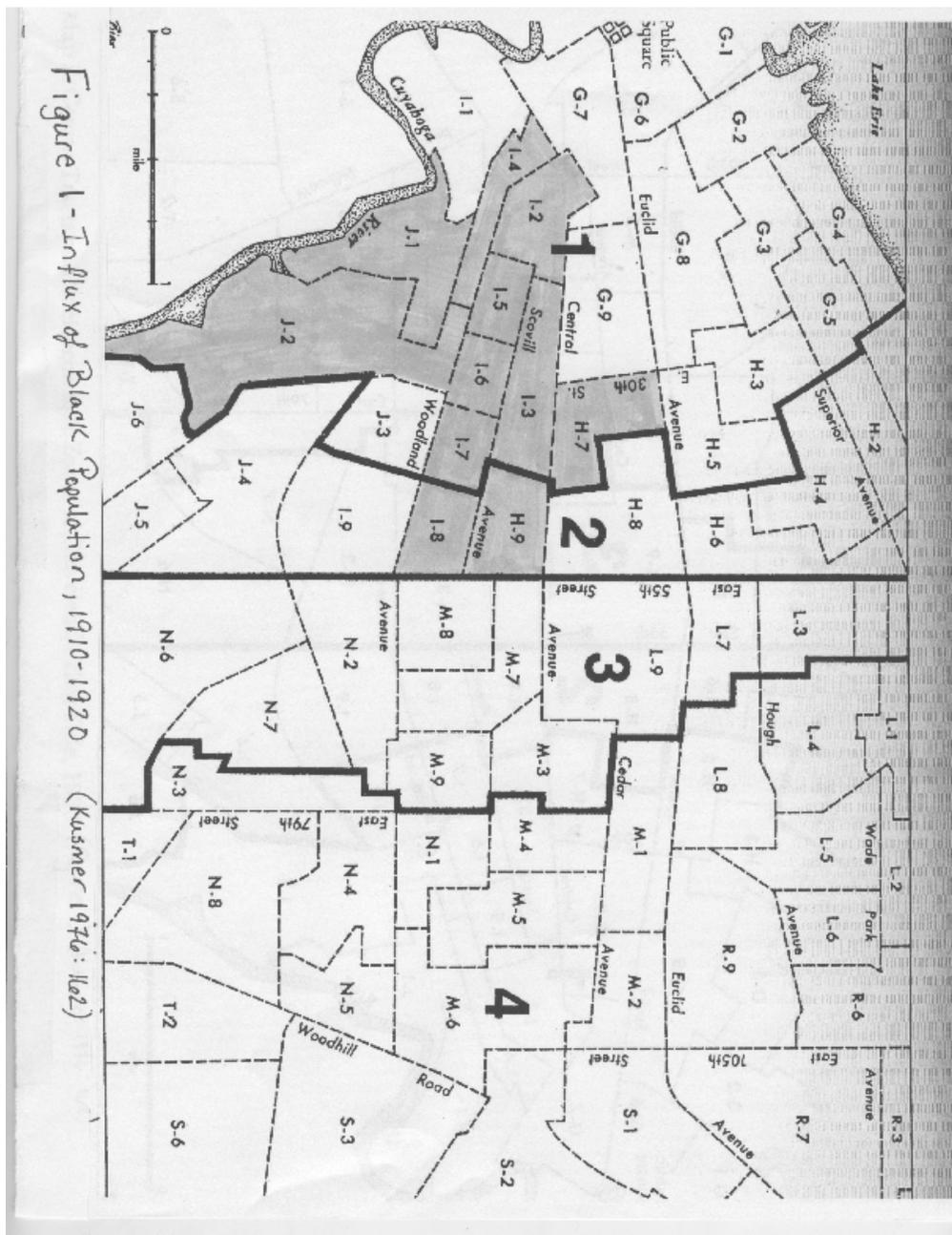


Figure 1- The influx of black residents between 1910-1920 was absorbed in the clustered areas highlighted above.

advantage of newly migrating blacks and charge them anywhere from 25 to 75 percent higher rent than was charged to whites living in similar housing units (Kusmer, 1976). As the housing issue nearly reached crisis proportion it can be best summarized through the words of Sociologist Douglass Massey:

As migration continued and housing pressures within the ghetto became intolerable, and as health, sanitary and social conditions deteriorated, middle-class black families were eventually driven across the color line into white neighborhoods adjacent to the ghetto. Their moves set off an escalating pattern of racial violence.

(Massey, 1993: 34)

As early as 1917, black middle class families were attempting to move out of the slums of the inner city Cleveland and into the developing suburbs. However whites, especially those who lived in neighborhoods adjacent to the expanding black ghettos, opposed blacks moving into their communities even if they were of the same socioeconomic standing (Kusmer, 1976). Whites used “mutual understandings or restrictive covenants that denied (in theory) the owner of the house the right to sell to Afro-Americans,” as means to keep blacks out of their neighborhoods (Kusmer, 1976: 167). Restrictive covenants were contractual agreements that legally bound an owner to not permit blacks to own, occupy or lease their property, and further held them accountable in the event the contract was broken (Massey, 1993). When mutual agreements did not achieve the desired means, whites resorted to intimidation and violence in the form stoning, bombing and general mob violence to keep blacks from intruding on their white space (Kusmer, 1976). The story of Dr. E.A. Bailey, a black physician who moved his family into the all white suburb of Shaker Heights, embodies the violent tactics that whites employed in order

to maintain their racially homogenous communities. Dr. Bailey was threatened, his house was bombed twice, he was shot at and his garage was lit on fire however, with the help of other black residents he was able to overcome the violent acts and continue living in his home (Kusmer, 1976). Dr Bailey's family was one of the few that were able to use their financial status to move out of all black communities, because a majority of middle and upper class families were forced to live in predominantly black neighborhoods (Kusmer, 1976).

The 1930s marked a time when the federal government created programs that offered low-cost loans to families to open up the market for homeownership; however, these programs further marked the marginalization of the black community. The Home Owner's Loan Association during the 1930's "provided funds for refinancing urban mortgages in danger of default and granted low-interest loans to former owners who had lost their homes through foreclosure to enable them to regain their properties" (Massey, 1993: 51). While the Home Owner's Loan Association gave whites the opportunity to regain their homes after the Great Depression, it also institutionalized the practice of "redlining" (Massey, 1993). Redlining established an appraisal system that evaluated the risks associated with loans given to specific neighborhoods. The system had four classifications or grades, A, B, C and D, which corresponded to the colors green, blue, yellow and red respectively (Home Owners Loan Corporation). The appraisal system ultimately tied property value and loan eligibility to race, as all-white neighborhoods

received the highest rating (A/green) and thus benefited from the governmental loans, while minority and mixed neighborhoods received the lowest ratings (D/red) and were denied loans (RACE—The Power of an Illusion). As white families were afforded billions of dollars in governmental aid they seized the opportunity from the 1930s throughout the 1960s to create a white suburbia on the outskirts of town away from the growing black inner city, which initiated the phenomenon of white flight in many major cities including Cleveland (RACE—The Power of an Illusion).

