

America the Beautiful: For Some, but Not for All

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Abstract

Park spaces are critical for the individual and collective health in physical, mental, and societal ways, and there are major racial, ethnic, and socioeconomic inequalities that exist in park access and quality throughout cities in the United States. This research investigates the impact of residential segregation on these inequalities and the roles of nonprofits and city governments in addressing them. Using a comparative case study method, four cities including Washington D.C, Pittsburgh, New York City, and Detroit were considered. Data collection techniques include original in-depth interviews with a park advocacy nonprofit within the city, quantitative data, and personal observations. Findings suggest that the historical decisions leading to continued residential segregation has had an impact on the inequalities surrounding park access and quality. In terms of the roles of nonprofits and city governments, there needs to be strong, active support by both sectors. Success in addressing these inequalities largely depends on the collaboration between nonprofits and city governments.

Introduction

The outdoors is undoubtedly an important and impactful aspect of human life for our health of local communities and the species overall. Humans crave the escape and freedom of the outdoors. Going outside strengthens our health, meaning the overarching physical, mental, and societal impacts with even more aspects in between. The National Recreation and Park Association defined three main values of parks that make them essential services within communities including economic value, health and environmental benefits, and social importance (n.a.). According to the American Public Health Association, parks, gardens, playgrounds, and other outdoor spaces are shown to promote better health along with creating more sustainable societies, incorporating aspects of both environmental wellbeing and public health (2013).

These benefits are crucial for individual and collective success, but there are issues of environmental injustice surrounding the topic of park access and quality. There are notable

disparities in park access and quality between racial, ethnic, and socioeconomic groups. One feature of cities potentially factoring into these disparities is residential segregation in urban neighborhoods across different racial, ethnic, and socioeconomic groups. The Trust for Public Land, a nonprofit working to invest in communities' outdoor spaces, found that for parks that serve people of color are half the size and 5 times as crowded as those serving a white-majority population (Muqueeth, 2020). To add, parks in areas of majority low-income households are only a quarter of the size of those in high-income neighborhoods (Muqueeth, 2020). The realities of environmental injustice led to a term that Richard Louv (2005) refers to as the 'nature-deficit disorder' which is connected to many problems in society today involving mental, physical, and social health. Those in low-income, high minority city neighborhoods have a particularly challenging problem with dealing with urban planning and environmental injustices. In addressing these inequalities, nonprofits and city governments are the most influential actors involved with the park management in connection with community involvement. Nonprofits are often the main driver in advocacy and initiative with having a sole focus on community parks. City governments are tasked with the management of all public services including education, infrastructure, and park spaces, but can provide meaningful contributions in addressing these inequalities through budgets, support of initiatives, and resources.

This research is looking into the impact of racial, ethnic, and socioeconomic inequalities in urban park access and quality. The research questions include: What influence does racial housing segregation have on these inequalities? And what is the role of nonprofits and city governments in relationship to addressing this issue? The findings of this research look to conclude that residential segregation in cities influence the unequal access and quality of park spaces, and that the work of nonprofits and city governments are instrumental in the efforts to

address these inequalities. Overall, this study attempts to provide a better understanding of the racial, ethnic, and socioeconomic inequalities that exist in park access and quality and the impact of residential segregation, nonprofits work, and city government support.

This research uses a comparative case study of 4 cities in the greater Northeast of the U.S. including Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania; Washington D.C; Detroit, Michigan; and New York, New York. The main data collection techniques include original in-depth interviews with urban environmental nonprofit leaders working within the area of city park advocacy. Other data collection methods included data from the Trust for Public Land and mappings from William and Emamdjomeh (2018), along with personal observations and firsthand experiences. Existing research was reviewed surrounding the topics of the disparities that have been identified, influences of residential segregation, ways to address these disparities, and the roles of nongovernmental organizations and local governments. This research fills a hole in the literature surrounding the environmental and public health policy implications of parks and outdoor spaces in considering racial, ethnic, and socioeconomic disparities and the important role of residential segregation and the actors involved, nonprofits and city governments. The findings of this study are meant to provide a greater conversation on the perspectives and suggestions on how this issue of racial and socioeconomic inequalities in park access and quality can be improved through a political and social lens.

This paper will proceed as follows: To start, previous literature is reviewed on the topics surrounding this research, Then, I explain the research methods and data collection techniques used. After, I examine the results of this research by hypothesis starting first with the question of what influence does residential segregation plays in these inequalities. Then, I address the question of what roles nonprofits and city governments play in park management and care

surrounding the issue of disparities in outdoor public space. After, there is a discussion of the findings and implications of these results on how they relate to prior research, suggestions, and democracy overall. Lastly, I conclude this research with explaining the role of this research in the nonprofit and city government sector and suggestions for potential further research.

Literature Review & Theory

Throughout society, there are crippling disparities across racial and ethnic backgrounds and socioeconomic status, and this divide is continuing to widen. Wealth and poverty are becoming increasingly concentrated among populations as economic inequality worsens (Scott, 2013). Importantly, the racial and ethnic demographics of the United States are quickly changing as those considered minorities are quickly becoming the majority (Whiting, et al, 2017). As these divides grow, there are concerns regarding social equity in all areas of society; but in the context of outdoor spaces, these disparities in park access and quality goes against the very mission to ensure that “our nation’s public parks and recreation services should be equally accessible and available to all people regardless of income level, ethnicity, gender, ability, or age” (NRPA, n.d). It is becoming increasingly important that these issues are addressed, and the main actors include nongovernmental organizations and local governments focused on outdoor spaces serving high minority and low-income communities in urban areas.

This literature review goes into four themes found in prior research: defining the disparities, residential segregation, roles of nonprofits and city governments, and addressing these disparities. These themes develop the different aspects involved within this research since no research has been found to focus directly on city park inequalities through the lens of residential segregation and the work of nonprofits and local governments in addressing the matter of these inequalities.

Defining the Disparities

Disparities in access and quality profoundly affect individuals, families, and communities throughout the United States. It's a tale of two of parks. One serving those wealthy, suburban dwelling communities with strong support to invest in the parks to ensure easy access with lots of amenities (Scott, 2013). At the other park, those poor and living in the inner cities are left without much, if any, municipal funding to invest into their natural spaces (Scott, 2013). There are trends in the demographic makeup of those who visit parks. In socioeconomic terms, Mowen et al, (2018) found in their national sampling that those with higher levels of education and income had fewer barriers; and therefore, reported more frequent visits to the park. The barriers of racially and ethnically diverse visitors were higher when compare to those White respondents (Stanis et al., 2009). Many factors affect why those low-income minority groups have less access and lower quality park. Sisters et al (2009) found using the measure for public service area (PSA) for parks in Los Angeles that the inequality is exacerbated more by higher congested parks compared to those closest to predominantly White and high-income areas. Other factors affecting this inequality were that parks servicing people of color and low incomes were understood by the community to be unsafe, had far less programs for recreation and physical activity, and residents lacked transportation to access the parks (Sisters et al, 2009). One last key difference was that wealthy and majority white neighborhoods had private backyards in while in low-income neighborhoods of color people tended to live in multifamily housing or apartments, which often were without an outdoor area attached. This forced more congestion at neighborhood parks (Sisters et al, 2009).