The PBS documentary RACE—The Power of an Illusion characterizes white flight as “the downward spiral” of a community. The spiral begins as white residents began to view the growing black population as a threat to their neighborhoods and their way of life they began to move away. Once residents relocate, the property value of the neighborhood declines changing its market value and transforming it into a poorer community accessible to poorer families. Adversely the poorer community now suffers from higher taxes because of their greater dependence on public services, which are largely funded through property taxes. With the wealth of the community diminished by the relocation of white wealthy families public services within the community now suffer and begin to diminish. Sanitation, police and fire protection, transportation and ultimately the school system all deteriorate due to lack of funding. The spiral ends when the community then hits rock bottom as business and investment wanes leaving it vulnerable to the construction of

highways, prisons, waste factories and other harmful entities (RACE—The Power of an Illusion).

Historian Andrew Wiese echoes the disparities between urban inner city space and suburban space when he argues that:

[R]ace and class subordination branded urban and suburban spaces. Residential locations were not neutral with respect to social and metropolitan spaces that had compounding advantages or disadvantages for those who lived in them...Racism not only limited black access to employment, credit, and public facilities, but it ensured that most African Americans lived in a racially separate and materially unequal world.

(Wiese, 2004: 7)

The racism and segregation of the 1960s further highlighted the racial inequalities that existed between blacks and whites that manifested itself not only in social interaction but residential spaces as well. As tensions mounted and urban uprisings and other violent acts erupted in ghettos throughout the country then President Lyndon B. Johnson commissioned a committee to identify the causes of the tension and create policies that prevent their reoccurrence (Massey, 1993). In 1968 the Kerner Commission reported to the President that the United States was “moving toward two societies, one black one white—separate and unequal (Massey, 1993: 3).” The Commission urged for policies that not only enriched the ghettos of America, but policies that also promoted integration, because the then current policies was:

T]o make permanent the division of our country into two societies: one, largely Negro and poor, located in the central cities; the other predominantly white and affluent located in the suburbs

(Massey, 1993: 3)

As middle class families in the 1960s and 70s migrated out of the ghettos they left behind communities that were destitute and lacked the institutions and resources that were vital for survival (Massey, 1993). Even as middle class black families had the opportunity to move to the suburbs they continued to face separate and sub par living conditions, as seen in Chagrin Falls Park, a suburb outside of Cleveland. Andrew Wiese characterized many of the black suburbs that were formed around this time as being visually unlike middle-class white suburbs, occupying cheap, often nuisance-prone land and were geographically isolated (Wiese, 2004). Chagrin Falls Park and other black suburbs to outsiders were seen as “slums,” “poverty pockets,” or even a “curse” but to the residents these areas represented much more “they were home, places where people had bought land, built homes, nurtured families and created communities (Wiese, 2004: 68). Black suburbs were a step up from the black ghettos of the inner city however; these areas were still plagued by the ills of discrimination in employment and lending which kept the neighborhoods poor and unable to improve and provide proper public services (Wiese, 2004). Racist sentiments felt by white residents of surrounding suburbs also maintained the slow development of black suburbs by refusing to share services and schools leaving them to survive on their own (Wiese, 2004).

Despite the passage of the 1968 Fair Housing Act, which prohibited discrimination in the sale, rental, and financing in house related transactions based on race, color, national origin etc, blacks still continued to suffer at the

hands of discriminatory housing practices (U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development). Appraisers continued to factor race into lending assessments and racial steering continued to cluster African-Americans into the same communities (RACE—The Power of an Illusion). Residential segregation took shape out of discriminatory practices and attitudes and has persisted in society until today. It is reported that as late as 1993, 86% of suburban whites still lived in areas that had less than a one percent black population (RACE—The Power of an Illusion).

The persistence of residential segregation is not a byproduct of happenstance, but it is instead the byproduct of federal policies and individual racism. Andrew Wiese argues that “black communities established by one generation served as the geographic and social foundation for the next,” which further supports how little has changed within the residential location of blacks in many major cities, especially Cleveland (Wiese, 2004: 3). The black population in Cleveland has increased; however, it still occupies similar Census Tract as seen in the 1920s.

Residential segregation is such a pertinent issue that is plaguing society especially the black community because:

Residential segregation is not a neutral fact; it systematically undermines the social and economic well-being of blacks in the United State. Because of racial segregation, a significant share of black America is condemned to experience a social environment where poverty and joblessness are the norm, where a majority of children are born out of wedlock, where most families are on welfare where educational failure prevails, and where social and physical deterioration abound. Through prolonged exposure to such an environment, black chances for social and economic success are drastically reduced.

(Massey, 1993: 2)

Massey argues that the negative neighborhood characteristics, which define the black American ghetto of joblessness, neighborhood deterioration and a poor education system, stem from the concentration of poverty created by residential segregation. As the lines of demarcation between the haves and the have-nots are drawn deeper and deeper between our communities the disparities become worse. It sets in motion a “set of mutually reinforcing and self-feeding spirals of decline into black neighborhoods” (Massey, 1993: 2). The concentration of poverty within black communities has adverse effects on the social welfare of residents, especially the youth in these communities.

The success of a community’s education system is closely related to the overall success of that community. It has been common knowledge that the better schools are in the better more affluent neighborhoods while the bad schools are located in the poorer bad neighborhoods. Massey argues that poverty has been associated with poor educational performance, and that residential segregation concentrates and reinforces educational disadvantage and social isolation (Massey, 1993). He further argues that by concentrating low-achieving students in particular schools, poor performance and low expectations become dominant (Massey, 1993), which can be seen in Cleveland as early as the Great Depression when schools began to change their curriculum as their student enrollment diversified (Kusmer, 1976). As schools transitioned from a white student body majority to a black majority, the focus on a liberal arts to focusing on mundane skills such as “sewing,

cooking, manual training, foundry work and sheet metal [work] (Kusmer, 1976: 184).”

Education lays the foundation for the future of America’s children, but when it is formed within the confines of segregation and poverty, it does not meet the needs of our youth. The next chapter of this study will highlight how negative neighborhood characteristics have a direct effect on educational achievement. The next chapter also includes findings of the linear regression conducted to test the significance of poverty, the rate of unemployment, and the rate of renter ship on educational achievement of public schools students on The Ohio Graduation Test.