The issue of gentrification is also a difficult aspect of addressing these disparities with green gentrification being another explanation of environmental injustice (Mullenbach et al,

2019). As more parks and green spaces are developed, the desirability of that area grows, leading to higher house prices and rent, forcing those for which the space was initially for to be displaced from that area (Wolch et al, 2014). Overall, those who visited more frequently were found to have greater levels of both personal and communal benefits compared to those that visited less often (Mowen, et al., 2018). In communities that lack accessible parks, or where parks are in disrepair and overwhelmingly congested, these individual and collective community benefits are not being attained in low-income minority neighborhoods at the same levels, or at all, compared to wealthier majority White areas.

Residential Segregation

Residential segregation “refers to the differential distribution of groups across space and is usually thought of in terms of the degree to which various groups reside in different neighborhoods” (Iceland & Wilkes, 2006). More than 50 years since the passage of the Civil Rights Act of 1964, there is extremely notable residential segregation in cities around the U.S. Iceland & Wilkes (2006) points out that this segregation is not driven by race and ethnicity alone: socioeconomic status (SES) has a role in the level of residential segregation. They conclude that groups with higher SES are less segregated from those non-Hispanic white groups compared to those with lower SES (Iceland & Wilkes, 2006). The two main themes coming from research on residential segregation are the challenges of lacking educational and economic opportunities within predominantly minority, low-income neighborhoods (Kramer, 2018. Williams & Collins, 2016). Also, stress and discrimination can be a factor effecting their health and wellbeing (Kramer, 2018). Simply put, “segregation creates conditions inimical to health in the social and physical environment” (Williams & Collins, pg.404, 2016).

Previous research focused largely on the economic and educational disparities that exist due to residential segregation. This research will provide a new perspective of a public good, parks, and the role those inequalities coming from segregation has in those communities.

Roles of NGOs and Local Governments

Both non-governmental organizations and local governments are instrumental in determining access to and care of the parks in communities throughout the United States. Harrison (2019, 10) writes that environmental protections coming from regulations and activism has led to the wealthy benefiting from the health and environmental protections while environmental inequalities worsen. Addressing environmental injustices includes advocacy and public policy. There is a necessary collaboration between nonprofit organizations, the public sector, and the private sector that work within an interconnected web and the importance that all areas are moving in the same wavelength (Vernis et al, 2006). In the conversations surrounding parks, the main actors are the public sector and nonprofits. Nonprofits have played a huge role in environmental and social justice movements by helping change laws and regulations at all levels of government, pushing for scientific research, and fighting legal battles (Rivers, 2008, 450). While nonprofits are often seen as the main advocates of an area, Rivers (2008, 480) goes on to explain that “ranging from reduced property values and increased health costs, the cost of these externalities are inequitably imposed on minority communities that generally do not have sufficient representation in the governance of environmental nonprofits”.

Engagement and representation are critical in communities experiencing environmental injustice. It is important that people are able to have a say in the decisions, policy making, and actions that will affect their lives and communities in order to maintain true democracy (Dodge & Ospina, 2016). Mullenbach et al (2019) studied the strength of community members

perceptions on their park being within their “neighborhood social fabric”. Using survey metrics to test the level of community involvement in the neighborhood’s park and the importance of that park in the community, Mullenback et al (2019) found that when the community member’s voice was heard in the discussion of management and investment into the area, they more strongly perceived the outdoor space as a community asset. Dodge and Ospina (2016) considered the importance of inclusion of people living in the neighborhood being active within nonprofit community organizations as those people were enabled to be influential citizens rather than customers of the city. This allows for people to become empowered and become vigorous in addressing issues within their community (Dodge and Ospina, 2016).

Addressing these Disparities

How can these disparities be fixed? The issues that are leading to these environmental injustices that prior studies have identified, need to be solved in order to fix this major problem of the racial, ethnic, and socioeconomic disparities in park access and quality. Scott (2013) offers six strategies surround the work of Park and Recreation agencies: these agencies need to establish connections with community allies to encourage improvements, bring accessibility and equal quality of parks into the realm of environmental injustice and civil rights issue, provide educational programs on activities, involve those poor and minority people to be involved in the advocacy and change, improve safety of those park spaces, ensure all feel welcome to those parks, and make services affordable. Sisters et al (2009) suggest that mechanisms such as the Primary Service Area be used by community organizations planners, federal and state park agencies, and other stakeholders to measure public service deficits such as parks to find where the most need is. The fix in addressing park access is not adding more area to parks; but instead,

creating smaller parks spread out to help with the congestion in those areas and ensure easy accessibility (Sisters et al, 2009).

Politics and policy play a huge role in addresses these disparities. Urban settings have a particularly difficult time finding ways in integrate public parks and green spaces. Wolch et al (2014) found through case studies that are way to address environmental injustice is through investment in spaces that may be obsolete or underutilized and turn those spaces ‘just green enough’ to avoid the threat of gentrification. This means small-scale projects that are scattered, which again increases proximity for those people in the neighborhoods along with anti-gentrification policies (Wolch et al (2014). A case study of Baltimore, Maryland examined the continued effects of segregation and environmental injustices as the city works to revitalize the city (Boone et al., 2009). The focus of environmental policies tends to be geared towards energy use and resources, pollution, and climate change rather than the issues surrounding environmental justice. Boone et al. (2009) suggests that to fix environmental injustices, public health should act as the foundation. Parks need to be included in the effort to address environmental injustice due to the positive health effects combined with the current focus on environmental justice of issues such as air pollution causing health concerns. This suggests a shift in the approach of policymakers from perceiving environmental policy as regulations of pollutants and the larger picture of climate change to incorporate outdoor access. Similarly, in the area of public health, investment into parks should be considered a solution to health issues rather than society focusing on health care.

Hypotheses

After reviewing previous literature and reflecting on personal professional experiences at a nonprofit working for park advocacy, these hypotheses were developed to better understand the

impact of residential segregation and roles of nonprofits and city governments in addressing inequalities. Hypothesis 1 approaches the research question, what influence does residential segregation have on these inequalities of park access and quality? Through considering residential segregation, this study can refine its focus on poorer communities of color and the parks that serve them.

Hypothesis 1: Cities with high levels of housing segregation will experience more racial, ethnic, and socioeconomic disparities in park access and quality.

The second hypothesis focuses on nonprofits' influence specifically and the role they have in park management and concerns of equitability. It is important to recognize the experiences of NGOs in this area of park advocacy and to see if differing levels of support by the local government, affect the outcomes and success of addressing inequalities park access and quality. From my experience interning at a nonprofit with the specific focus of city park advocacy, I was able to recognize just how much work is dedicated to addressing issues of inequalities as this is a growing focus of the work of nonprofits. Hypothesis 2 pertains to the research question of what is the role of nonprofits in addressing park inequalities?

Hypothesis 2: Cities with NGO supported funding and programs surrounding parks will experience fewer racial, ethnic, and socioeconomic disparities in park access and quality.

City government includes the Mayor, city council members, city managers, city staff working within departments, and all others who have a hand in the management of city duties. This research will consider "support" to include the active tackling of the issue of inequalities pertaining to parks. Utilizing this definition will allow the differentiation between support as "Yes, the city supports addressing this issue" to the more active, "Yes, the city is taking action to address this issue." Also coming from my internship experience, the advocacy of nonprofits of

attending to these inequalities largely comes down to the relationship between those organizations and the city government and how effectively advocates can get the public sector involved. Hypothesis 3 address the research question, what is the role of city governments in addressing park inequalities?

Hypothesis 3: Cities with more local government supported funding and programs surrounding parks will experience fewer racial, ethnic, and socioeconomic disparities in park access and quality.

Methods

To gain perspective on the issues surrounding the disparities in the access to outdoor spaces and quality, this research uses a comparative case study of four cities in the greater Northeast of the U.S. A comparative case study allows a comprehensive analysis of the similarities, differences, and patterns that form by the looking at multiple cases. The cases selected are based on their urban setting and demographics looking to fit areas with higher rates of low income and minorities; with the understanding that the overall demographics of these cities tends not to represent certain areas within the city most often impacted by these disparities (U.S. Census, 2019). Information regarding the number of parks in the specified city and percent land used for parks and recreation is used to gain a perspective of park specific data within the entirety of the city (The Trust for Public Lands ParkScore Index, 2020). These cities also have strong NGO involvement working with park advocacy in the community. Nonprofits are particularly active in cities by putting on community events, advocating for resources and funding to the city, state, and federal government, and the overall management of parks with their refined focus on equitable public outdoor spaces in their areas. To complete the process, data was collected regarding the racial make-up of neighborhoods in the cities considered in this

research, and non-profit organizations were interviewed to learn from their experiences in the demographic area they serve, what they do to address the disparities, the struggles they face, the implications of these disparities on the individual and community, and what suggestions they have in fixing these issues. These interviews were original in-depth interviews with leaders of the environment nonprofit sector within their respected cities. Personal observations and firsthand experiences through an internship with Washington Parks and People were also considered in this research.

The cities that will be covered in the comparative case studies within this research are all in the greater Northeast of the United States: Washington, District of Columbia; Detroit, Michigan; New York, New York; and Pittsburg, Pennsylvania. The NGOs that have been interviewed as part of this research include Washington Parks and People, People for Palmer Park, New Yorkers for Parks, and Pittsburg Parks Conservancy. Data considering the role of racial and ethnic residential segregation in urban communities is from William and Emamdjomeh (2018). The Washington Post article “America is more diverse than ever-but still segregated” by William and Emamdjomeh provides a clear mapping of racial and ethnic segregation throughout the United States using data from the U.S. Census. The Trust for Public Lands is a national wide organization that has considerable amounts of data on parks throughout of U.S. Their data provides yearly national rankings of major cities including features of accessibility and quality of parks, broken down to race and socioeconomic status. Using all the collected data, Figure 1 in the appendix shows the level of measurement (high, medium, low) for each of the independent variables (park access and park quality) and the dependent variables (residential segregation, nonprofits active support, city government active support) for each city. The dependent variable measurements were based on personal observations, interviews, google

search of similar nonprofits, and data from the Trust for Public Land. The independent variables were from the Trust for Public Land data with their map providing quality measures and William and Emamdjomeh (2018) mapping of residential segregation.

There were a few challenges in data collection for this research. Related to interviews, establishing contacts and getting replies proved to be difficult for a few of the nonprofits that I wished to interview. Many of the nonprofits do not share contact information that would establish a direct line of communication from a specific staff member to myself, leading me to have to use the organization wide email. Another challenge included the interviewing of people with different staff titles and roles within the nonprofit. This may have altered answers based on the different experiences and perspectives per diverse jobs. A problem with qualitative data versus quantitative data collection led to some discrepancies between the information provided by the Trust for Public Land and individual nonprofits interviewed. Overall, it could be concluded that the qualitative data provided in the interviews with nonprofits who truly experience these inequalities and interactions with city government is more helpful for analyzing what is happening within the urban parks and why. This is particularly true in the measurement of underserved communities within the researched cities because data from the Trust for Public Land provided information about the entire city without showing the variation among different areas within the same city. The qualitative data is particularly useful because nonprofit work tends to focus on the areas in the most need.

Results-

Each city within this research presented a different makeup of their city parks which it is essential to understand what the park situation is like each city. By also explaining the role of the nonprofit interviewed in relation to the specific park makeup, it is evident their scope of work. In

Pittsburgh, there are 165 parks in total representing 5 regional parks (touching multiple neighborhoods and are over 200 acres), community parks (touching multiple neighborhoods), and neighborhood parks (existing in one neighborhood). The nonprofit interviewed is the Pittsburgh Parks Conservancy (PPC), established in 1996. This city is very racially segregated and because of this, who PPC is serving is largely based on where they are working in the city. There are disparities in the park access and quality between higher income, predominantly white neighborhoods compared to lower income, high minority neighborhoods as seen by PPC.

New York City is known for Central Park, which is nearly 840 acres in the heart of Manhattan. While this park is a destination for many visitors, this is far from reality for residents in neighborhood parks throughout the city. The nonprofit, New Yorkers for Parks (NY4P), was interviewed as part of this research. NY4P works to conduct research and collect data surrounding parks in the City to be used by all New Yorkers in each of the 5 boroughs, with a focus on communities that need the support the most. Much of their work is through connecting volunteer groups and organizations to facilitate a public conversation on parks and address the growing demands of the public for more investments into their outdoor spaces. As learned through the interview, there are actually more parks in certain poorer communities of color compared to predominantly wealthy white areas, but these parks are of much less quality. New York City is the densest in population and has the most racial and ethnic diversity of all cases within this research, which is very evident in Figure 2 in the appendix.

When thinking about Washington D.C, I used to think of the beautiful, perfectly manicured lands within the National Mall. From my experience working and interviewing the nonprofit, Washington Parks and People (WPP), I learned that this is far from the truth. D.C has an interesting mix of nationally and city managed public lands. This nonprofit shines in its

partnerships and grassroots work with other organizations throughout D.C and across the country and world. They also have established a strong relationship with community members setting up projects such as the Green Corps, community harvests, and art, music, and educational events (to just name a few). WPP has worked in over 230 parks, making a particularly amazing impacts in Marvin Gaye Park, Meridian Hill/Malcom X park, and Walter Pierce Park, focusing their efforts in disadvantaged areas of D.C. Based on map imaging, it seems as though there is fair access to parks, but there is a sharp contrast between the size and number of parks in areas serving largely Black communities and those of predominately white communities.