**Chapter Two**  
**Contemporary Consequences: How**  
**the Past is Impacting Today**

### **Statement of the Problem**

The U.S. Supreme Court *Brown v. Board of Education* (1954) decision overturned the “separate but equal doctrine” that was established by the US Supreme Court *Plessy v. Ferguson* (1896) decision. *Brown v. Board* (1954) ruled that separate was inherently unequal and that public schools needed to become racially integrated for the sake of equality. However, more than 50 years later, inherent differences still exist within the educational system across the country. There is inequity in funding, resources, teachers and overall viability of school districts throughout the country. Race and socio-economic standing have tremendous implications on the educational achievement of students, especially if they are low-income and African-American. Studies have shown that “by the time they reach fourth grade, children living in low-income communities are already two to three grades behind their higher-income peers” (Teach For America, 2010). Educational inequality is just another ramification of the life in inner-city low-income neighborhoods. As American schools “Race to The Top” under President Obama’s new administrative initiative, it is important to ponder whether schools are beginning the race in same position or are some already halfway to the top while others are stuck on the bottom. What are the inherent differences between these schools? What makes the experience of an inner-city student so different from that of a student in a suburban environment; is it is the neighborhood in which it is located? Furthermore, it is important to

contemplate the state of the children within these schools. If a child is hungry and the growl of their stomach is the only thing they can hear, how can they learn? If a child is forced to walk past abandoned buildings, drug dealers, and through gang territory just to get to school how much hope can they have for their future?

More than 50 years have passed since the *Brown v. Board of Education* (1954) decision and America's children are still receiving separate and inherently unequal education; when will it be enough? When will all students in low-income communities graduate from high school by age 18 instead of just half (Teach For America, 2010)? When will at least half if not all of students growing up in poverty, graduate from college instead of only one in ten (Teach For America, 2010)?

### **Literature Review**

As the United States of America attempts to assert itself as a “melting pot” democracy, the reality of this nation is quite the contrary. The reality is that despite countless legislation and decades of attempts, this nation still operates in a segregationist and unequal manner. Residential segregation may be the most blatant manifestation of our divided nation and has tremendous implications on school segregation and subsequent inequalities. Recent studies have shown that 72% of blacks, 76% of Latinos, but only 11% of whites attend schools that are not more than 50% white (Goldsmith, 2009). Pat Goldsmith (2009) focused on the impact of racial segregation on educational

attainment. Using data from the National Educational Longitudinal Study 1988-2000 and information from the 1990 Census he conducted a study on the long-term effects of segregation on educational attainment. The research was focused on the question of whether neighborhoods' or schools' proportion of black and/or Latino students during high school influence later educational attainment. Goldsmith measured the proportion of blacks and Latinos in schools from the number of non-Hispanic black and Hispanic, as reported by the school administrator. The neighborhood proportions were gathered from number of non-Hispanic black and Hispanic members of the residential zip code area of the schools examined (Goldsmith, 2009: 1924). Educational attainment was measured in five categories: lacks a high-school diploma or equivalent; has high school diploma or equivalent, but no post secondary enrollment; has post secondary enrollment but not a post-secondary degree or license; earned a license or an associate's degree, but no higher degree or license; earned a four-year degree or more (Goldsmith, 2009: 1923). The study found that the proportion of black and Latino students with a school negatively impact later educational attainment, as the proportion of these students increases later educational attainment decreases (Goldsmith, 2009: 1934). On the contrary, the proportion of blacks and Latinos within a neighborhood was found to be an insignificant indicator of later educational attainment. Goldsmith concluded that "desegregating high schools will improve the long-run educational attainment of students from predominantly black and predominantly Latino schools" (Goldsmith, 2009: 1936).

Nancy St. John and Ralph Lewis (1971) also examined the impact of race on educational attainment in their study of 900 black and white sixth-graders in 36 inner-city schools. Using cross-tabular and multiple regression analysis St. John and Lewis raised the following research questions: is there a significant positive relation between school percentage white and achievement; is the relation the same whether the independent variable is measured over time or at one point in time; is the relation the same whether the dependent variable is reading or math; and is the relationship the same for black and for white children (St. John, Lewis, 1971: 70)? The study found that there is a positive relationship between the cumulative and current school percentage of white students and academic achievement in math and reading (St. John, Lewis, 1971: 71). They concluded that the relationship between the racial compositions of schools and educational achievement is more significantly found in mathematics than in reading; and that the “relationship between cumulative racial context and achievement is stronger for white children than for black congregation (St. John and Ralph Lewis, 76).

James Ainsworth (2002) used random selection of 25 eighth graders in about 1,000 randomly selected middle schools from the National Educational Longitudinal Study of 1988, as well as linked information from the 1990 census for neighborhood level analysis to create regression tables to test the relationship between neighborhood characteristics and educational achievement. Ainsworth used the math and reading test scores of students to measure educational achievement, while neighborhood characteristics were

measured with a four point criteria: neighborhood high-status residents; neighborhood residential stability; neighborhood economic deprivation; and neighborhood racial/ethnic diversity (Ainsworth, 2002: 124). Ainsworth's research raised questions such as which neighborhood characteristics influence educational outcomes, and how are neighborhood effects on educational achievement mediated (Ainsworth, 2002: 133)? The results of Ainsworth's linear regressions found that there is a direct link between neighborhood disadvantages of: low proportion of high-status residents, low neighborhood stability, high neighborhood economic deprivation, and decreased educational attainment of the youth in the respective neighborhoods. Of the tested criteria of neighborhood characteristics, neighborhood economic deprivation and greater prevalence of high status residents had more significant outcomes.

Using data compiled on 2000 5<sup>th</sup>-8<sup>th</sup> grade public school students between 1999-2000 from the Texas Schools Microdata Panel, scores from the Texas Assessment of Academic Skills and census data, Paul Jargowsky and Mohamen El Komi (2009) tested the correlation between neighborhood characteristics and school contexts on math and reading scores of fifth through eight grade students. Neighborhood characteristics were defined as "the poverty rate in the school's census tract, percent of children in married couple families and the percent of adults who are college graduates" (Jargowsky and El Komi, 2009, 14). School context was defined to include: the percent of students eligible for free and reduced price lunch, turnover meaning students

who attended a different school in the past year, and the average math or reading score of a student in the school/grade (Jargowsky and El Komi, 2009, 13). Their research concluded that neighborhood characteristics play a significant role in school environment and context. According to their regression results, neighborhood socioeconomic conditions affect student test scores supporting previous claims that the worse off a neighborhood the worse off are its students. They argue that schools are more or less a microcosm of the neighborhood they are located in, and that reducing the concentration of poverty and economic segregation could be the simplest way to decrease the grave inequalities that exist between schools (Jargowsky and El Komi, 2009).