In Detroit, Michigan, the problem surrounding park inequalities tend to be less about access and more about the poor quality of parks largely serving communities of color. As Figure 2 in the appendix shows, there are a large majority of parks in desperate need of care based on their defined need. There are 356 parks in Detroit, 308 of which are official city parks which are categorized as a mini park, neighborhood park, community park, regional park, plaza park, and greenway (Svoboda, 2015). The variations in classifications are based on size, number of neighborhoods surrounding, and use. People for Palmer Park, part of the Detroit Park Coalition, was interviewed for this research. They act as a nonprofit group focused on one specific park, Palmer Park, and work to receive grant funding for projects, organize volunteerism, and advocate for the investments and improvements of city government funds to be used within that park. The coalition of these individual nonprofits work as a larger unit to push for city government support.

Below is a chart presents the independent variables (residential segregation, nonprofits support, and city government support) and dependent variable (park access and park quality). These results are based on personal considerations following collected research, data, and

feedback from the interview. It shows the different levels of residential segregation, nonprofit involvement, and city government support in relation to experienced park access and quality.

Table 1

City	Residential Segregation	Nonprofits	City government support	Park access	Park quality
Washington D.C.	High	High (20+ Nonprofits)	Low	Medium	High
Detroit, Michigan	High	Medium (13+ Nonprofits)	Medium	Medium	Low
New York, New York	High	High (18+ Nonprofits)	Low	High	Medium
Pittsburg, Pennsylvania	Medium	Medium (8+ Nonprofits)	Medium	Medium	Low

The scale of this chart High – Medium – Low based on the data provided by the Trust for Public Land Parkscore Rating, Washington Post Segregation Map (Williams & Emamdjomeh, 2018) and observations during in the interview.

Hypothesis 1

The first hypothesis tested was that cities with high levels of housing segregation will experience more racial, ethnic, and socioeconomic disparities in park access and quality. It is apparent that racially segregated neighborhoods were extant in all cities presented in this research based on Williams, A. & Emamdjomeh, A. (2018) graphics shown in the Appendix. These graphics provide mappings of the racial and ethnic makeup of the four cities considered alongside the mapping of the parks and their level of need. By putting these graphics side to side, it shows the level of access and quality of parks in alignment to who those parks are serving. These findings were confirmed by the experiences shared by the nonprofits in the interviews. The challenges of racially segregated communities are the historical implications of the past

political decisions that left lower income communities of color with fewer public outdoor spaces compared to wealthier and predominantly white areas and/or (in the case of NYC) parks that have been greatly neglected without maintenance and investment. Based on Williams & Emamdjomeh (2018) and per my observations, there are high levels of residential segregation in all cities other than Pittsburgh, which I have defined as having a medium level of residential segregation.

Cities are divided into smaller communities largely serving a certain race and income. Washington D.C and Pittsburgh both presented with total support for this hypothesis. As shared in the interview, Washington D.C is one of the most segregated cities in the country, by both race and class. The population of the capital is 705,749 people, with a 13.5% poverty rate and 46% Black population (Census Bureau, 2019). The 7th Ward in D.C is made up of a mostly Black population, but it is further segregated based on class; so much so, in certain areas of the 7th Ward where the poorest communities of color live, their mortality rate is nearly as high as some of the worst places in the world. The poorer communities of color have fewer park spaces much smaller in size and had it not been for the work of nonprofits like WPP, they would have been in continuous disrepair. This residential segregation makes an impact on the work of nonprofits. In Pittsburgh, the Pittsburgh Park Conservancy (PPC) started their work in 1996 in the original four regional parks, three of which were in wealthier and majority white parts of the city, leading to most of their work being focused on these communities rather than those disadvantaged areas, simply based on decisions made regarding public services. Since PPC's beginnings, they have expanded their reach into all city parks, and it is evident that there are major inequalities across different neighborhoods in park access and quality.

The two cities presenting mixed support results per Table 2 were Detroit and New York City. New York City has by far the largest and densest (in the U.S.) in population at 8,336,817, as shown in Figure 1 in the Appendix. For demographics data, 24.3% of the population is black and there is 17.9% persons in poverty (Census Bureau, 2019). In New York City, neighborhoods are still isolated due to decisions made by Robert Moses in the 1930s to 1960s to strategically place roads and highways in a manner that would separate certain communities of color and lower incomes from the rest of NYC. These isolated communities continue to face the repercussions of those decisions as they are facing cycles of poverty and unemployment, which has particularly worsened in the time of Covid. While in NYC, there are more parks in lower income, predominantly communities of color, they lack proper maintenance and investment, with some being untouched since they were established in the 1930s. This result is “mixed” because there are more parks in the in The Bronx, which is predominantly minority and low-income area, than the Upper East side, which is largely white and higher income. This might argue against the inequality of park access aspect. In Detroit, 78.3% of the population is Black while 35% of the population is persons in poverty (Census Bureau, 2019). Based on the interview with People for Palmer Park, the multiple neighborhoods that this regional park serves is largely like the demographics of the entire city. This is, of course, broken up by neighborhood as well based on income, but it cannot be fully supported based on the limited scope of one regional park being too small of a scope to define the experience of other communities in Detroit.

Racial housing segregation set the foundation for the continued inequalities facing urban parks serving minorities and low incomes, and these racial and socioeconomic divides across urban communities are still occurring and widening this problem. Having concentrated communities of a certain race and socioeconomic status can present concerns like communities

of color tending to be less engaged because they don't have the privilege to be as engaged as experienced in Pittsburgh. There are greater concerns and needs such as having to work more hours or multiple jobs, these concerns trumping attending a community meeting surrounding their local park. This lack of engagement is troubling because it expands the divide between those who have the time and knowledge to organize and advocate for their parks, which in turns puts pressure on the city to make the improvements as they desire, to those who do not. Engagement and representation are crucial to the social fabric of the community and the ability for those community members to recognize their parks as an asset to them and their neighborhood (Dodge & Ospina, 2016; Mullenbach et al, 2019). It comes down to peoples voices not being heard.

Another major concern of residential segregation is green gentrification meaning that making these improvements of green amenities can lead to an area becoming enticing for businesses, increasing property value, and attracting wealthier residents. Three of the four nonprofits interviewed in this research. The topic of green gentrification was brought up as a major concern of their work. In New York City, parks are an essential part of life as they provide an escape from the very dense population of the city. This leads to park improvements being a major appeal of neighborhoods which has made areas that were once predominantly black and neglected by the city and state and finally invested into, now being appealing for white professionals and families. From an experience of the Pittsburgh Parks Conservancy, they had put together a perfect master plan of amazing new improvements to the local park and presented it to the largely African American community with high homeownership. This plan was met with community concern of gentrification and future affordability of their homes. Policies must be put into place such as rent control and others that work to make sure people are able to live in their

neighborhoods and enjoy their quality and improved outdoor spaces. Connected to gentrification is the impact of urban renewal projects. These projects seek to help poorer communities move into “better” housing and neighborhoods. In the case of Washington D.C., urban renewal was facilitated by white downtown urban planners without any understanding of the community. This led to the physical fabric of communities getting ripped apart in family and neighborhood structure, crippled by the decimation of the male population in those communities from mass incarceration policy and the systematic racism involved in the War on Drugs. Nonprofits have a challenge of achieving a difficult balance of making the improvements these areas need without causing green gentrification along with also entering these neighborhoods with the understanding that there is an existing framework of community that need to be elevated by nonprofit’s work and not altered in a negative light with issues like gentrification.

Hypothesis 2

The second hypothesis explored in this research is that cities with nongovernmental organizations supported funding and programs surrounding parks will experience less racial, ethnic, and socioeconomic inequality in park access and quality. These nonprofits are tasked with having a major role in managing parks, communicating across the community and local government, and fostering the investments and projects into parks. The nonprofit experiences as shared by the interviews found that these organizations have a crucial part in addressing equitable focus for both nonprofits concentrated on one specific park and larger organizations with a wider duty to all parks in a city. In this research, nonprofits with different scopes of focus and organization size were included. This can be seen in People for Palmer Park being an organization focusing on one specific park space, Pittsburgh Parks Conservancy being a large

nonprofit involved with a wide scope of parks within the city, New Yorkers for Parks is strategically an organization focusing on data collection on all the city parks for the use of other nonprofits, and Washington Parks and People is a smaller organization that have a range of parks they focus on within the communities with the most need.

Through the experiences of nonprofits as shared through the interviews, it is evident that nonprofits are the major actor involved with the maintenance and facilitation of investments, work that is often thought of to be done by city agencies. Nonprofits involved with park advocacy have strategies and missions that include certain components that ensure that addressing this issue is a top priority and the tools are there to do so. New Yorkers for Parks have experienced trends of parks that have a nonprofit or support group attached to them are able to advocate for the needs of that park to the city government. One specific example in NYC is the Central Park Conservancy which was the leader in advocating for its redevelopment in the 1970's which has made Central Park as we know it today. Many communities in the city are unable to develop and maintain that type of organization, leaving those parks behind and without the organizational structure for advocacy. Similarly in Detroit, multiple small nonprofit organizations focused on one park space works as the main advocate in the competition for the limited funding and resources. To develop a partnership amongst those organizations and the city government the Detroit Parks Coalition was established to share experience and work for the greater picture of parks in Detroit. Specifically for People for Palmer Park, they came in and restored many historical aspects of Palmer Park such a log cabin and lighthouse originally built by the Palmer family in the late 1800's which was left to decay by the city government. The Pittsburgh Park Conservancy has worked in an equitable investment strategy into their organization to ensure that there is a focus on equity and the areas of need with programing,

projects, and support. All these nonprofits play a huge role in establishing the connections with the community and the city in order to advocate for these public park spaces that would otherwise get left behind and unnoticed of their potential for community use.

Nonprofits are powerful in making park space improvements largely because of their ability to secure grant funding. As shared by the PPC, there are more funding opportunities by foundations in the city of Pittsburgh and these foundations would rather fund local nonprofits to do projects rather than the city as there is a lack of trust that they will get the job done. This funding can come from many different avenues, including the public sector and private giving. PPC received a federal grant from the National Recreation of Parks Association for \$437,000 for a project dealing with the cities storm water problem. Nonprofits can get access to more funding through other avenues, and this can make projects possible in the communities that need it the most.

Hypothesis 3

Lastly, the third hypothesis considered is that cities with more city government supported funding and programs surrounding parks will experience less racial, ethnic, and socioeconomic disparities in park access and quality. In these findings, all 4 nonprofits agreed that when cities actively provide support in the form of resources and funding, these issues can start being resolved. With that being said, none of the city governments were fully providing that needed support. Each city was found to have an associated city council committee that dealt with park space. One of the details mentioned in Washington D.C. is that the council committee dealing with parks is where junior members of the council without much experience was pushed to as it is seen as less important than other committee such as ones focusing on policing and schools.

There are issues with city government support when it comes to the budget, funding options, and resources. In New York City, the Park agency budget (as allocated by the city council) has been less than one half of 1% of the total city's operating budget and left without any discretionary capital budget. This is despite the fact that parks make up 14% of the total NYC land. It is worth understanding that the role of the local government is limited by the difficulties and complexity of managing all city government functions. In Pittsburgh, while there is support for the work of the nonprofit organization, there are some barriers put on by the city government related to all city parks. In all areas of government: the mayor, city council, and city staff, these interactions between city and nonprofit become political very quickly. This political behavior was existent in all four cities in this research, but particularly evident in Pittsburgh. There is no being apolitical even if it is meant to be that way, and the political influence is largely due to the nature of elected positions and individual biases. It is important that politics does not come in the way of equitable park improvements. A specific example was the delay in establishing a city wide voted and passed referendum to have a property tax (\$50 for every \$100,000 of your home value) collected specifically for city parks. PPC experienced many difficulties in getting this implemented because of the political nature of the city council. In New York, it is evident that the challenge of city projects are in that certain communities' public services are so under resourced that it is difficult to decided where the funding needs to go (schools, sidewalks, roads, libraries, parks, etc.). In Detroit, many different nonprofits organizations such as People for Palmer Park working to advocate for their park they focus on, are in a troubling "competition" for the limited funding and resources of the Detroit city government. These are high stake decisions for these communities and compounds generations of inequality and neglect in how public dollars are being spent.

Through these findings regarding the role of nonprofits and city governments, it can be concluded that it is the nonprofits that are most connected and aware of the needs of the public when it comes to parks. Washington Parks and People has done a campaign addressing this concern known as “Think Outside of the...”. One example they have used is “Think outside of the Hearing Room.” This is meant to imply that policy decisions are being made a vacuum, far out of touch with the community their decisions are impacting. Any interactions representatives, elected government officials, and city managers have with the public tend to be people with a title or degree, but they are not reaching the people who really know the community.

There is also the problem of complexity in the way the city government manages parks in that there can be multiple departments involved with park spaces in one way or another. In Detroit, most of the care and maintenance for the park comes down to the department of general services while their parks and recreation department is less involved, focusing more on recreation centers (a similar experience to that of the city of Washington D.C.). In D.C. and Pittsburgh, there are multiple departments which is defined to 6 in the experience of the city of Pittsburgh. Having so many departments involved can make it challenging to ensure that parks are a priority in the staff and funding spent as parts of the budget and the wider scope of work could lead to less focus on those spaces.