Another important study that highlights the impact of neighborhood risk factors on educational attainment of students is that of Sara Whipple, Gary Evans, Rachel Barry and Lorraine Maxwell (2010), which examines the impact of ecological factors on educational attainment. Ecological factors were divided into school cumulative risk and neighborhood cumulative risk. School cumulative risk was measured by a series of factors such as: inexperienced teachers; teacher absences; and the building quality. The measurement of neighborhood cumulative risk included: the number of households living below the poverty line; proportion of single parent female headed households; the proportion of vacant buildings and more (Whipple, Evans, Barry, Maxwell, 2010: 2-3). Using standardized test scores in English and Mathematics of 609 New York City public elementary schools to demonstrate educational achievement, and Census data to identify

neighborhood risk factors, Whipple et al (2010) found that neighborhoods with multiple risk factors have fewer students that meet academic standards. They found that “school and neighborhood-level cumulative risk exposure predict school-wide achievement both singularly and in combination” and that “schools located in areas with higher levels of cumulative risk perform worse on standardized achievement tests” (Whipple et al, 2010, 4). Using multivariate-regression they concluded that the percentage of students meeting school-level achievement significantly decreases as the number of neighborhood and school risk factors increase (Whipple et al, 2010).

Another study conducted by Catherine L. Garner and Stephen W. Raudenbush (1991) examined the relationship between neighborhood deprivation and educational attainment, which coincides with the negative neighborhood characteristics presented in previous studies. Their study was conducted with data from the 1981 Scotland Census of Population and Scottish Young People’s Surveys conducted by the Centre for Educational Sociology at the University of Edinburgh (Garner, Raudenbush 1991: 254). To test the supposed effects of neighborhood deprivation on educational attainment they employed a hierarchical linear regression model and defined neighborhood deprivation in terms of sociodemographic, economic and housing indicators (Garner, Raudenbush 1991: 257). A deprivation score was measured based on the number of single-parent families, family size, unemployment, low-earning socioeconomic groups, overcrowding within houses number of vacant dwellings and more specific factors (Garner,

Raudenbush 1991: 257). The results of the regression model found that there was a significant and negative association with educational attainment after controlling for prior attainment and family background (Garner, Raudenbush 1991: 258). It more specifically found that “being from a large family, or a single-parent family or a family in which the father is currently unemployed each has a negative effect on attainment” (Garner, Raudenbush 1991: 258). Garner and Raudenbush conclude that neighborhood deprivation plays a significant role in the educational outcomes of students and if policy is created to alleviate educational disadvantage it must encompass broader initiatives that address the larger community as well as the school because they work together (Garner, Raudenbush 1991: 251).

Sophia Catsambis and Andrea A. Beveridge (2001) widened the scope of examination, as they examined the effects of family, neighborhood and school characteristics on educational outcomes. Their research combines the more specific studies done by leading scholars, and they argue that family, neighborhood and school characteristics are overlapping spheres that impact educational attainment of youth (Catsambis, Beveridge, 2001: 24). Data collected from the 1988 National Educational Longitudinal Study and US Census Catsambis and Beveridge sought to answer the question “in what ways do parental educational practices, neighborhood and school influence students’ achievement in the eighth grade (Catsambis, Beveridge, 2001: 6)?” The variable neighborhood characteristic was measured as a composite of factors that included: percentage of female-headed households, percentage of

high school dropouts, percentage on welfare, percentage below poverty, and racial composition (Catsambis, Beveridge, 2001: 8). School characteristics were measured by: the location of the school, percentage of minority students within the school, student-teacher ratio, and the academic climate of the school (Catsambis, Beveridge, 2001: 9). The results of the research show that schools that have a higher number of students receiving free and reduced lunch have lower mathematical achievement, and that there are a variety of ways that neighborhood characteristics are linked to mathematical achievement (Catsambis, Beveridge, 2001: 21). The study concludes that there is a direct and indirect association between family, neighborhood and school characteristics on achievement that is most profoundly seen within disadvantaged youth.

Jonathan Crane (1991) enters the discussion of the effect of neighborhood characteristics on educational attainment from a unique perspective that examines the affect of neighborhood characteristics on dropout probability. Crane (1991) uses data found in the 1970 US Census's Public Uses Microdata Samples (PUMS) to randomly select 95,512 teenagers for his probability analysis. Crane (1991) argues that youth within poor neighborhoods or ghettos are exposed to epidemics of social problems, which exposes them to an increased risk of dropping out and childbearing (Crane 1991: 1226). The probability analysis found that there was a sharp increase in probability of dropping out across race categories and gender of students in disadvantaged neighborhoods compared to those of more affluent

neighborhoods (Crane 1991: 1236). Another key finding of the study was that the sizeable increase of dropout probability of black males in urban ghettos is not seen in black females (Crane 1991: 1239). Crane (1991) concluded that negative neighborhood characteristics that plague ghettos affect all youth regardless of race, but especially affect black males in their likelihood to drop out of school. He argues that policies should be implemented that, promote neighborhood improvement strategies because they have the potential to be effective in reducing the dropout rate of students (Crane 1991: 1252).

Another study that analyzes the correlation between neighborhood factors and the rate of high school dropout is Shane Jimerson, Byron Egeland, L. Sroufe and Betty Carlson (2000). Jimerson et al, (2000) used descriptive statistics, regression models, and discriminant function analysis to evaluate the longitudinal sample of 177 children and their families. This study was designed to explore the developmental processes and precursors that lead to a student dropping out of high school and combines neighborhood, family, school and individual factors into the analysis (Jimerson et al, 2000: 527). The results of this study find that a child's early home environment and quality of early care giving are strong indicators of whether the student remained in a traditional educational program or dropped out of high school. They further found that measures of IQ, SES, problem behaviors, academic achievement, parent involvement from elementary school through adolescence were also significant predictors of educational attainment (Jimerson et al, 2000: 542-3). The findings led to the conclusion that the rate of high school dropouts is

related to pre-existing factors of their household environment, parent involvement, socioeconomic states and overall neighborhood environment that affect students before they even enter school (Jimerson et al, 2000: 542).

When examining the consequences of residential segregation, Massey (1990) drew attention to how it concentrated poverty in certain areas and wealth in others. Many scholars have analyzed the effect of poverty on educational attainment as a complimenting argument to those raised by the aforementioned scholars who focused on broader overarching neighborhood characteristics. The following literature speaks to the correlation between economic factors and educational attainment.

Susan Meyer (2001) highlights leading hypotheses regarding the correlation between economic segregation and educational attainment, and creates a study that relies upon longitudinal data from the Census and the Panel Study of Income Dynamics of 3,240 respondents. Meyer examines various Metropolitan Statistical Areas for changes overtime in the level of economic segregation as well as the changes in educational attainment (Meyer, 2001: 158). The results of her research found that a state's level of economic inequality between census tracts affects children's educational attainment; however the state's level of economic segregation had no significant affect (Meyer, 2001: 162). Meyer's results lead her to conclude "an increase in economic segregation exacerbates differences in educational attainment between high and low-income children" (Meyer, 2011: 166). She further concluded, "an increase in economic inequality that is distributed

between census tracts increases the gap in educational attainment between high-and low-income children more than an increase in inequality that is distributed within neighborhoods” (Meyer 200: 166). This study highlights how educational attainment is effected by the economic differences between census tracts, and previous studies have shown that residential segregation can cause these stark economic differences.

Jeanne Brooks-Gunn and Greg J. Duncan (1997) examined how poverty affects children and how extended poverty further affects children. Using data from the 1988 National Health Interview Survey Child Health Supplement and National Center for Educational Statistics to create a random sample of 1,705 students Brooks-Gunn and Duncan (1997) aggregated the information in cross-tabulations. The study found that the timing of poverty and how long a child is exposed to poverty affects their overall achievement, as well as other factors in their quality of life. Brooks-Gunn and Duncan (1997) also concluded that family income has a stronger influence on a child’s achievement and ability than emotional outcomes. This conclusion is supported by their findings that children living below the poverty threshold are more likely to experience learning disabilities and developmental delays (Brooks-Gunn and Duncan, 1997). Poverty also plays a role in a child’s educational attainment to an extent that a 10% increase in family income equates to a 2% increase in the number of school years completed (Brooks-Gunn and Duncan, 1997). Low-income families have fewer options and are forced to live in areas that are populated by other low-income families and are

characterized by social disorganization and few resources for child development (Brooks-Gunn and Duncan, 1997). This study extends the examination of neighborhood characteristics by other scholars, by focusing on one negative neighborhood characteristic and seeing the adverse effects on youth.

Sarah Lubienski and Corinna Crane (2010) challenge the use of basic indicators such as free-lunch eligibility that scholars commonly employ when examining the socioeconomic backgrounds of students. They used the 1998-99 kindergarten class of the Early Childhood Longitudinal Study (ECLS) to determine which background characteristics are the most effective in predicting the educational achievement of the students. The study used the following questions to guide the research: “which ECLS-K home resource and climate measures are the most significant predictors of students’ reading and mathematics achievement at the start of kindergarten? Which of these variables are also significant predictors of kindergarten through fifth grade gains in achievement?” (Lubienski, Crane, 2010: 6). The variables employed in this study focused on the home resources and experiences the students were exposed to in an attempt to broaden the examination of a student outside of the traditional socioeconomic status composite. The variables included household information such as number of children in the household, and parent’s marital status; parenting practices that included time spent reading to the child, and television habits; child care, child’s health and school involvement and connection (Lubienski, Crane, 2010: 7). Lubienski and Crane

do not discredit the argument that socioeconomic status is among one of the strongest predictors of academic outcomes, however their study finds that the number of children in a household, mother's age at first birth, the number of children's books in a child's home and other related factors were significant predictors of math and reading scores (Lubienski, Crane, 2010:22). The conclusions of this study urge scholars to pay close attention to other factors in a student's background that may complicate their situation more so than just their socioeconomic status when attempting to draw conclusions between academic achievement and socioeconomic status.

William Henderson (2002) enters the discussion on the correlation between neighborhood characteristics and educational attainment from a unique perspective, which further highlights the complexity of this issue. From a legal perspective he examines the social ramifications of the school desegregation order of *Reed v. Rhodes* (1976) in Cleveland, OH. Critics of the forced integration argued that it was the detriment of the Cleveland public school system however Henderson argues "the educational crisis is the inevitable outcome of several economic, social and demographic trends that began in the early—1900s (Henderson, 2002: 461)." This article highlights how demographic trends of mass racial migrations rather than court ordered desegregation explain the "persistent pattern of racial and socioeconomic isolation" (Henderson, 2002: 547) within public schools. Another key finding is that combination of the racial and socioeconomic isolation can be detrimental to the educational achievement of students as seen through

examples of the Cleveland, East Cleveland and Warrensville Heights school districts. These districts are in areas with highly segregated housing patterns, which subsequently leads to 80.1-100% minority student enrollment, and were all identified as districts in academic emergency (Henderson 2002).

Every aforementioned scholar takes a different position on how educational disparities have arisen and continue to plague our society. Some have drawn correlations between family characteristics while others have attributed it neighborhood factors. Some have attributed it to racial segregation while others have attributed it to socioeconomic factors. Each argument offers integral insight into solving this complex issue. Educational disparity between students of different races and socioeconomic statuses is not clear-cut and is not the result of one factor, but instead a consequence of an array of unequal and separatist practices. The existing research has served as a foundation to the formulation of my hypothesis and the definition of my variables as explained later. This study seeks to extend the existing research by examining the effects of negative neighborhood characteristics such as poverty, unemployment and renter status on the educational achievement of Ohio public school children.

### **Formulation of Hypothesis**

This paper seeks to answer the question of whether or not negative neighborhood characteristics of poverty, unemployment and renter-ship have a significant effect on educational achievement of students as seen through

their math and reading scores. The highlighted literature offered arguments that illustrated the relationship between many societal, family and school factors that may explain the disparities within educational achievement and attainment. Some have argued that schools are a microcosm of the neighborhood in which they are located, and the problems that students face within their communities and homes travel with them into the halls of their schools. This argument is supported by the common perception that “good schools” are located in “good neighborhoods” and vice versa. As a contrast to this argument leading scholars including Emile V. Siddle Walker have argued that this is not always the case and that through a mutual investment from the community and the school, students can overcome restrictive circumstances to achieve true academic success (Siddle Walker 2000). Despite contrasting arguments, I maintain my hypothesis that rates of poverty, unemployment and renter-ship will have a negative relationship on educational achievement. Meaning, as the prevalence of these negative characteristics increases, the educational achievement decreases.

This hypothesis is not only rooted in the foundational knowledge my literature review equipped me with; it is also rooted in my own personal experiences as a by-product of an impoverished community and school district. I am a living testament to the immense potential found in the children within the low-income and forgotten neighborhoods across the country. I was raised in a female-headed, single parent household, in a deteriorated neighborhood that is highly segregated racially and economically, while also

being riddled with high crime and poor schools. However, I was able to beat the odds and become a different statistic, a college graduate. I have witnessed first hand the disparities between my community, and most of all my school in comparison to other more affluent and white communities, and from there the question of why arose. As poverty increases, as unemployment increases, and renter-ship increases, it seems as if the resources accessible to schools decreases. This paper seeks to identify if these identified negative characteristics are truly significant in the educational outcomes of students, in an attempt to create solutions that effectively address the dilemma of educational inequality plaguing many communities.