In all 4 cities, a theme that presented itself is that the park department budget is always the first to be cut, and the last to be recovered. These are budgets that are often the lowest money allocated; and yet, the first to be impacted during financial distress. According to The Trust for Public Land data, the average public spending on parks and recreation per resident in 2019 included Washington D.C, \$230.67; New York City, \$198.02; Detroit, \$78.72; and Pittsburgh, \$90.54. After interviewing the nonprofits dealing with the budgets of their parks and recreation

department, these number do not properly relay the message of the reality, for at least all residents in the respected city. Particularly coming from the financial crisis of the pandemic in 2020 and the lasting economic troubles, another evident theme was struggles in city resources as a result. The New York City Park Department and Detroit's departments working in park maintenance was "guttled" and laid off in 2020 during the economic pressures of the pandemic on the city. As explained in the interview with People for Palmer Park, this struggle has continued in Detroit as past city staff have chosen to remain on unemployment rather than return to work. During this time, the demand of parks and the growing needs for maintenance lead to the overwhelmed staff only being able to do so much. Similarly, in Washington D.C., the park and recreation budget was cut despite the growing reliance on parks while other departments budgets being maintained or even increased. Furthermore, what funding is allocated to the Park and Recreation Department in D.C, the vast majority goes to recreation centers and programming with very little for parks. This brings up the ever going fight that parks are not a luxury as potentially viewed by city government, but a public necessity. The pandemic has proved that point thoroughly with parks being a staple of trying to preserve community's physical, societal, and mental health even more than in normal times.

Table 2: Hypothesis Results

Hypothesis	No Support	Mixed Support	Total Support
Cities with high levels of residential segregation will experience more racial, ethnic, and socioeconomic disparities in park access and quality.	0/4 0%	2/4 50%	2/4 50%
Cities with nonprofit supported funding and programs surrounding parks will experience fewer racial, ethnic, and socioeconomic disparities in park access and quality.	0/4 0%	0/4 0%	4/4 100%
Cities with more city government supported funding and programs surrounding parks will experience fewer racial, ethnic, and socioeconomic disparities in park access and quality.	0/4 0%	0/4 0%	4/4 100%

Discussion

This research asked two questions: What impact does residential segregation have on racial, ethnic, and socioeconomic inequalities of park access and quality? and What are the roles of nonprofits and city governments in addressing this issue? In summary, residential segregation continues to exist in cities and leads to inequalities in both park access and quality; nonprofits have the major role in the advocacy and the care of parks in poorer communities of color; city governments are essential to successfully addressing these inequalities, but they lack taking profound action and allocating prioritization of these neighborhoods’ outdoor spaces. All nonprofits in the cities within this research shared a similar experience of being an advocate and facilitator of conversation of the issue of inequalities, while city governments tended to lack equitable plans for funding and investment for the areas that it needed it the most. In all

experiences, it largely came down to importance of the people being impacted by the decisions of the past and those of today in relationship to their communities and public spaces.

In reference to previous research related to this paper, the shared tale of the two parks is the reality of urban parks within the cities studied in this research and as can be inferred, those around the entire United States (Scott, 2013). With the demographics of the United States rapidly changes from minority groups becoming the majority in the population, the issue of park inequalities of access and quality will become increasingly evident in society with a greater proportion dealing with those implications (Whiting, et al, 2017). As this research concluded about the impact of residential segregation by both race and ethnicity, along with socioeconomic status, similar to the findings of Iceland & Wilkes (2006), these continued impacts of historical decisions surrounding residential segregation does have an influence on the health and wellbeing of these communities (Williams & Collins, 2016). While not explored directly in this research of all potential implications of health and wellbeing in a community such as financial stress, crime, and healthcare access, parks provide an opportunity to address individual and community wellbeing along with aspects of environmental care (Boone et al., 2009).

This research developed the realization of just how much work nonprofits must do to ensure the city government is maintaining parks and providing equitable investments into the public park spaces that are in the most need. It comes down to every important triangle of the public sector, private sector, and nonprofits to establish working relationships (Vernis et al, 2006); and while in this research the private sector had no part of this research analysis, there may be a role in that is less defined through personal observations and within the data collected. The most important aspect in the success of addressing the inequalities of parks is getting the community engaged to advocate for them to be represented and have the platform to express

their needs so parks are viewed by the public as the community asset it is meant to be (Dodge & Ospina, 2016; Mullenbach et al, 2019).

The overall goal of this research was to not only explore what inequalities exist in urban parks and the role of nonprofits and city governments to address this problem, but also to understand how these organizations can best position themselves to successfully address it. Based on these findings, nonprofits are very much fronting these efforts, but there are areas in which these organizations are working to improve. A major step is building relationships and trust among community members. As the interviewee of the Pittsburgh Parks Conservancy said, “A lot of organizations come into communities with the best of intentions, but don’t take the time to listen, and then they are not successful and not able to actually fulfill their original intent.” These relationships are essential to trust, cooperation, and understanding of these projects by all. It is important to acknowledge that the groups experiencing these inequalities have been historically dismissed, so nonprofits must ensure that they will be heard and listened to. A key aspect of the organizational mapping is to bring diversity into their organization for a widened perspective. All people have different understandings of their personal biases and privilege, so diversity is crucial. Having nonprofits bring in staff that are people of color and of different backgrounds, who can better relate to the experiences of minority and low-income neighborhoods. It also helps with the relationship building aspect of being a successful organization.

Through trial-and-error organizations learn and have an avenue to grow. Working to have community involvement in these projects that help the public in bigger ways than just the end goals are important. Community involvement can include having volunteers help with projects grows community and assigning local contractors to do work on projects to benefit those in that

community financially. Involving the community in clean-up efforts helps not only get the project done, but it brings the community together around the park and allows people to care about the space on a deeper level with the commitment. In Pittsburgh, a major storm water project totally more than a million dollars worked to present green infrastructure and play elements into the local space. One of the concerns of the public was that while there is this huge financial grant to improve this space, what about the people that are financially struggling, but has skills that could be used for the project. PPC caved out money to give locals a role in this project, both helping in community building and economic aid as, “We need to not only invest in these parks, but we need invest in these people.” Consider the potential negative effects the work may have. There is a disconnection of white, middle to high income understanding from those of minority, low incomes as they may not think of what adverse effects these improvements may have on the community’s lives.

Partnerships are impactful for making organizations stronger in number and in action. The New Yorkers for Parks organizations fosters these connections with other groups in order to use their skills and resources in data collection to further develop advocacy methods with those working on the grounds. Another important partnership to consider are those outside the realm of park specific missions. Washington Parks and People opened up its park space in collaboration with another organization, Life Pieces to Master Pieces, which worked to support returning citizen (those previously incarcerated) and others in the community. This partnership allowed the organization to continue its work during the pandemic through using the community parks WPP helps to invest and maintain. It comes down to looking at the whole picture of societal needs and seeing in what ways parks can fit into that equation. Partnerships can also include working with other organizations around the world as a way to identify new ideas in addressing problems and

finding themes of the challenges. WPP has a strong relationship with people and groups around the world to learn from each other and find new methods that may be successful in tackling problems within Washington D.C.

This research is important for the state of American democracy because it adds onto the ever-growing amount of literature of the inequalities people face across the U.S. based on their socioeconomic status and racial and ethnic backgrounds. These are groups of people who have been historically dismissed and this trend continues to worsen and has major implications on the livelihoods of those being impacted. It brings up the question of why these inequalities exist, who is at fault, and what needs to be done to successfully address these hindering cycles? One of the common themes of this research specifically related to the nonprofit's experiences with local/city officials is that they are not going out into the community and hearing the concerns and perspectives from those who are living and experiencing the most need. Particularly those who have been elected as representatives of the people not going out into the neighborhoods of those that they politically represent to see what changes could help their communities. In regard to parks, "It's the most democratic space, it's free, it's for everyone and I think the challenge that exists is really making everyone feel welcomed. Because they are for everyone, but not everyone feels welcomed" (Pittsburg Park Conservancy). Overall, parks are the very image of democracy, where all people no matter their race, background, income, or situation, can come together and build up themselves as individuals and as a community; and if people do not have access to good quality parks that are cared for, then democracy is being threatened.

Conclusion

In summary, this research found that **yes**, cities with evident residential segregation across different racial, ethnic, and socioeconomic groups did experience more inequalities in

park access and quality. **Yes**, cities with more nonprofits working to provide funding and programs to city green spaces do result in lowering the inequalities of park access and quality. It also showed the amount nonprofits of all sizes and scopes of work do to manage their parks, facilitate communication across the city government and the communities, and advocate for the resources and tools to address disparities. Lastly, **yes**, parks with more city government support (meaning active problem solving) experienced less inequalities, but unfortunately it was not fully evident that any of the city governments were putting the needed resources and funding equitability into parks serving those in the most need. Another finding going beyond the initial hypothesis relates to the relationship between nonprofits and the city government. I found that the way in which nonprofits interacted with each other and with the city through the Mayor, city council, and city staff may be the most important relationship in working to successfully address racial, ethnic, and socioeconomic inequalities in park access and quality.

To further develop this research, I would expand those interviewed to include city staff and city council members working within the cities studied to learn from their perspective if they feel these inequalities are being addressed and what is happening within the city government that is or is not allowing progress to be made on their part from the perspective of nonprofits. For a much larger project, expanding the areas researched to include cities across the United States would also provide a fuller understanding of the different struggles city parks face and the roles of nonprofits and city governments in their management. Something I would work to improve in a future expansion of this project is to create a better defined method of labeling Table 1 where the independent and dependent variables were measured based on data, research, and feedback during interviews. One method to adjust this chart could be by considering more cities, it would provide a wider perspective of the experiences in other cities.

Overall, this research may provide the public with a better understanding of the actors at play within city parks specifically and the challenges for nonprofits in being able to deliver the areas of the most need the resources to provide the public health and environmental benefits of parks. It also worked to give a look into what other nonprofits throughout the greater Northeast of the United States have done to work towards equitable park space.

Appendix

Interview Questions

You are being asked to participate in a research project conducted by Jennifer Paszko, a student from Hartwick College. This project has been approved by the Institutional Review Board and my thesis advisor, Dr. Forster Rothbart. The purpose of this research is to better understand the racial, ethnic, and socioeconomic disparities that exist in urban park access and quality and the roles of NGOs and local governments in addressing this issue. Information collected will be used as my main method of data collection. If I am interested in quoting you, I will ask for your permission; otherwise, names of those interviewed will remain confidential. For my future reference in this research, would it be okay with you to record this interview? It will not be shared with anyone else and will be deleted at the completion of this research. Is okay to move forward with this interview?

- What demographics of people (race/ethnicity/socioeconomic) does your organization tend to serve?
- Would you say that this community is racially segregated?
- Do you see disparities in the access and quality of parks serving those disadvantaged communities? Specific examples?
- In what ways have parks helped the local community? The individual?
- As an NGO, what do you see as the challenges of addressing and fixing these disparities in park access and quality?
- What role does the local government play in park investment, management, and care?
- Would you say they are supportive of addressing inequalities?

This concludes my questions I had for you today. Is there any other information you would like to share with me that I did not ask you today?

Thank you so much for your time today. If you would like, I can provide a copy of my thesis to you upon completion or you can contact my thesis advisor, Dr. Forster Rothbart with any questions or concerns. Thank you again!

Factors of Cities Involved in Comparative Case Study

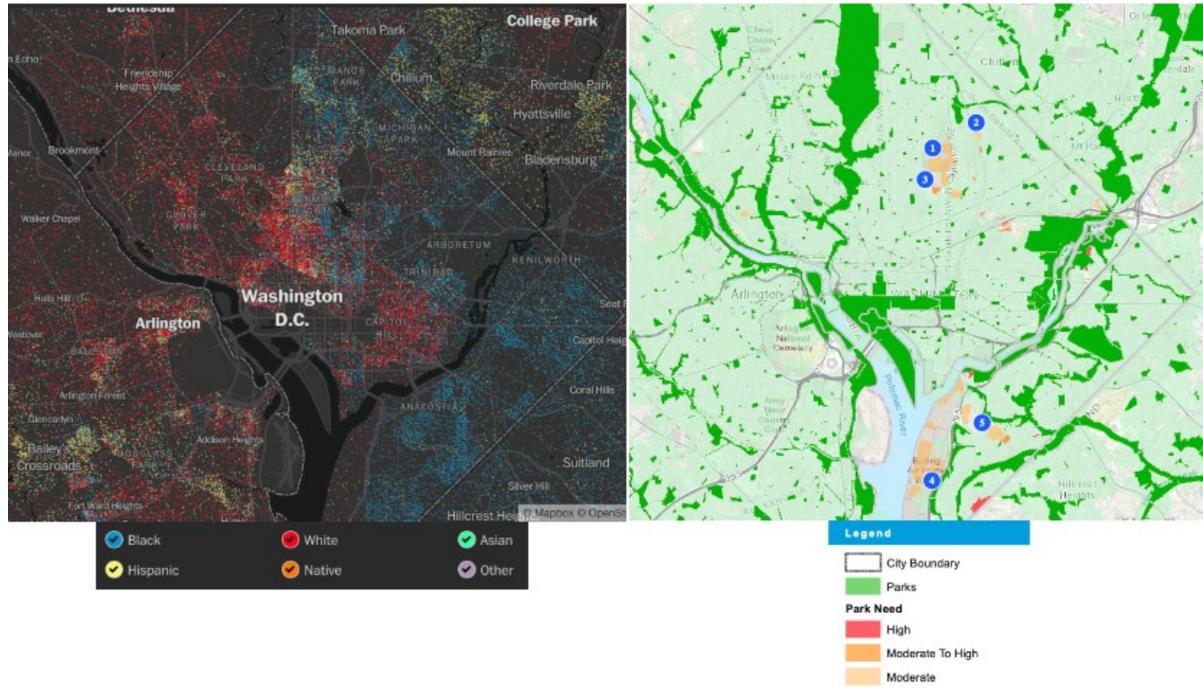
	<i>Pittsburgh</i>	<i>New York</i>	<i>Detroit</i>	<i>Washington D.C</i>
Population	300,286	8,336,817	670,031	705,749
% Black Population	23%	24.3%	78.3%	46%
% Persons in Poverty	20.5%	17.9%	35.0%	13.5%
Public Spending on Parks and Recreation/Resident	\$90.54	\$198.02	\$78.72	\$230.67
Median Park Size (acres)	2.2	1.1	2.38	1.41
Number of Park Units	235	2314	356	631
% City Land used for Parks and Rec	10%	21%	6%	24%
% within 1-minute walk	92%	99%	80%	98%
Associated Nonprofit	Pittsburg Parks Conservancy (PPC)	New Yorkers for Parks	People for Palmer Park	Washington Parks and People (WPP)