### **Research Design**

This study examines school districts in Ohio to analyze the effects of neighborhood characteristics on educational attainment for 10<sup>th</sup> graders. Neighborhood characteristics were coded in this manner in an attempt to address leading differences between communities, and were measured in terms of poverty, unemployment and renter-ship. Poverty was chosen because in previous research it was established as a variable that offered an enhanced examination of the neighborhood population. The rate of employment was employed in an attempt to highlight the difference in economic and job opportunities within various communities. Finally, the rate of renter-ship was used to illustrate the differences between communities with a low rate of renter-ship and those with higher rates; especially since school funding for

Ohio schools comes from property taxes. The dependent variable of educational achievement was measured in terms of passage of the math and reading portions of the Ohio Graduation Test. The Ohio Graduation Test is a mandatory assessment of all 10<sup>th</sup> grade students and is a determinant of a student's graduation.

Ohio was chosen as the focus of this research because as an Ohio native I am highly invested in studying my own community. I entered this research with the desire to find a possible solution to the problems that plagued my community and believed the best way to do that was through focused research. The historical component of this study highlights aspects of Ohio's history during the Great Migration and laid the foundation for the subsequent focus on the complexity of Ohio.

### **Methodology**

The data for this study was collected on a community-level based upon school district distinctions. The data used for the rate of poverty was collected from the U.S. Census Bureau's Small Area Income and Poverty Estimates (SAIPE) of School Districts for Ohio. The U.S. Census' School District Tabulation (STP2) was utilized for the rate of unemployment and rate of renter-ship. The rate of unemployment was calculated by adding together all of the possible employment and dividing by the total number of males and females out of the labor force, as identified in the STP2. An issue of validity does arise with this variable because it is not clear how the survey defines "in"

versus “out” of the labor force, which could encompass those who are retired, disabled or even receiving public assistance. The data for poverty was derived from the SAIPE and was defined as a poverty status that was calculated based on a family’s income in comparison to the income cutoff designated for a family of that size.

Educational achievement data was collected from the Ohio Department of Education’s Ohio Graduation Test Preliminary Results of the March 2005 Administration in Public Schools. The test results from the March 2005 exam were used in this study because the graduating class of 2007 was the first class required to take the test as 10<sup>th</sup> graders as a requirement for graduation. I more specifically, used the results from only public schools to encompass a wider range of students, with potentially similar public and government resources. As a standardized test, the Ohio Graduation Test measures a student’s ability to meet expected skills at the end of their 10<sup>th</sup> grade year and the passage of all five parts (Writing, Reading, Math, Science and Social Studies) are required for graduation. Ohio established that only students who pass the Ohio Graduation Test, or meet certain criteria, are able to receive a high school diploma. I chose to use the scores from the math and reading portions to highlight a student’s educational ability because other studies (Jargowsky and El Komi, 2009; Ainsworth, 2002; St. John and Ralph Lewis, 1971) identified math and reading scores as a valid measure of educational achievement.

For the scope of this study, a sample of 72 schools districts was used as a result of the available data from the US Census' School District Tabulation (STP2). The School District Tabulation only included data for the 72 districts included in this study, and through the National Center for Education Statistics data from other surveys were matched to the respective school districts based on an id number assigned to each school district.

The hypothesis of a negative relationship between neighborhood characteristics and educational achievement will be tested by examining the significance of poverty, unemployment and renter-ship on math and reading scores of Ohio 10<sup>th</sup> graders in 2005. Using SPSS software a linear regression will be conducted in the Analysis and Assessment section that will illustrate the direction and the size of the effect of the outlined neighborhood characteristics on educational achievement.

### **Analysis and Assessment**

#### *General Findings Concerning Educational Achievement Effects*

The hypothesis that the neighborhood characteristics of poverty, unemployment and renter-ship have a negative effect on educational achievement as seen through the reading and math scores of Ohio students was partially supported through the data.

#### *Findings Concerning the Effects on Reading Achievement*

Table 1 demonstrates the effects of each independent variable on reading scores of 10<sup>th</sup> grade students on the Ohio Graduation Test. The

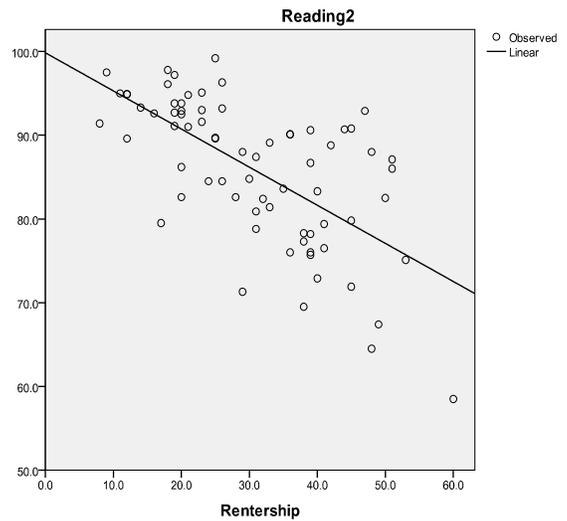
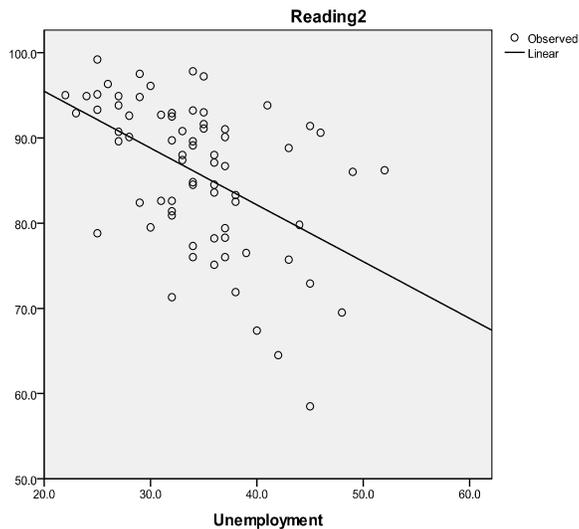
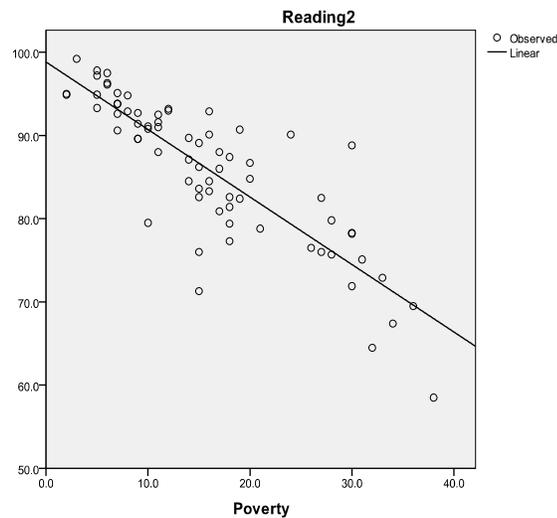
estimated intercept has a coefficient of 101.793, which is more than twice its standard error of 2.608 and thus is statistically significant. Unemployment and renter-ship both have t-statistics that are less than  $\pm 2$  and are consequently insignificant. Poverty on the other hand proves to be highly significant with a coefficient of -.648 and t-statistic of -7.804. In Table 1,  $R^2=.71$  meaning the intercept, poverty, unemployment and renter-ship explain 71% of the variation in the average level of educational achievement throughout the presented cases. The linear regression results find that poverty, unemployment, and renter-ship as variables of neighborhood characteristics explain 71% of the variation in achievement, however there is still a 29% that is unaccounted for.

Renter-ship was the least significant indicator of a student's reading achievement and was a statistically insignificant factor. Unemployment had a higher t-value than renter-ship however it was not a significant indicator of a student's reading achievement either. Poverty with a t-value of -7.804, passed the threshold of significance and has a sizeable negative affect on a student's reading achievement. The results support the hypothesis that as poverty increases a student's reading achievement decreases.

**Table 1: Regression of Reading Scores on Poverty,  
Unemployment and Renter-ship**

Variable	Coefficient	Standard Error	t
Intercept	101.793	2.608	39.024
Poverty	-.648	.083	-7.804
Renter-ship	.019	.057	.326
Unemployment	-.065	.085	-.765

$R^2 = .71$



The curve fits above graphically depict the regression results of  
Table 1

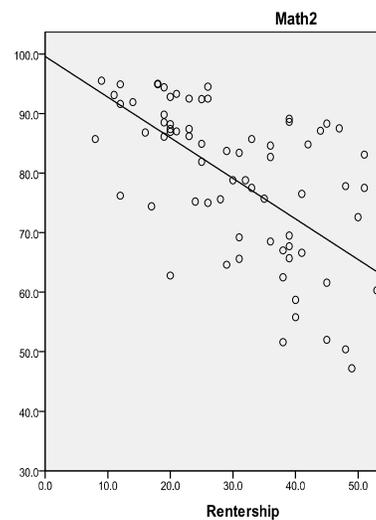
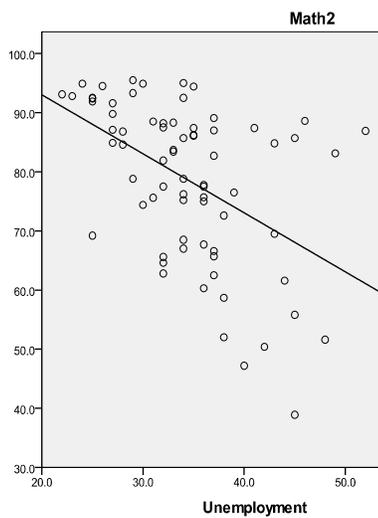
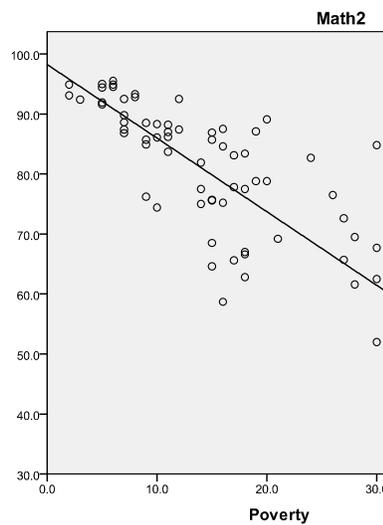
*Findings Concerning the Effects on Mathematic Achievement*

Table 2 demonstrates the effects of the independent variables on math scores. The estimated coefficient of the intercept is estimated to be 96.930, which proves to be statistically significant with a t-statistic of 18.567. Similarly to the results found in Table 1 unemployment and renter-ship have t-statistics that are not  $\pm 2$ . Poverty increases its statistical significance in Table 2 in comparison to Table 1, with a t-static of -8.295. Table 2, the r-squared value of .72, highlights how the intercept, poverty, unemployment and renter-ship explain 72% of the variation in the average of educational achievement in the presented cases. Even though poverty, unemployment, and renter-ship have a higher r-squared for mathematic achievement versus reading achievement, the difference is not great enough to conclude that the independent variables have a greater effect on one over another. Unemployment was not a significant indicator of a student's mathematical achievement and furthermore played a less significant role than in indicating a student's reading achievement. Even though renter-ship was more significant in indicating mathematical achievement than reading achievement, it was still statistically insignificant in indicating both. Similar to the results of Table 1, poverty was the only statistically significant indicator of mathematical achievement. Poverty also had a higher negative statistical significance on mathematical achievement than reading achievement. The results support the hypothesis that as poverty increases a student's mathematical achievement decreases.

**Table 2: Regression of Math Scores on Poverty,  
Unemployment and Renter-ship**

Variable	Coefficient	Standard Error	t
Intercept	96.930	5.221	18.567
Poverty	-1.379	.895	-8.295
Renter-ship	.065	.114	.569
Unemployment	.009	.171	.052

$R^2 = .72$



The curve fits above graphically depict the regression results of  
Table 2

### *Limitations of Results*

The data used for the regression was aggregated from data sources that were previously identified in the Methodology section. The use of multiple secondary data sources has the potential to complicate the variables being tested and could add error to the results of the findings. However, by using a linear regression model when the effect of one independent variable on the dependent variable all other variables are controlled, which helps minimize the threshold of error.

### **Conclusion**

Before the school bell rings children are subject to an environment that either negatively or positively impacts their educational performance. It is undeniable that the United States' educational system is separate and inherently unequal, and the inequality did not manifest overnight. This study was designed not only to highlight a contemporary issue plaguing society today, but also to highlight how history has played a role in shaping today's reality. Often times, history is removed from the conversations that critique problems within society however in order to examine an issue holistically and to create comprehensive solutions, history has to be included in the conversation.

This study focused on the impact of discriminatory housing practices on African Americans during the Great Migration and beyond in Ohio. As whites used restrictive covenants, steering and redlining to maintain the

whiteness of their neighborhoods, Cleveland's racial and socioeconomic landscape was beginning to take shape. Poor inner city African American ghettos emerged and were encircled by richer white suburban areas and tremendous implications followed. Residential segregation both involuntary and voluntary divided society and heightened the differences amongst groups of people. Consequences of this divide can be seen in crime rates, residential stability, employment opportunities, poverty and educational opportunities. This study focused primarily on the impact of negative neighborhood characteristics on educational achievement because education is the foundation for future success. If equality cannot be reached in other areas of society it needs to be reached within education.