Data collected from the United States Census Bureau, 2019, QuickFacts & The Trust for Public Land, 2020, Park Land ParkScore

Figure 2

Map of Residential Segregation and Park Layout/Quality

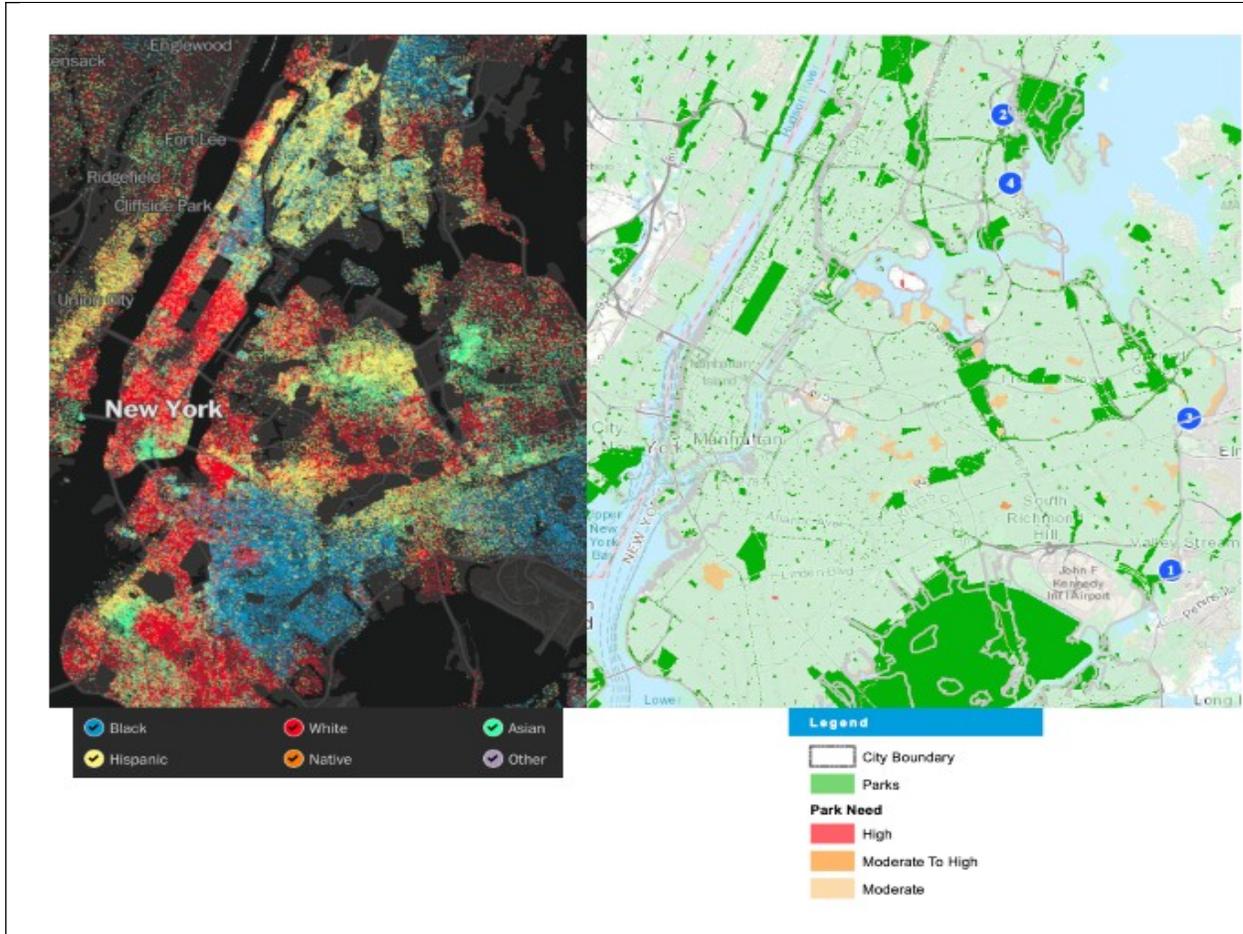
Washington D.C



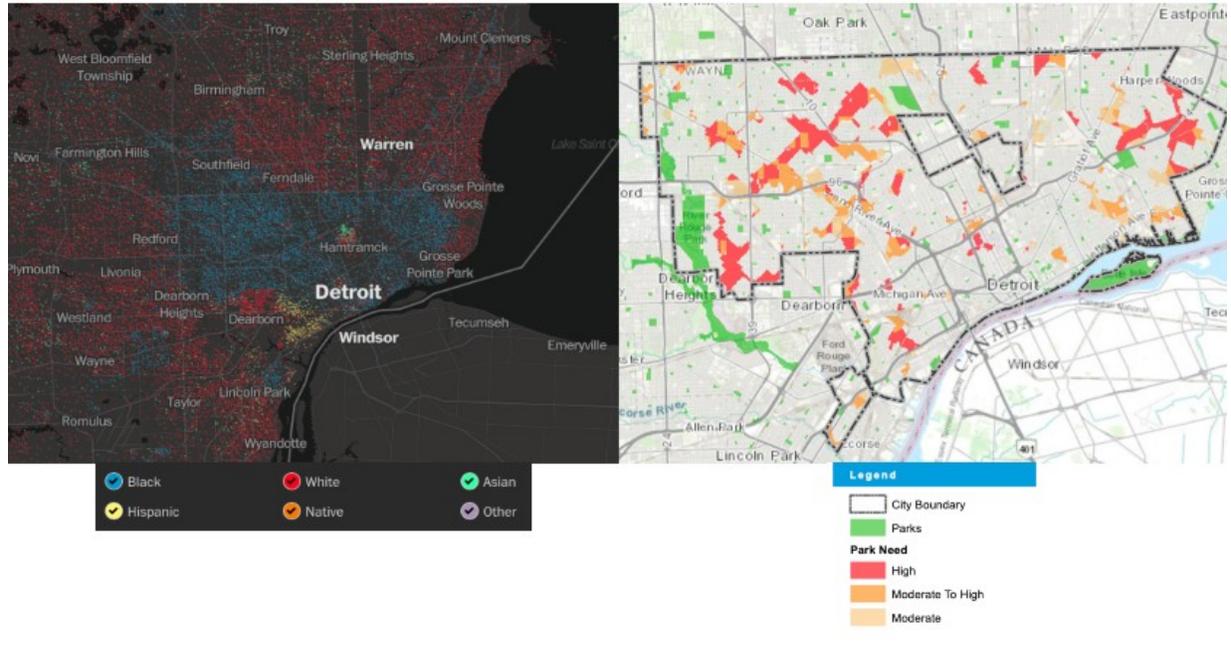
Pittsburgh



New York



Detroit



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