The findings of this study partially support the original hypothesis that negative neighborhood characteristics of renter-ship, unemployment and poverty would have a negative impact on educational achievement. The rate of renter-ship and unemployment proved to be insignificant during the regression testing. However, poverty was statistically significant and indeed had a negative relationship on educational achievement in both reading and math. A key finding of this study is that poverty had a greater negative impact on a student's math score than their reading score.

Poverty has emerged, within this study, as a significant indicator of educational achievement for children within Ohio public schools and is an issue that deserves attention if educational equality is desired. Often times school reform is implemented through longer school days, the formation of

charter or magnet schools, the hiring of new teachers and administration and much more; while the issues that plague the greater neighborhood go ignored. No longer is it sufficed to only combat issues within schools because there are issues greatly impacting a student's likelihood to succeed before they ever step foot into the doors of a school. Changing the educational future of America's children goes far beyond changing the four walls of the schools that they attend, it means changing the communities they live in everyday before and after the school bell rings. If schools are viewed as microcosms of the greater communities they are located in (Jargowsky and El Komi, 2009) it is of no surprise that schools are failing when their surrounding communities are failing. If society continues to fail our communities, our communities will fail our children, and our children will fail in the future.

This study evokes more questions to be answered in the form of future research. Future studies could explore the influence of poverty on passage of all five parts of the Ohio Graduation Test, to study whether or not the significance of poverty stays consistent. A comparison between the effects of negative school versus neighborhood characteristics may also offer interesting insight into the true root of differences between educational achievement amongst students. A focused examination on the impact of race on educational achievement may also aid another piece of understanding to this complex puzzle.

The issue with solving educational inequality is that the answer is not as black or white, clear-cut, as one would hope a solution to be. It is instead as

complex as the institutions, legislation and societal practices that created it. Solving educational inequalities will call for a holistic examination of in-school and out-of-school contexts that students are exposed to, in an attempt to decrease the negative and increase the positive effects they have on overall educational achievement.

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### **Capstone Summary**

The U.S. Supreme Court *Brown v. Board of Education* (1954) decision overturned the “separate but equal doctrine” that was established by the US Supreme Court *Plessy v. Ferguson* (1896) decision. *Brown v. Board* (1954) ruled that separate was inherently unequal and that public schools needed to become racially integrated for the sake of equality. However, more than 50 years later, inherent differences still exist within the educational system across the country. There is inequity in funding, resources, teachers and overall viability of school districts throughout the country. “Before the Bell Rings” is an examination of the educational inequality plaguing society today. It is undeniable that the United States’ educational system is separate and inherently unequal, but the most important point is that the inequality of this system did not manifest overnight. This project is a two-part study that first focuses on the impact of discriminatory housing practices on African Americans during the Great Migration as they moved north to Ohio. Secondly, this project examines the effects of negative neighborhood characteristics on educational attainment. Looking into the effects of redlining, steering and restrictive covenants as employed by whites in Cleveland, Ohio; one can begin to see how a city’s racial and socioeconomic landscape takes shape. Over the years, little change has occurred to erase the lines that divide the haves from the have-nots and neighborhoods have absorbed and consistently perpetuated the effects and education is one of the many areas impacted.

Chapter One of this study uses texts written by historians and sociologists: Kenneth Kusmer, Andrew Wiese and Douglass Massey to establish a historical foundation to the contemporary issues that Chapter Two discusses. Kusmer, in his work A Ghetto Takes Shape: Black Cleveland 1870-1930, gives a detailed recap of the history and formation of ghettos in Cleveland from 1870-1930. Wiese's text, Places of Their Own, focuses on the phenomenon of suburbanization throughout the Midwest. Massey offers intriguing insight into how events occurring in individual cities were apart of a larger phenomenon impacting society as a whole within his text American Apartheid: Segregation and the making of the Underclass. These three texts were the primary sources used in Chapter One to delve into how legislation and societal practices impacted groups of people and how those actions had future consequences. Redlining, restrictive covenants and steering were legislative and societal practices that perpetuated immense residential segregation along racial and socioeconomic lines. As communities became increasingly African-American and subsequently poor, Whites began to leave in large numbers and settle in surrounding communities, creating an affluent suburban community. These neighborhood divisions set in motion a series of differences surrounding economic opportunity, residential stability, neighborhood safety and most importantly educational opportunities.

Chapter Two focuses on the impact that negative neighborhood characteristics have on the educational achievement of youth. Numerous studies have drawn clear connections between socioeconomic standing, race,

household contexts, school contexts, neighborhood contexts and their effect on educational attainment and achievement. This study sought to add to preexisting literature by offering an insider's perspective as well as a foundation in history that most studies lacked. Chapter Two examines the question of whether or not negative neighborhood characteristics of poverty, unemployment, and renter-ship have a negative effect on educational achievement as seen in math and reading scores of Ohio public school students.

To test my hypothesis, I gathered community level data from 72 Ohio public school districts using the U.S. Census as well as the Ohio Department of Education. The data was analyzed using statistical software, which tested the impact of each of my independent variables separately. My original hypothesis that negative neighborhood characteristics would have a negative effect on educational achievement was partially supported by the results of the significance testing. The rate of unemployment and renter-ship were statistically insignificant while poverty was a significant indicator and had a negative impact on educational achievement. This study found that as poverty increased a student's math and reading score decreased.

This study is significant because it reminds people that the issues facing our society today did not occur overnight but instead emerged out of decades of legislation and societal norms. This study was designed not only to highlight a contemporary issue plaguing society today, but also to highlight how history has played a role in shaping today's reality. Often times, history

is removed from the conversations that critique problems within society however in order to examine an issue holistically and to create comprehensive solutions, history has to be included in the conversation.

The significance of this project is further embedded in the lives of children across the country. As American schools “Race to The Top” under President Obama’s new administrative initiative, it is important to ponder whether schools are beginning the race in same position or are some already halfway to the top while others are stuck on the bottom. Before the school bell rings children are subject to an environment that either negatively or positively impacts their educational performance. If our country expects to have a prosperous future and truly reign as a superpower, not only in military force, but also in scholarly achievement, we must pay closer attention to our children’s future. As time passes the achievement gap widens within this country; and if something is not done to reverse it the implications will be devastating for the future of this great nation. The research process for this project was an integral factor in me becoming a 2011 Teach for America Corps member. I applied for Teach for American because I want to work diligently to help close the achievement gap that plagues students in poorer communities who have seemingly been forgotten or written off, because I was almost that student.